

**(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)**

**A/N: Getting Emma home.**

**-x-X-x-**

Silence reigns in the wake of Thaddeus' last words, nobody seeming to know quite what to say. Finally, a response comes from the most unlikely of corners...

"He's kind of right, isn't he?"

All eyes turn towards Hawkeye, though the archer doesn't quail under their gazes. He just shrugs in a seemingly careless manner.

"We were hunting Frost because we thought she'd gone off the deep end and kidnapped a bunch of folks after being possessed by the Phoenix. And yet, all of those people are here now, categorically claiming not to have been kidnapped."

He gestures to the individuals in question, causing eyes to flick around as they're all forced to wordlessly acknowledge his point.

"So now we're talking about 'potential threat' and 'what might happen'... but that isn't really fair, now is it? There's a lot of 'potential threats' in this very room right now, after all. Each and every one of us has abilities that make us 'potentially dangerous'. Hell, even I could go around hitting politicians with trick shot arrows from farther away than the furthest sniper rifle if I wanted to... and believe you me, I've certainly been tempted a time or two."

Thaddeus blinks at that. Both in surprise at the unexpected support, but also at the mental image of Hawkeye using his supernatural skill with archery in such a way. Admittedly, he'd never really thought of the man as being that dangerous, especially surrounded by the other Avengers. However, he had a point that even he could be a threat to the fabric of society if he truly wanted to be.

Of course, Cyclops is not at all happy to be hearing this. She steps forward with a snarl, teeth gritting.

“You can’t seriously be suggesting that we just... ignore the Phoenix and let it do whatever it wants!”

Stark answers that, scoffing as he speaks up in defense of what his teammate is saying.

“Of course not. But its not the Phoenix who’s in charge, is it? If it were, there’d have been a lot more collateral damage. If Frost is in control, then she’ll make sure the Phoenix doesn’t do anything untoward. And if she fucks up, then we’ll stop her... but Hawkeye is right, not exactly fair to act on what she might do, especially if she’s not actually guilty of any of the crimes you lot were trying to lay at her feet.”

Cyclops bristles... and so does Wolverine, though the latter is still too busy shooting glances at Laura every few seconds to speak up again. Still, seeing them getting riled up, Storm speaks up once more, attempting to be a voice of reason.

“In fairness to us, we had no way of knowing that our people went with Emma Frost willingly. We could only act on the information that was available to us at the time... and from our perspective, the situation looked quite bad, which was why we contacted your team as soon as we did.”

Storm’s eyes slide over to Thaddeus and she arches a brow.

“We had no way of knowing that you and the others were not victims of the Phoenix’s wrath.”

Thaddeus very deliberately does not wince at that or show any reaction whatsoever really. Because the truth was... he HAD been a victim of the Phoenix’s wrath. If it wasn’t for his apparent status as an ‘External’, if he hadn’t been literally immortal... he would have died in that office, permanently.

For all his regenerative power, for all his reality warping, the Phoenix Force had simply moved too swiftly and too overwhelmingly for Thaddeus to even think of reacting. He'd been dead before he knew it... and alive again before he knew it too.

If not for that, things would have been a lot, lot worse. He's well aware of that. However, Thaddeus isn't about to give anyone the ammunition they're looking for against Emma. So he keeps that quiet and simply gives Storm a nod, willing to extend an olive branch of peace if it means they can get this whole inquisition over and done with.

"I understand. But knowing what you know now, it should be clear that Emma doesn't deserve to be tarred with such a brush. She's no more a threat than anyone else in this room, just as Hawkeye already said."

Before anyone else can speak, Captain America cuts back in.

"Mister Cummings is right. So are the members of my team who have spoken up in his and Ms. Frost's defense. At the end of the day, we cannot act upon what people might do... that would be no better than tyranny. Emma Frost deserves the benefit of the doubt... and exiling her for an unrealized threat would be unconscionable. It is also beyond our area of responsibility. She's an American Citizen who has done nothing worth losing that citizenship."

Just from some of the reactions around the room, Thaddeus can tell that that last part matters a lot less to most people than it does to Captain America. But then to be fair, he's literally Captain America, so that's not surprising.

The X-Men don't look happy, but at the same time they don't continue to argue the point. Cyclops looks like she might want to, but Professor X gives her a look and a wordless shake of his head. Then, he looks to the rest of them.

"We understand. It is entirely possible that with Emma Frost as a host, the Phoenix Force is not as dangerous as it was the last time we found ourselves tangling with it. That said, it is my recommendation that she be asked to submit herself to observation for a period of time to ensure that that is the case."

Thaddeus snorts derisively at that, drawing attention back to himself.

“Way ahead of you. SHIELD already sent an Agent to keep an eye on Emma, so that’s handled.”

That declaration sends a ripple of surprise through everyone present, from the Avengers to the X-Men to even the girls at Thaddeus’ sides. Though in the case of his girls, they’re probably more surprised that he bothered mentioning Daisy in the first place.

Clearing her throat, She-Hulk finally breaks her silence, looking both annoyed and confused.

“SHIELD? They sent an Agent?”

Amused, Thaddeus shrugs.

“Director Fury and I go way back. When you lot teamed up to storm his office and paint Emma as the villain, I sent someone to explain the situation to him clearly. He made the right choice, which was to send someone up to the Moon to gather information so he could make an informed decision.”

Both She-Hulk and Storm are looking at him with narrowed eyes now and Thaddeus can tell that neither woman is all that happy with him. But to be fair, he’s not all that happy with them either. Jennifer hadn’t even tried to contact him before she’d agreed to team up with Storm and dragged the rest of the Avengers into this mess.

Sure, she might have done so out of concern for his safety and good health, but Thaddeus wasn’t some damsel in need of rescuing. She could have at least tried to reach out, even if he WAS on the Moon... but she hadn’t. He would have known.

“Well, if SHIELD has an Agent on the case then-!”

"Actually, if that is the case, I would suggest we each also send a member of our teams to verify everything is above board. Multiple layers of redundancy can only help, right?"

Storm cutting off Captain America like that definitely shocks a few people, but the man himself pauses and considers the suggestion for a long moment. Thaddeus doesn't really like that, to say the least, so he moves to nip that in the bud right off the bat... while also throwing a bone because why not.

"I'm afraid neither Emma nor I can accept 'oversight' from the X-Men at this point. We don't recognize your group's authority... and besides, I already spend time with multiple X-Men on the daily as is, given they're attending classes at University with me... or teaching them."

He gives Storm a particularly pointed look at that, causing her to flush. Indeed, there's a ripple of minor embarrassment out of the X-Men contingent as he basically calls them out on their previous 'observation'. Which in reality, was more akin to outright blatant spying than anything else.

Still... he looks to the Avengers and shrugs.

"If you lot want to assign a minder from among your number though, Emma and I would be more willing to accommodate such a thing. We do recognize your authority, given you work directly with organizations like SHIELD and the United Nations to make the world a safer and better place."

Despite being very obviously flattering and his words clearly intentionally meant to drive an even greater wedge between the two present hero groups then had already been driven... it works. Even Stark puffs up a fraction of an inch more in pride at Thaddeus' words.

Of course, he also knows for a fact that most of them aren't going to take him up on this offer. Captain America is too busy being their leader to be his and Emma's minder. Hawkeye might be suited for the job, but he's definitely not interested. Stark is a literal genius billionaire playboy philanthropist so he's pretty busy. That really just leaves...

“I’ll do it.”

She-Hulk. Thaddeus doesn’t smile too wide as Jennifer breaks the silence to throw her hat in the ring pretty much immediately. Given she was pretty much already doing the observation thing, and that she knew the most of his secrets out of everyone in this room who wasn’t fully on his and Emma’s ‘side’, she probably was the best choice for the role. At least where he and Emma were concerned.

“No.”

Which of course makes it very annoying when the OTHER female Avenger in the room immediately shoots Jennifer down. Scowling slightly, arms still crossed over her substantial chest, Ms. Marvel shakes her head.

“You’re unbelievably compromised here, She-Hulk. That’s as clear as day. We need an impartial observer if we’re doing this... so I’ll do it. Unless that’s not acceptable for some reason?”

That last part is directed specifically towards Thaddeus, along with a challenging eyebrow lift. She’s basically calling his bluff now. After all, he’d said he was fine with any of the Avengers being his and Emma’s minder... and now here Ms. Marvel was, effectively countermanding She-Hulk and stepping up to the plate. If he said that he preferred Jennifer over her... well, that would just be proving her suspicions, wouldn’t it?

Instead, Thaddeus plasters a smile on his face and shakes his head.

“Feel free to ‘observe’ Ms. Marvel. Emma and I have nothing to hide.”

That, admittedly, was very much not true... but in for a penny, in for a pound. And it seemed to work too. The blonde superheroine simply nods decisively, as though it’s already decided... which given nobody speaks up in protest, not even Jennifer herself, it seems it is.

It's a compromise, at the end of the day. And nobody is ever truly happy in a compromise if done right.

At least things are finally settled though. With that, the assembled groups disperse, the X-Men leaving first and then the Avengers escorting Thaddeus and company outside onto their lawn. From there, Thaddeus makes sure Emma, Sage, and Daisy are all alright and brings them all back down from the Moon.

There's a brief moment of tension as Emma stands there on the lawn in the flesh, gazing around imperiously. However, there's a reason that Thaddeus insisted on the X-Men leaving first before bringing her back to Earth. Without the likes of Cyclops or Wolverine to start something, everything is ultimately chill.

They make a bit of a show of it, with Thaddeus explaining that Ms. Marvel will be their 'Avengers Liaison' for the foreseeable future in the same way Agent Johnson is their SHIELD Liaison. Then, they all finally get to go home.

Home, in this case, is not back to Thaddeus' dorm room... but rather, to Emma's penthouse apartment. By the time they physically arrive at her residence, the White Queen has already pulled some strings and gotten Ms. Marvel an apartment on the floor directly below them. The blonde heroine isn't too happy about this, but once again, it's a compromise... they aren't happy to have her in the same building as them, she's not happy to be one floor lower. Everyone gets to be unhappy.

Admittedly though, Thaddeus isn't too unhappy. In fact, he's pretty pleased that he managed to defuse things like he did. Getting Emma back to Earth was... a triumph in his eyes. They celebrate, of course... in exactly the way one might expect.

Afterwards, as they lay there tangled in the sheets with Emma pressed into his side and Thaddeus' arm around her body, however, it becomes time to talk about the elephant in the room.

"So... you rejected Saul's offer. Chose to go with Selene instead."

There's no judgment in Emma's voice... of course there isn't, she'd been psychically present for literally everything that had happened. If she truly disagreed with Thaddeus' decision making at any point today, she would have told him and he would have adjusted accordingly. They were a team, after all... partners in the truest sense of the word.

"Yep. Devil we know over the one we don't."

Emma hums in acknowledgment of that, still resting her head on his chest.

"... You'll have to face her then, finally. No more shadow games. No more proxies. No more hiding any of it, really. She knows now, if she didn't know already."

Thaddeus lets out an explosive breath at that, slowly nodding.

"Yeah..."

All these months, everything he and Emma had done had been at least partially to obfuscate his true growth from Selene. The Black Queen wanted him fattened up for her, but she specifically only wanted him to gain physical strength and power. Nothing that would allow him to challenge or resist her. But that, of course, had been out the window from the moment that he and Emma first slept together. Earlier even if one considered the psychic defenses he'd picked up from Laura to be applicable 'resistance'. Which Selene probably would.

But now... none of the hiding truly mattered anymore. Selene would know one way or another now that Thaddeus was not some trifling snack that Emma had been preparing for her all this time...

"Do you want me with you when it happens? Do we face her together, or do you go alone?"

That... Thaddeus frowns. That was a good question...

**-x-X-x-**



**A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!**