

After handing off the young girls, I was swamped by people cheering and thanking me. Someone claiming to be the neighbor of the children explained that their mother was working and that she was already on her way. After nodding, I pulled off my filter mask and did my best to step away, explaining that I was still on the clock until the fire was under control.

When the crowd stepped back, I immediately headed to where Kaldur and the rest of the team were. Kaldur was talking to what appeared to be the fire chief, as nearly two dozen firefighters ran around running hoses, spraying down the building. A ladder truck was already being raised to pour water into the upper floors, and the nearby buildings were being sprayed so that the fire didn't spread.

"Thank you for your help," The fire chief said, shaking Kaldur's hand. "We wouldn't have been able to get up to them. This building is already a loss. The only thing that's left is to keep the fire from spreading."

When the chiefs spotted me, he shook his head.

"What the hell are you doing?" He asked, waving at someone behind me. "You need to get checked over by the paramedics after the stunt you just pulled."

"Sir, with all due respect-"

"No, your friends assured me that they never even got into the smoke, but I watched you leap out of a window on a floor that was already on fire," He said, shaking his head. "You will sit down and let Jonathan here take a look at you."

Someone put their hand on my shoulder, and I turned to find a man in a paramedic uniform. He gestured towards a nearby ambulance. I turned back to Kaldur.

"Come get me if anything goes wrong," I said before following the paramedic.

"We've got it from here," The fire chief assured me with a smile. "Just let us do our jobs. It's what they pay us for, after all."

The paramedics spent about ten minutes making sure I was alright, listening to my lungs, and making sure I hadn't overheated or gotten any burns. I assured him I hadn't, but he explained that it was easy to miss small burns or injuries when your adrenaline was pumping. Sure enough, he found a thumb-sized burn on my neck, where something hot must have fallen on me.

"You're lucky your collar is so tight. If anything had fallen into your shirt, this would be a very different conversation," The paramedic explained before putting a large patch on the burn. "Keep it covered, put some Neosporin on it, and if it gets red or swells, go to the doctor."

I nodded in agreement before heading back to the team, who were standing back from the fire and watching the firefighters do their jobs, still hosing down the fire and nearby buildings. Eventually, after the fire chief assured us that the situation was under control and that they would call us if anything went wrong, we left to continue our patrol.

We checked in periodically as we kept up our patrols. The fire was just finally going out when we returned to the cave late in the morning.

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We all slept until late afternoon, everyone feeling the drastic shift in our sleep schedule. I was doing alright, my enhanced body dealing with the stress and lesser quality sleep easily. M'gann was in a similar state, though she was suffering for a different reason.

It seems that the high emotion and trauma from the fire had settled overnight, and not in a good way. I could feel it myself, the suddenness and extreme danger had left me feeling tense and unnerved. M'gann and I stuck together most of the day, leaning on each other for comfort.

The rest of the team was dealing with it as well.

Kaldur was obviously upset, most likely by how he had been forced to leave me to take care of the situation. Artemis seemed to be in a similar boat, clearly wishing she could have done more. It probably didn't help that for the first time, she was probably feeling the self-doubt that came from being a peak human in a team with quite a few metahumans.

M'gann was feeling guilty about her inability to handle fire, worried that it would cause more problems down the line. She was also recovering from listening to me struggle with the dangers of the fire itself.

Even the two pairs that hadn't been at the fire were affected, having spent a rather tense few minutes listening to teammates and friends dive head-first into a dangerous situation while unable to do anything about it. They also had to deal with their own high-stress scenarios as well. They were fine, of course, having been happy to hear that I had made it through intact and that everyone was alright, but being powerless to help could not have been a fun experience for them.

Altogether, the team was handling it well, but the after-effects were definitely noticeable.

I ended up getting everyone together after we had woken up, both to talk about it and deliver some news that Batman had sent me. Wally and Artemis had slept over and would continue to do so until our patrols were over, so we could gather everyone quickly.

"First off, last night went as well as anyone could hope. Batman sent me confirmation that everyone we rescued at the fire, as well as the car accident that Kyle and Wally dealt with and the mugging victim that Robin and Tora helped are all doing well and recovering," I said as we all gathered around the kitchen table, eating breakfast." That said, I think everyone is feeling the tension from yesterday... meaning this is an excellent opportunity to talk about mental health, stress, and how this team will be dealing with it."

Wally and Robin shared a look, and Tora nodded, but nobody said anything, waiting for me to continue.

"I've already asked Batman to look into finding a psychologist for the team, someone who can help us deal with stress and the issues that come with this job. To start off, seeing them once every other week will be mandatory, and they will have the purview to declare that more visits are required for specific individuals or if an individual is unprepared for an active role in the team," I explained, getting two eye rolls, as well as an open scoff from Wally. "Further, we will be coming up with a list of situations and occurrences that will have additional mandatory sessions, such as life-threatening injuries, of particularly harrowing situations."

I looked at each team member, trying to convey the importance of what I was setting up. So many issues from Steve Rogers' memories, and from my own memories of my old life, could have been avoided or lessened by just having someone who knew how to help.

"I know all of this sounds lame, and that talking to a psychologist would make you seem weak or that real heroes don't have issues with stress or mental health. I've had the same thoughts. But the truth is that mental trauma is no different from physical trauma. It is something that needs to be treated by someone who understands what is wrong. None of you would shrug your shoulders at a broken bone or a stab wound, right?"

"And they will be a trained psychologist, someone who will respect patient confidentiality?" Robin asked, and I nodded.

"Absolutely, that's not something that's up for negotiation," I answered. "I'm asking Batman for help, but we will have the final say, just like anyone else we hire. We won't hire them if they can't be trusted to stay professional."

We chatted a bit more about what other requirements we were looking for before eventually going our separate ways to spend some time unwinding and preparing for the night's patrol.

M'gann and I passed the time by going down to the grotto. I carved a set of stairs into the stone around the spring-fed pool, and we went swimming. To M'gann's tough martian physiology, the cold temperature was practically comfortable. With my enhanced body, it was brisk and refreshing, though I could feel it getting uncomfortable when I stayed in it too long. After we swam for a while, I did some light practice while she read on the bench.

Eventually, it was time to head back out, and just like the day before, we piled into Bioship and headed off to Central City. We arrived a little early but still broke off into pairs. This time, however, I brought my motorcycle, donated from the mission to apprehend Dr. Ivo, and paired up with Artemis to patrol the downtown.

M'gann dropped us off on the city's outskirts, giving me a kiss on the cheek and a mental hug as Artemis and I climbed down Bioship's ramp. I climbed onto the motorcycle and started it up, Artemis climbing on behind me after she pulled on her helmet.

"How much experience do you have with motorcycles?" Artemis asked as I took a second to familiarize myself with sleek, high-tech vehicles and interfaces.

"Personally? About forty-five minutes." I responded before revving the bike and peeling away, exiting the parking lot where we had been dropped.

Artemis squealed, gripping around my waist tightly as I maneuvered the motorcycle perfectly around the corner, racing deeper into the city. Unfortunately, I couldn't keep the speed going for very long didn't, considering we would be driving inside city limits, but it was fun to tease my new teammate. I hadn't lied either, I had never ridden a motorcycle before the Dr. Ivo mission, but almost every version of Steve Rogers owned and frequently rode a motorcycle, so I got a significant portion of those skills.

I still preferred classic cars, though, no matter how the forced merging had given me an appreciation for two-wheeled travel.

We drove down street after street, with the near-silent electric motorcycle allowing me to listen for any signs of distress as we did. Artemis was a bit restricted with her much beefier motorcycle helmet, but she still kept her eyes peeled. Luckily she had a radio in her helmet, so we could still communicate.

"So... you and M'gann, huh?" She eventually asked as we passed an empty playground.

"Yup."

"How did that happen?" She asked.

"How does any relationship happen?" I responded, pausing to focus on a corner before continuing. "She is great, and I'm thrilled to have met her. She's made getting sent here much easier than it could have been."

"Yeah, Green Arrow explained... your situation." She replied. "I can't imagine how that felt."

"It was... an interesting experience, not one I would wish on anyone," I admitted. "But I'm doing alright. I'm working on making a life here, where I can do a lot of good."

We chatted for a while as we drove through downtown Central City. We stopped a few times to help people, apprehending a mugger who was holding up an older couple, and helping a sweet elderly woman whose car broke down. Not long after we pushed her car to the side of the road, I heard a distant sound that both Artemis and I instantly identified.

Gunshots. Lots of them.

I swerved the motorcycle around and revved it up, heading directly towards the noise, deftly speeding down the mostly empty roads. We arrived on the scene to find an all-out shoot-out between two groups, just over fifteen people in total. It was an insane level of firepower, with several fully automatic weapons on both sides. One of them even had what looked like a futuristic plasma pistol of some kind, blasting green globules of energy across the road, slagging the bodywork of an armored SUV.

We screeched to a stop, already informing the rest of the team of what was happening. I pulled out my shield and added all of the metal I had on me to it, including several feet of cable, melding it together into a tall tower shield. I had it done just in time for the fighting factions to realize I was there, a few goons on both sides turning to aim at me. Bullets impacted my shield, hammering into the iron but failing to dent it as I held it steady.

Snapshot, who had taken cover in an alleyway, used the distraction to start picking off vulnerable aggressors, taking them down with taser and foam arrows. The sudden losses from each side got their attention long enough for me to slam my shield down and secure it to the ground before falling backward and pulling thick concrete armor around myself.

When Artemis yelled as the man armed with a plasma pistol started taking out chunks of the corner she was taking cover behind, I leaped up over my shield with an earth-assisted jump and slammed into the ground behind the heavily damaged SUV. Four of the armed aggressors fell to the ground as I shifted it to sand, spun it around their feet, and converted it back into stone with their hands and weapons locked there. I stood and punched out, blasting a double fist-sized dirt clod at the lead gunman to knock him off center. He took it to the chest and stumbled backward but brought his gun up surprisingly fast, immediately blasting more plasma at me.

I shifted right, then left, just barely dodging the relatively slow-moving blasts of energy, before stomping down and kicking my foot around, sending a chunk of stone to smash into his wrist. I was done being gentle, and the hunk of rock snapped his forearm like a twig. He screamed and fell to his knees, which I immediately locked to the ground before surrounding him with a wave of sand and sealing him up to his neck in reformed concrete.

I was just starting to turn towards the next target when a bullet hit my shoulder and pulverized a large chunk of my stone armor, promptly answering a question I had been putting off asking. I spun and lashed out, slamming another chunk of stone into that gunman's leg, wincing when I heard another crack.

I didn't have time to secure him though, as Artemis shouted out a warning. She had managed to take all of the goons on her side down, save one, who had climbed back into his car and was trying to escape.

I pulled the asphalt under me upwards, launching me and my considerably heavy armor up into the air and over the totaled SUV. I came down almost perfectly on the hood of the older car, smashing it down into the ground. I punched downward and launched a few feet of cable out, the energy-infused iron piercing the hood of the car and slamming into the engine. I twisted my arm around and used the metal to lock it up, the engine immediately letting out a grinding seizing noise before dying completely.

The man inside was limply holding onto his gun, face bleeding from having been slammed into his steering wheel from me smashing the front of his car. I crouched down to look into his window, and he let out a yelp, dropping the pistol and raising his hands in surrender.

"You alright?" I asked, looking over at Artemis, who was securing one of the shooters.

"Yeah, you kept their attention for the most part," She explained. "What the hell was that one guy shooting?"

"I don't know, some sort of plasma weapon," I guessed. "But I think how some random guy in a small-time gang fight got is the more important question."

We spent a minute or so securing all of the shooters before the police arrived.