

Once we gathered around the ritual platform, I pulled out a teleport crystal and held it out to Taylor. She accepted gingerly, her eyes wide as she turned it over in her hands.

"This is already set to teleport, you just need to focus on a location and say 'Goodbye,' I explained. "You don't have to worry about imagining us moving or how we get there or anything like that. Just focus on imagining your backyard, as it is right now."

She nodded, and both Sarah Pelham and I put our hands on her shoulders, gripping them tightly. Taylor closed her eyes and focused, most likely trying a bit harder than necessary to envision her backyard, but I wasn't about to interrupt her focus. After about fifteen seconds, she finally said, or really, shouted the activation word, and suddenly, with the familiar sensations of a teleport, we were standing in a normal, if not a bit unkempt, suburban backyard.

"S-sorry, it's a bit of a mess," Taylor said, looking around with a wince. "With the settlement money, we've been slowly fixing up the house, but... convincing dad to hire people to do things he could do, if he had time, is an uphill battle."

"It's alright, Taylor," I assured her. "I'm hardly going to judge you for the state of your lawn care."

"My family couldn't really throw stones either," Lady Photon said with a smile. "We have a landscaper, and before that, our yard looked just about like this."

Taylor didn't seem to know how to react to our reassurances, but nonetheless, she guided us to a small back porch, where we sat down on old wooden chairs. She then headed inside, looking to find her father.

"What can I expect from her father?" Sarah asked quietly as the young hero disappeared inside. "You have experience with him?"

"He... seemed like a good man, if a little... tired, from more than just work. Something all too common these days," I explained, keeping the fact that Taylor could very well be listening in with her bugs to myself. It was an innocent question, and my response wasn't anything too deep. "I'm not sure what Taylor meant by him being 'fragile,' but I'm willing to give her the choice of when to bring up the flute and Piper issue."

She nodded in understatement and agreement before leaning back and waiting quietly. After nearly fifteen minutes, Taylor, with red eyes but a smile, came to get us. When we walked into the home, I could see Danny sitting at a small kitchen table, watching us closely as we entered. He was also clearly on the emotional side, but with a distinct lack of tears.

"Please sit," he said, gesturing to the two empty chairs opposite his. "I... I admit this is not where I anticipated my evening going."

"Sorry," Taylor said softly as she sat down beside her father, though around the table corner.

"No, I'm glad you told me, Taylor," He said seriously. "I wish it had been sooner, but... I understand why not."

Sarah and I shared a subtle look, before Danny leaned forward and continued, his hands folding on the table.

"I have to admit... knowing how people become parahumans... I was already worried Taylor had become one after her... assault," He admitted, shaking his head.

"Why didn't you say anything?" Taylor asked, turning to meet her father's eyes.

"Because I didn't want to make an already confusing scenario worse, Danny responded. "I heard that trauma was how people become capes, but it wasn't something super reliable. I had planned on bringing it up... I suppose I overestimated my ability to notice anything out of the ordinary."

"To be fair, Dad, I haven't been going out for very long," Taylor said, rubbing the back of her head and looking away, to the floor of the kitchen. "Less than two weeks. I was working on my costume and my abilities before that. My first night out I... I ran into the Empire attacking Arcanum."

"Your daughter saved me a whole lot of pain, potentially even death when she stepped in to help," I said honestly, leaning back in my seat. "She stopped Victor from shooting me with a 20mm anti-tank weapon."

"I just wanted to help," Taylor said with a slightly embarrassed shrug. "Stopping the Nazi with a gun taller than me seemed like a good place to start."

"I'm glad she could help, Arcanum," Danny said, sounding a bit proud, despite his still obvious concern.

"Please, my name is William Kalus," I responded, leaning forward and shaking Danny's hand. "And I'm sure you recognize Lady Photon?"

"Please, call me Sarah out of costume," the female hero said, leaning forward and shaking Danny's hand next, giving him a supportive smile. "Taylor is a fantastic person, and New Wave is very much looking to work with her."

"New Wave... I was under the impression she was joining your team, William," Danny said, looking between us. "I have no problem with New Wave, of course, I'm just trying to figure all of this out..."

"Taylor's bug control has a shocking number of applications, but by and large her two most effective talents, at least in day-to-day conflicts, are her crowd control of non-protected targets, and her ability to provide overwatch," I explained. "When push comes to shove, she is capable of corraling and neutralizing entire mobs at once. On top of that, her ability to provide recon, keep track of gang movements, scope out suspicious places, and even spot crimes in

real-time, within a several-block radius is invaluable. Unfortunately, our team already has someone capable of doing that to more or less the same degree."

"Basically, Dad, I'm part of Arcanum's team, but for normal patrols, I work with New Wave," Taylor explained. "That's where I can do the most good."

"I see... and what exactly does being in Arcanum's team imply?"

"For now, we are in a bit of a holding pattern. Our two major concerns are Coil, as we have reason to believe he helped make the Empire's riots much worse than they would have been otherwise," I explained, tapping a finger against the table for emphasis. "The tinker tech armed squads of soldiers were not standard Empire fare. Second, we are concerned about incoming threats here. The Elite, Teeth, Accord, all nearby gangs who would *love* to move in mostly uncontested space like Brockton Bay."

The names I listed as our secondary concerns made Danny lock up for a moment, no doubt considering how dangerous those organizations were. The Elite were known for being quite brutal when they needed to be, depending on the branch, and the Teeth had the Butcher, which, honestly, was more than enough to make *anyone*, including myself, worried. The worst part was that I hadn't even listed the worst possibility. Brockton Bay was doing better than it had in a very long time. We had been making a lot of noise, and that, combined with the city's history, made it a prime target for the Slaughterhouse 9.

"We are taking these possibilities very seriously, which is one of the reasons why there are so many guardians and golems patrolling around the city," I pointed out. "I'm working hard to come up with solutions specific to some of the greater threats, as well."

"And if I don't want Taylor fighting someone?" He asked. "Say the Butcher."

"That would be your prerogative, sir," I responded. "Though I will point out that keeping capes away from fighting almost never goes well. These things tend to spiral towards conflict. That said, as her father, you would have final say."

"Dad, you can't do that," She said, looking at him with frustration in her eyes. "I have the power to help people, you can't just keep me home because you don't think I can handle it."

"Taylor, if there is anything I've learned over the last few months, it is that there is very little you can't handle," Danny said, catching his daughter off guard. "Learning just what you've put up with, now finding out that you had the power to stop them but held back... that's a kind of strength I've never had. Not wanting you to go against people like the Butcher or, god help me, an Endbringer, is not because I don't think you're strong enough, it's because *I'm* not strong enough."

Her father's open and emotional admission catches Taylor off guard, a tear running down her cheek. Danny reached over, and after a moment, Taylor put her hand in his.

"If it makes you feel any better, Danny, Taylor is now the same level of brute that I am, and can fly," I pointed out. "Pretty soon, New Wave will be too."

"That's... That's possible?" Danny asked, looking first at Taylor, then at New Wave. "I thought power gifting trumps were rare... and dangerous."

"They can be, but I'm not really a power gifter," I assured him. "My ability to gift things is from my tinker abilities. And... I'm also a bit of a special case."

"...If it were anyone else, I'm not sure I would believe them," He admitted, giving Taylor's hand a squeeze. "But that does actually make me feel better."

"Plus, my powers are all about support and fighting from a distance, Dad," she explained. "I'll be doing my best to stay out of the main fight."

Danny nodded, though he clearly had thoughts about how well that would go in real life, which frankly, I understood. No plan withstood contact with the enemy, and from what I knew about Taylor, she wouldn't be able to resist getting up close and personal if the fight looked to be turning that way.

"Thank you for looking out for Taylor. For obvious reasons, the Wards aren't an option in my mind, not after what they... not after what happened," Danny finally said, his empty hand tightening into a fist at the memory. "But working under the hero who got her the justice she deserved? Who seems happy to offer up more cape powers like candy? I can live with that."

I chuckled, nodding in understanding. From there, we began discussing what Taylor's work with me and New Wave. The more we talked, discussing topics such as team practice, extra study subjects, first aid training, and various other matters, the less unsettled the older man seemed to be about the concept of his daughter being a hero.

As the conversation started to slow down, the gradually darkening view through one of the windows indicating it was starting to get late, I brought up something I had been holding back for quite some time.

"Taylor, I have a question about one of your abilities," I asked, catching the room's attention. "Do you have a way to sort of offload your emotions to the swarm you're controlling?"

"I- Yeah, I can do something like that," She admitted with a frown. "I do it when things get too chaotic or when I'm worried my temper might get me in trouble. How did you find out?"

"Alya has noticed it a few times, in moments where you would have normally been angry," I explained. "It coincided with worrying changes in your demeanor on my side."

"I mean it calms me down..."

"Look, I don't want to throw you off, but the look you had was not 'Calm,'" I explained with a frown, trying to approach the subject as gently as I could. "It was cold. Unsettlingly cold."

She looked at me with wide eyes, then glanced over at Lady Photon, who was looking contemplative. After a moment, the older hero nodded.

"If the moments I am thinking of are the same as what Alya and William observed, then... I have to agree," the older woman admitted, racing over to squeeze her shoulder gently.

"I didn't realize it was affecting my expression that much," She responded, crossing her right arm in front of her, rubbing her left elbow. "Sorry if it freaks you out."

"Oh, no, that's not what I meant," I said, waving her off. "If seeming cold helped you stay safe and fight crime, then we could come up with something. Besides, your mask would be on most of the time."

"Then what's the problem?" Danny asked with a raised eyebrow.

"I'm worried that it might be affecting her mind," I explained. "When we first met, while solving your problem, you fed your anger into your swarm, and it *tore itself to pieces*. I'm worried what sort of influence that might have on the push back."

"... but it's my power?" Taylor asked, looking a bit confused. "Why would it hurt me?"

"Taylor, it is widely accepted by parahuman specialists that powers do *not* solve a parahuman's problems," She explained with a sad frown. "In fact, there is quite a bit of evidence that says they frequently make things *worse*. New Wave might seem to be lucky in that regard, in that our powers have very few psychological drawbacks, but I can assure you, each of us had an... Adjustment period."

"This doesn't mean you should be scared of your power," I continued after Sarah was done. "From what I can see, your actual ability to control bugs, both the control and the multitasking, doesn't seem to be affecting you."

"So, you're worried that my shifting my emotions into my swarm will what, make me a psychopath?" she asked with a frown.

"Or it could be feeding you a more animalistic viewpoint, as you feed them your emotions, some of their instincts shift to you," I guessed. "Or you might become strangely addicted or reliant on the emotional state. Maybe you start doing it instinctively whenever your emotions are high, making your general choices colder. I have no idea beyond the way the bugs react is brutal, and the way you react is... concerning. Any actions you take while in that state... I would be worried."

"I... alright, I will do my best not to shift my emotions around," She said with a determined nod, before frowning and shaking her head. "If I'm honest... I knew I was doing it. Sometimes it was all that kept me from... making a major mistake in school. But I wasn't something I worked on doing; I just realized I was doing it and took advantage of it. And now that I'm thinking about it, that sounds really worrying."

"This is part of why being in a group is so important," I explained with a smile I hoped was reassuring. "We will keep an eye on you, I promise. And like I said, your main power, which I assume you use significantly more, doesn't seem to have any effect on you."

"I use it near constantly," She admitted. "It's part of me, like looking with your eyes or feeling with our hands."

"That's not uncommon, though your power is certainly at a scale that is rare," Sarah explained. "The key is to understand the ins and outs of your power, to know what is risky and what is safe. For example, Glory Girl used to be much more liberal with her fear aura. Until one day she accidentally gave a criminal a heart attack trying to force him to submit. Panacea was able to heal the damage, but it was a hard lesson for her to learn."

"I understand, thank you both for helping and working with me," She said with a smile. "This is all... Thank you."

"We are happy to help, Taylor," Sarah said with a smile. "You're our teammate after all, and making sure you are safe and the best you can be is important."

We continued to talk for a bit longer before it was eventually time for us to go. We said our goodbyes, exchanging phone numbers and shaking hands. When we finally left, rather than leaving by the front door and potentially revealing that Taylor and Danny had been visited by Lady Photon and some dude who looked a lot like Arcanum, we stepped into the backyard and I teleported us to Sarah's home, before popping back to the forest.