

The young woman's sudden shift at my words was startling, but since healing was such a rare power to have, I could understand some strange reactions.

"I was hoping to get some advice from the city's best healer," I repeated. "Like I said, I would have-

"You can heal?" Panacea asked, releasing her sister and taking several excited steps forward as she cut me off. "How does it work? What method? What..."

I withstood a barrage of questions, eyes wide and answering none of them. The young woman continued getting closer, eventually looking up at me. Despite me being several inches taller, I still took a small step back, overwhelmed by her rush. It took her nearly a dozen questions for her to finally realize I was still not responding.

"Perhaps we could talk a bit more in private?" I suggested before she could continue her tidal wave of curiosity.

"Uh... I'm not sure..."

"Glory Girl is welcome to come," I quickly added, suddenly aware it sounded like I wanted to be alone with her. "As well as any doctor or nurse you think might be a good addition. We can trade answers and discuss how this whole thing works."

As I talked, I could see that, at first, she was going to refuse my offer. That was fair, considering how it sounded. When I corrected myself to include her sister, as well as a doctor or nurse, she seemed a bit more okay with the idea, finally nodding in agreement.

"I suppose I could take an early break. Unless there are any time-sensitive cases?" Panacea said, looking over her shoulder to a doctor standing a few feet away.

"There's nothing that needs your attention immediately," He responded, looking down at the chart on his clipboard before looking at his watch. "I believe conference room four should be open at the moment, as long as one of the residents isn't using it to sneak a nap."

"Okay, let's go then," she said, heading back down the hall she and her sister had arrived from.

Panacea clearly knew her way around the hospital because she navigated it like she was born there. We went down a hall, weaving between nurses and doctors, before stepping into an elevator, which closed with a ding and started ascending. We stood in silence, with Panacea looking excited and eager, while Glory Girl was still watching me closely.

The doctor looked calm, as if this was just another Tuesday. After a few seconds, I reached out my hand to him, which he took and shook after looking at it curiously.

"Sorry about that, I was a bit overly focused, Dr...?"

"Dr. Pilota," He answered, returning my firm shake. "And I understand. Thank you for being polite."

"Of course, I came to you guys, after all."

Not long after that, the elevator door opened, and Panacea once again led the way, making a beeline for a door at the end of the hall. Once we were all inside, I sat down on one of the chairs, trying to set the tone as casual and, more importantly, calm. This prompted everyone else to do the same. For a moment, the room was quiet until Panacea cleared her throat and started talking.

"So... what were you hoping to learn?" She asked. "I'm happy to help another healer...but I'm not sure what you need."

"Well, first, I wanted to know if there were laws or rules regarding parahuman healing," I responded. "I tried looking online, but I couldn't find anything precise."

"Well, that's kind of a complicated subject," The healer responded with a wince. "Technically, all you really need to use a beneficial power on someone is their permission. *But* the PRT prefers you to go through their power testing first, so your abilities can get tested for any unfortunate side effects, or... well, they basically want to stop a repeat Teacher."

"Who?" I asked before I could stop myself, internally wincing for showing ignorance about this world.

"Teacher? You know, hands out low-level thinker and tinker abilities, but he Mastered anyone he gave them to?" Glory Girl responded with a frown. "He's in the Birdcage now, but he was pretty scary for a while. The PRT still stumbles on some of his minions occasionally."

"That's... horrifying," I freely admit. "How common are Master powers?"

"Human Masters are on the rare side," Glory Girl said reassuringly. "But the label of Masters also includes people who control other things. Like plants or projections. Crusader, from the Empire? His projections make him a Master."

"Could we stay on topic for now?" Panacea asked with a frown, giving her sister a look. "While technically all you need is their permission, the PRT will push for power testing. If you refuse, there is a nonzero chance they might find a way to strong-arm you."

"How?" I asked, furrowing my brow. "Are we talking about using the wordings of rules to trip me up or just straight up bending them to fit?"

"If you ask my mom, it's the latter or worse," Glory Girl responded with a frown. "But Gallant says he's only ever heard of the first one happening, and only when someone needs to be investigated."

While I wasn't usually one to harp over government conspiracies or assume they are always out to get us, trusting a government agency to only bend the rules when they *really need* to set off so many alarm bells. Still, I would reserve my own judgment for when I could back it up with my own experiences, not just secondhand gossip from a Ward's girlfriend.

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Okay, now it's my turn," Panacea said, leaning forward eagerly. "How exactly does your healing work? What sort of limitations do you have?"

Now, there was the big question. Since Alya and I first arrived here and realized that powers all seemed to come from the same place, even if no one was sure where that place actually was, we knew I would have to come up with some sort of explanation for my own powers. In a Marvel or DC, I could have just said magic, and people would have shrugged and moved on. Here, though, people considered powers to be science they didn't quite yet understand, which meant everyone who claimed magic was looked at like they were slightly off their rocker.

Even a respected member of the Protectorate was seen as a little crazy just because he pretended to use magic.

Not only that, but the fact that I was gaining magic over time and would be able to guide myself to grow in new, powerful ways made me a Trump with hilariously potent potential. That was too much to reveal before I could defend myself.

Thankfully, Alya and I had plenty of time to come up with a reasonable excuse, one that would work to explain what I could do. Or at least it would hopefully work until I was powerful enough that it didn't really matter anymore.

"I'm a grab bag, kinda," I explained with a vague gesture. "I have an energy source inside me, and I can do a whole bunch of stuff with it. It all drains from the same source within me, so I'm not sure if it counts as many smaller powers. I can use it to heal, make myself tougher, or..."

I raise my hand and cast a low-level shocking spell, basically just making an arc of electricity jump between my fingers. It was simple, meaning I could control it easily without words or the glow of mana. All three of them jumped at the sound, but I only kept it going for a second, so none of them did anything more before I stopped.

"It's nothing crazy, and I can run out of power, but I like to think what it lacks in strength it makes up for in versatility. Also..." I trailed off, biting my lip and looking away, doing my best to look embarrassed. "It requires a lot of concentration, so I've found that rhythmic speaking helps me concentrate. Combined with some of the light shows that using the source makes... there's a reason my real name is probably going to have to do with magic."

"...But you don't actually think it's magic, right?" Panacea asked, obviously worried that the new healer was a nutjob.

"No, no, of course not," I lied, shaking my head. "But I have a theme, so I might as well stick with it, right?"

"Oh, thank god," She said, letting out an audible sigh of relief. "That's good to hear. You have no idea how crazy some of the 'powers are magic!' people are. Almost as bad as the ones that think they've been blessed by god. I've healed a few of them at Endbringer battles, and they... they can be a lot."

The young girl suddenly stopped, cutting off whatever she had been about to say. It seemed that she was more than a bit off-kilter, probably due to myself.

"Anyway, as much as it might suck to kowtow to them, just going through their power testing is probably your best bet," She continued. "The hospitals around the city require it, and the Protectorate won't be nearly as on your case as they would be otherwise."

"That's unfortunate," I admitted with a frown. "But I shouldn't be surprised that the government would insist on oversight. In all honesty, I will most likely be focusing away from the hospital since-"

"Wait, what? You're not going to be helping here?" Amy asked, suddenly a lot less calm. "Why not? Please, healing abilities are very rare. Please don't think you need to run off and fight to be a hero-"

"I never said that I wouldn't help out, especially in emergencies or critical cases like children, but I plan on focusing my abilities on the less fortunate population of the city, traveling between some of their camps and such to offer my healing," I explained. "I want to help, but I have my own things I need to do as well. I won't be able to dedicate all my time to the hospital."

While I thought I was being reasonable, but from the look I was getting from the young healer, it was clear she didn't agree.

"I assumed you were trying to be a hero, but I guess we shouldn't have." She said, her entire demeanor starting to change.

Her tone was cold and judgmental, such a drastic shift that I physically leaned back.

"I do intend to be a hero," I responded, more confused than angry at her tone. "But I'm not willing to spend my entire life here at the hospital. There are doctors and nurses here who I'm sure are perfectly capable of handling most cases. As I said, I will be going to some of the city's homeless camps, and eventually soup kitchens and the like to-"

"If you have a healing ability, then you're best off working here at the hospital, not off getting yourself killed fighting on the streets," Panacea fired back, cutting me off. "Going out to help the homeless is fine, but you have a responsibility to use your ability it as best you can."

The room was silent for a moment as all of us took in what the young woman was saying. Both Glory Girl and Dr. Pilota seemed shocked, though the former seemed more confused about the vehemence and tone, rather than what she was actually saying.

While I could feel my blood pressure rise from the young woman's tone and aggressive, holier-than-thou assertions, I quickly reined them in. This was essentially a child, a high schooler who was probably just repeating the opinions of people around her. More than anything, this behavior made me worried that someone was feeding her some very unhealthy opinions.

"I choose to help where I can, not because it's my responsibility, but because it's what I want," I said, frowning under my mask. "I owe nothing to anyone, and while my power is a part of me, it does *not* define me."

"What kind of hero would put themselves before the people that need help?" She responded, shaking her head. "You can't really consider yourself a hero if you are going to be so selfish."

Seeing the annoyance, almost disgust still on her face, I decided that enough was rough.

"I can see that, somehow, this conversation is no longer amicable," I said, standing from my seat. "I think it's best if I go for now, before anything worse is said. Thank you for your time, Panacea. Glory Girl. Dr. Pilota."

I left the conference room behind, letting the door shut as I walked away. I let Alya guide me out of the building, easily ignoring the stares and phones now that I had... whatever the hell that had been on my mind. Before I knew it, I was making my way through the alleyways again, looking for a place to change.

"What the hell was that?" I asked, feeling Alya's presence pull in tightly around me. "It was like a full personality reversal!"

"It appears she has formed some... unhealthy opinions," Alya said, floating across the alleyway in a half-formed, wispy state. "It was concerning to listen to."

"And the way her sister first intercepted me?" I pointed out. "It was like she was a few *seconds* from attacking me."

"You did read that she had a bit of an anger issue," my partner pointed out. "They are teenagers with superpowers. Not very hard to see how that might create some issues."

"Yeah... still kind of worried about what Panacea said," I admitted, finally stopping in the abandoned spot where I stored my back. "That... that didn't seem healthy."

"I agree," Alya responded before swirling away and returning with my messenger bag. "I may not have much experience with teenagers-"

"So about the same as me." I pointed out before gesturing for her to continue.

"But is it not normal for teenagers to struggle with questions of self-worth and responsibility?"

"I mean, yeah, along with a whole list of other problems..." I confirmed with a frown. "But that sounded like more than just a phase... Do you think I should tell someone? Maybe try to contact her parents?"

"I think that you are very early in your time here," she responded simply.

"Yeah... Well, I'm sure I will be rubbing elbows with her, despite her clear distaste for me," I guessed with a frown. "I'll give it some time. Maybe try to ask around?"

We talked a bit more while I finished changing out of my costume. When I was done, I made my way away from the alleyways and towards somewhere I could have lunch. After a few slices of pizza and a beer, I headed back to the shop. I still had a few hours before I was supposed to meet up with Tony and whoever he managed to get in contact with, and considering it was likely to be a late night, I decided a quick nap was in order.

I reorganized the couch into my bed and set an alarm on my phone before laying down and closing my eyes. Despite the rough afternoon, I still managed to fall asleep quickly, soothed by Alya's constant refreshing breeze.