

The flight was largely uneventful. At first Clint and I talked about the finer points of archery, which I felt a bit bad about considering the only reason I could keep up was my archery ring. It passed the time however, and I think I actually learned a thing or two. After that, while Clint talked to the pilot and Ema and Coulson talked about the quarantine and retrieval protocol, I focused on what the next few days might include.

I knew from Ema's more recent research sessions that Dr. Donald Blake was in fact around, contrary to what the research I did when I first arrived said. Unfortunately Ema couldn't find much on him besides the fact that he was a Doctor in Virginia. While I couldn't look him up at the moment I was preparing myself to deal with him, which was a conundrum in and of itself. Donald Blake got one hell of a bum deal in the comics, and I wanted to help prevent that if he was involved. But I had no idea if what had happened in the comics would happen here at all. I was going to have to play it by ear, try and help how I could without fucking anything up because of pre conceived notions. Also, without pissing off Odin. That would be bad.

After three hours had passed Coulson got a message on his phone. He checked it and quickly made his way to the computer, tapping on the keys for a moment before speaking.

"We got our updated pictures. The local sheriff used an evidence camera to snap some photos. Come take a look." He said, leaning back from the computer screen. "He also said it's heavier than anything he has ever seen or heard of, no one could budge it."

"Yeah... that's a hammer." I said, shrugging and shaking my head as I looked over Coulson's shoulder.

"Any Ideas?"

"No, nothing beyond the fact that even if it was made from heaviest metal on Earth the handle would be enough leverage to atleast rock it side to side." I pointed out before continuing. "If it's not budging then something is keeping it from budging."

"Yeah... But what?"

"I don't know for sure, it could be a personal binding like I do, or it could be something else entirely."

Eventually the group spread back out around the comfy interior, doing their own thing for the remainder of the flight. Not too long after the jet came in for a landing in a small New Mexico airport and we quickly disembarked, all four of us piling into another black SUV, despite my offer to drive in my surprisingly spacious super truck. Instead Clint and Coulson sat in the front while Ema and I sat in the back. Despite the spacious interior I was happy my armor was compact and comfortable.

“Originally I was going to head up a bit later, once everything was set up.” Clint admitted as we pulled out of the small airport. “But you guys agreed to go early enough to head out with Coulson, and well...”

“They didn’t want us to be alone with him.” I finished with a nod. “For future reference we won’t be insulted by reasonable security issues.”

Clint winced and looked apologetic, while Agent Coulson simply shrugged as he drove. The sun was just starting its afternoon descent when we pulled into a gas station, only an hour from the impact site. Clint got out of the car to start pumping gas when Coulson looked over his shoulder at us.

“Do you guys want anything?” He asked.

“Something to drink?” I asked with a shrug. “Water would be fine.”

He nodded and stepped out of the car, asking Clint the same question before heading into the shop. I focused back on my phone, reading through local news stories and scanning through the small time paper of the closest town to the hammers landing site, Puente Antiguo. As I was reading an article about a local diner getting new seats, Ema gave me a nudge and pointed.

“Look, going into the gas station.”

I followed her finger and looked, watching two extremely nervous men looking around as they went inside. As they stepped in they both pulled out shotguns, aiming at the woman behind the counter.

“Shit, okay lets-”

I opened my door by a few inches when Clint stopped me, crouching right next to it and holding it in place.

“Stay inside.” He said, peeking over the back of the car, watching the robbery. “Coulson can handle this and introducing more variables could just set the gunmen off.”

Reluctantly I nodded and stopped trying to open my door, moving back to watch from the back seat. I moved just in time to watch Coulson do some sort of shelf assisted jump before a shotgun went off. Before I could even blink, Coulson had both of the gunmen down and out.

“Holy shit...”

“Yeah, he is easy to underestimate, but Coulson knows what he is doing.” Clint said with a smirk, standing and finishing with the gas pump.

As Coulson exited the building and made his way back to the car he looked perfectly calm and normal, looking everything like a normal guy. As both he and Clint climbed back into the car Coulson looked over his shoulder and passed me a water bottle.

“Sorry about that.” He apologized. “Took longer than I thought.”

I just stared at him for a moment, before finally taking the water bottle with a nod. I shared a look with Ema before cracking the water bottle open and taking a sip. I needed to remember not to underestimate Coulson.

----- *A Short Time Later* -----

The rest of the drive was uneventful, with Clint and I taking naps while Ema kept vigil and Coulson drove. Eventually we reached our destination, or rather a ridge overlooking our destination. A large crater sat at the bottom of a large hill, its rim was maybe six feet above the dirt around it, while the crater itself was maybe thirty feet deep. Around the outside were dozens of tire tracks, meaning that while only one car was here now, a truck with a set of police lights on the roof, there had once been a lot more.

“Looks like the sheriff cleared everyone out.” Clint said, looking down at the crater through some binoculars. “He is all by himself down there... currently trying to lift the hammer.”

“Of course he is.” Coulson responded, pulling out his cellphone and stepping away.

“Are we going to go down there?” I asked after a long moment. “Or are we waiting for the calvary?”

“She’s busy.” Coulson said, coming back from his phone call. “But the Quarantine and Retrieval team will be here within the next half hour. Let’s get down there to start surveying and get a closer look.”

We drove the SUV down to the crater, parking far enough away for a perimeter to be set up when the team got here. We stepped out of the car and back into the heat of the arid landscape, slowly making our way to the edge of the crater, while Coulson peeled off to talk to the sheriff, who was pretending to have been in his truck the whole time.

“That... yeah... damn that’s strange.” Clint said as we looked down into the crater.

“You guys have a geiger counter in the car?” I asked, still looking down at the hammer. “Might be a good place to start.”

“We have a small kit meant to detect when it’s getting dangerous, but nothing precise...”

For the next half hour we paced around the crater, studying the hammer from afar. When the Q&R team finally arrived there was an almighty flurry of activity. Clint pulled me and Ema to the side to keep us out of everyone's way, and to keep everyone's curiosity from slowing them down. About thirty minutes after they arrived I spotted Coulson talking with another agent, leading even more agents to the cars. I intercepted them, Ema trailing behind me.

"Coulson, what's going on?" I asked as he stopped.

"There is an astrophysicist in town who was studying astrological anomalies." He explained. "We are going to see what kind of data they have on the last few days, see if it has anything to do with the hammer."

"Are you going to let me take a closer look?"

Coulson pursed his lips slightly for a moment before looking at the other agent.

"This is Agent Sitwell. He is in charge of the science teams." Coulson said, gesturing to the bald man. "Once he declares the hammer safe for closer examination you can take a look at it."

I reached out and shook Agent Sitwell's hand, who nodded in return. I vaguely remembered an Agent Sitwell from the comics, though I wasn't sure if I was forgetting something.

"Hello Maker. I've read your file." He said, giving me a solid if light handshake. "I'm interested in what you make of the hammer."

We walked back to the crater, the framework for a simple temporary plastic structure already being set up. Computers, desks, lights, metal doors, a crane, things were being set up at an incredible speed. After about twenty minutes the first scientists were running geiger counters, scanners and imaging wands over every inch of the crater.

"So I'm sure Coulson asked you this already, but any theories?" Agent Sitwell asked.

We were both watching the isolation suited scientists as they did their work, leaning on the metal railing of the central metal and plastic sheet building.

"Something is obviously off." I pointed out. "It's being held by something, stuck to the ground or held in place. And they are already getting some abnormal electrical interference. My guess is that it's waiting for someone to come get it."

"...Who?" He asks, an eyebrow raised.

"Not the slightest clue." I lied. "But since it somehow got here, it's clearly capable of moving or being moved. Since so far no one has been able to budge it, that tells me none of us meet the requirements. If I can bind things to someone, it would make sense that someone else can too."

“So you think someone is going to come looking for it?” He confirms before continuing. “What should we do when they get here?”

“Don't piss them off.” I answered simply. “Anyone who can do this is either connected enough to buy it or special enough to make it.”

Eventually the scientists empty out into the now finished outer areas to analyze their data, letting Clint, Ema and I climb down to the dirt. All three of us stand around the hammer, examining it closely.

“I'm assuming people have already made note of it being 'vaguely celtic'” I asked, looking up at Agent Sitwell

“Yes, we have historians and language experts already looking over the carvings and style.”

I nodded, before stepping closer to the hammer and gripping the handle, setting up my stance before giving it a pull with a significant portion of my strength. My feet dug into the earth but the hammer stayed completely still, not shifting in the slightest. I nodded, not having believed I was worthy by any definition anyway.

“Has anyone tried smashing the rock under it?” I suggested, taking a step back. “I can be a bit stronger but it didn't even budge.”

“It was suggested but no one has attempted it yet.” He responded.

“Call it plan B then.” Clint suggested. “Are you going to try and card it?”

“Do you guys trust me to try it?” I asked. “I felt you all tense up when I touched it before.”

“Higher ups are a bit nervous about you making off with something” Agent Sitwell admitted. “Plan C then?”

“More like plan Z.” I corrected. “I'd rather not test the limits to my greatest creation on an item that shows signs of having infinite mass without infinite weight.”

And that was a genuine concern. My cards had a limit and I felt it when that limit was brushed, felt it in what I was beginning to think was my soul. I had no idea how the deck would handle Mjolnir and I certainly didn't want to kill myself trying.

“I'd like to take a look at the readings you've gathered.” Ema called up to Agent Sitwell, who nodded in response.

“Come on up, I'll introduce you to the onsite team.”

Ema gave me a look and I nodded, watching as her stealth suit clad form easily climbed the ladder up and out of the shallow pit we had been in.

I continued to examine the hammer for another few minutes, idly chatting with Clint. I was pretty sure he was here to keep an eye on me as much as anything, though I didn't mind. Eventually the topic shifted from the hammer to his next piece of equipment.

"I got caught up in figuring out your quiver and finishing Ema's exosuit." I admitted. "Your glasses shouldn't take long after we get back."

"I thought you would have to figure that out too." He asked, leaning back at the metal framework of the quarantine structure.

"Yes, but the effects aren't nearly as elusive as expanded storage had been." I explained as I stood up straight from examining the strap of the hammer. "When we get home I might take a day to rest but-

"Maker, Clint!" Ema called from higher up. "Coulson just returned. He brought back the astrophysicist's research."

"Huh...shall we?" I asked, gesturing to the ladder. "I'm curious why he felt like it needed to come back with him."

We both climbed up and headed out of the structure, following Ema to where Coulson was. We found him watching Shield agents unload computers, equipment, sheafs of paper and folders full of pictures. He held a black notebook in his hand, idly looking through it.

"Welcome back Coulson." I called out as we got closer. "Looks like you found something good?"

"It appears that way." He said with a nod before handing off the book to someone. "Get someone to read that specifically." He instructed before turning back to Clint.

"Dr. Foster has been out in the desert chasing some sort of astrological anomaly." He explained. "There is a large chance her equipment picked up data from when the hammer landed. Better yet this was the quadrant she was focusing on during the hammer's arrival window."

"Wait, Foster... as in Jane Foster?" I asked, internally wincing at my inability to keep my mouth shut."

"Yes, do you know her?" Agent Coulson asked with a look as we climbed into the protection of the temporary structure.

"No, not personally." I clarified. "Her name is just familiar."

“She came up in our research.” Ema said, covering for me. “When you first started using your abilities.”

“Right!” I said with a nod. “We spent some time trying to figure out what was going on. Looked up a lot of weird stuff online.”

“Either way she should have recorded some interesting data.” Coulson said, stepping into what was quickly being turned into a command center of sorts. “Feel free to look at it, tell us if you think of anything.”

“Will Dr. Foster be joining us soon or...?” I asked, slowly trailing off as Agent Coulson looked over at me.

“Dr. Foster won't be joining us.” He said. “We confiscated the data and her equipment.”

Me and Ema shared a look before I turned back at Coulson.

“Wait... Let me get this straight. You saw a scientist, working on something that is potentially connected to what we are here for, an expert in her field... and instead of working with her... you stole her shit?”

“It's standard Shield procedure.” Sitwell explained, looking up from the paper covered table he was leaning on. “We have no idea how she was involved, what her background is. Outside assets cannot be added into the equation too quickly. I'm sure she was properly compensated.”

“Yeah... good job. Definitely not going to come back and bite you in the ass.” I said, shaking my head before I turned and made my way to the door.

“Where are you going?” Agent Coulson asked.

“I'm going for a walk.”