

Consciousness fluttered in a bit at a time. At first, the glimpses and snapshots of sounds were fleeting. I recognized some of them, and others were new, strange, and confusing. Slowly, though, that improved until I realized where I was and remembered what had happened. I cracked my eyes open and looked around.

I was lying down on a hospital bed, hooked up to the usual monitoring devices, the steady beeping picking up just a bit. I could feel the breathing mask strapped onto my face, but thankfully, there was no intubation tube. When my thoughts finally connected together, I started looking for the button that called a nurse, only for one to peak in around the door.

"Oh, you are awake. Just hold tight, dear. I'll get the doctor, and they will explain everything."

I coughed, trying to call out to the woman but failing as she disappeared quickly. After she left I attempted to shift myself into a sitting position, only to find my hands were heavily bandaged. As if noticing that made it real, a dull ache seemed to spread across them like they were heavily bruised.

Before I could start to investigate just how bad my hands were damaged, my doctor, who I didn't recognize, finally arrived.

"Ah, Warren, it's good to see you up," He said with a smile. "You've been in a coma for just over four days, brought on by your multiple concussions. Ordinarily, I would have said the damage and trauma that I saw when you first arrived would have led to some serious issues, but I'm happy to say your progress has been outstanding. As far as we can tell, you're going to make a full recovery."

I nodded, thankful that my enhancements were pulling their weight. I tapped the face mask, and the doctor nodded, stepping forward to help me pull it off. Once I was free, he helped me sit up. I was still a little sore, especially around the three spots where the nanite tendrils had impaled me. Given how fast I healed, the fact that I was still sore in some places said a lot about how badly I was injured in the first place.

"Do you know how my team is?" I asked when I was finally sitting up.

"Your teammates are fine. I saw most of them myself," He explained. "I can't discuss them directly, but none of them were permanently injured."

"Thank you Doctor..."

"Salif. Dr. Salif," He answered with a smile. "I was hired by the Justice League to staff their newly made recovery facility for their members and affiliates like the New Titans. It's where you and your team will be able to get medical treatment from now on."

The doctor explained that after Green Arrow had assembled an entire facility for Roy, Will, and Jim, the League decided to turn it into an official location. It was connected to the Zeta-Tube network and was equipped with all the advanced medical tech they knew of and staffed by crack doctors.

"It's been interesting acting as what is basically a testing bed for a bunch of tech, years ahead of what most hospitals have, but with any luck, our testing will mean they get access to it sooner rather than later," He finished, before smiling and holding my arm up so he could get a better look at my bandaged hand. "Last time we looked at your hands, they looked good, but we wrapped them anyway to keep them clean. Why don't we take these off and see how they look now?"

The doctor slowly unwrapped the bandage off one of my hands, and a nurse came in to unwrap the other, all while I nervously waited for the reveal. From what I remembered, which in all honesty was a bit spotty at the end, my hands had been pretty harshly scoured by the nanite cloud. The fact that I wasn't sure how bad they were because there was too much blood in the way was more than a little worrying. Thankfully the fact that the doctor wasn't freaking out was a good sign.

"Now, you have some scarring, but you should have full use of your hands, and these scars will fade over time. With your enhanced biology, they might even fade completely."

When they both finally pulled the last bit of bandage off, I let out a long sigh of relief. My hands were mostly fine, with some slight scabbing around my fingers. I could still feel their ache, but they weren't the nubby, mangled mess some dark part of my brain had been worried they were. I slowly made a fist before spreading them out, testing my range of motion. I could also see a few new scars from part of my hand that had already healed.

"Hmm, they look good, about what we expected so far. I think we will leave them unwrapped as long as they don't start to crack or bleed, so take it easy on them," Dr. Salif explained, tilting my hands back and forth to examine them. "Now, your stomach, shoulder, and leg wounds required some surgery to pull out the chunks of material being impaled had left inside you, but you are healing very well. I see those bandages coming off in a day or two. The rest we can take off now."

Slowly, the doctor and nurse worked to undo the bandages around my body over the next hour, revealing that I had been wearing a shocking amount. Once again, I thanked my enhanced healing, as there were very few obvious scars and only some scabbing in certain spots. I honestly looked like I had taken a bad fall off of a bike or something multiple weeks ago rather than being smacked around and pummeled by a nanite monster only a few days ago.

When the doctors were finally done, they informed me that they wanted to get a CT scan later in the day, of both my head and the impalement sites to make sure everything had settled

into place properly. They would then base when I could leave on the swelling and fluid retention where they had cut into me and how the swelling in my head was doing.

They had barely finished taking off my bandages when Batman walked into the room. The nurse looked more than a little nervous about him, but the doctor simply nodded. The former left to get me some water, while the latter kept working.

"Almost done here, Batman, but you can ask some questions in the meantime," He explained before focusing back on me.

"Thank you, Dr. Salfi," Batman said, stepping closer but stopping far enough away that the doctor could still work. "How are you recovering?"

"Well. A lot better than I should be," I said, shaking my head. "I thought I had completely internalized being enhanced, but seeing how quickly I healed from that... more than a bit surprising. Even more so than when I broke my arm."

"You were in rough shape," Batman responded. "I've seen many people die from similar levels of abuse."

"Yeah," I responded, not sure what else to say.

"We need to know what happened," Batman continued. "We have put some of the pieces together, but we cannot ascertain the full story from the evidence we found."

"Fuck, then this is going to be some bad news," I said, shaking my head. "The whole thing was a plan by Mauser. He wanted whatever was powering Amazo, so he orchestrated the whole thing to get it."

"Tell me everything," Batman demanded, stepping closer as Doctor Salfi finally left the room.

For the next hour or so, I described the entire mission, lightly going over everything that happened until Kyle, Tora, and Beatriz were knocked unconscious, and then I started being more detailed. I explained that the idea of freezing the nanites worked at first but that the construct had somehow adapted or at least figured out how to free itself. I described the explosion and how it managed to get the jump on Kyle and knock him out.

I then explained that through the pain and frustration, I managed to somehow break through a previous barrier.

"It was too refined, with too much plastic... too small maybe? Either way, when I first tried, I couldn't bend it. I'm pretty much a master at sand bending at this point, but this was obviously not sand," I said, shaking my hand. "But between frustration, anger maybe? I don't

know why, but I was able to break through whatever was stopping me before and start crushing the nanites into clumps. It took a lot out of me and... well."

I gestured to myself and my hands, and Batman nodded in understanding before I continued.

"I managed to destroy a whole pile of them before the swarm suddenly dissipated. After that, I collapsed. I had no chi, my body was torn to pieces, and it just stopped. The concussions probably didn't help either. But that's when Mauser showed up," I explained, pausing momentarily before taking a deep breath and continuing. "He monologued a bit, admitted this was his plan and that he probably overcomplicated it, before pointing his pistol at my head. I thought he was going to kill me, but... he decided that would be too boring."

"Sounds familiar," Batman commented, and I couldn't help but nod.

"Nightwing mentioned a similarity to Joker."

"They show an unfortunately similar style, though Mauser is less interested in theatrics," Batman agreed. "Continue."

"After he talked to me, he finished cracking open the last vault and went inside and came out with Amazo's ribcage," I explained, shaking my head in frustration. "He cracked it open like a walnut and pulled out some sort of artifact. It was red and covered with markings, maybe some kind of writing? He mentioned that the containment would have failed spectacularly if he hadn't taken it out now, perhaps even destroying the city. Then he left. Wally arrived not long after, maybe thirty seconds, probably less, I wasn't really keeping track."

"What are your thoughts?" He asked, though it sounded like he was testing me from the tone.

"Well, there is only one thing I can think of, having just dealt with one artifact-related mess."

"We were concerned about that as well," Batmans admitted. "The inclusion of Mauser only makes it more complicated."

"Yeah... Hey, listen, how was the team?" I asked, leaning forward a bit. "The doctor said they were alright, but..."

"Superboy recovered from his wounds within a few days. Tora is in a cast with a broken forearm, and Beatriz is recovering from her own concussion," He answered. "No lasting effects are expected."

"Good. That's good," I said, rubbing my face and shaking my head. "That mission could have gone very bad in the end. If the construct or Mauser had had any inclination to finish us off... Wait, what about the scientist inside the construct?"

"Dr. Roquette is mostly recovered, though she is taking a long sabbatical from her work. The League is keeping a close eye on her. She only remembers the initial breach of containment. The rest is blank."

"Yeah, not really surprised. I think she was at least partially conscious for a few moments, but... she didn't seem that coherent," I admitted. "I'm glad she is alright, though."

Batman asked a couple more questions, clearing up a few things before eventually leaving. The nurse who had to rush off to get water and definitely wasn't spooked by Batman eventually returned about fifteen minutes later with a jug of water and some food. I drank half of it before quickly eating the meal she brought. The nurse was just taking it out when a green blew past her, flying way too fast for being indoors.

"Warren!" M'gann shouted, stopping just above my bed and hovering for a moment before slowly drifting downward until she could give me a hug.

As she hugged me, I could feel our connection slowly restoring itself, and she threw herself at me mentally, our minds holding each other just as tightly as we did physically. When we finally pulled apart, I spotted a security guard standing at the door.

"I understand you were excited," He said, looking at M'gann with a raised eyebrow. "But no flying indoors outside of emergencies."

M'gann sheepishly nodded, and the guard left, leaving us alone again.

*"Warren, I'm so glad you're okay!"* She gushed, turning back and focusing on me, her feet landing on the floor beside my bed. *"When they took you away, you looked so bad, and then I visited, and the team was worried, and I was worried, and the doctors-"*

*"It's okay, M'gann, I'm okay,"* I assured her mentally, giving her hand a squeeze. *"I'm sorry I scared you like that."*

*"It's okay, as long as you're okay, I don't care,"* She said, holding my hand with both of hers. *"Batman said you were in a coma and that they had no idea when you would wake up."*

*"Comas caused by concussions can be unpredictable for humans,"* I explained. *"Some wake up immediately, others take much longer."*

*"That's what he said. I'm glad you woke up, Warren. I was so worried..."*

I pulled her closer gently, kissing her softly. She floated off the floor, and I guided her into the bed with me, where she snuggled against my chest. After about ten minutes of quietly comforting each other, she looked up at me.

*"Why did you keep me upstairs?"* She asked, catching my eyes.

*"What do you mean?"*

*"When you made the team to go down into the lower levels, why did you keep me upstairs?"* She repeated.

*"Because I was worried about you being in enclosed spaces with fire and Beatriz,"* I explained, feeling her nervousness underneath her question. *"You're worried I was doing it to protect you? Because I care about you so much?"*

She nodded, and I sighed, kissing the top of her head and holding her close. My shoulder, where the tendril had punched through, was still very sore, but keeping her closer was well worth it.

*"I love you M'gann, and I won't deny that seeing you in harm's way cuts deep into me,"* I admitted, looking down at her as she looked up at me. *"But this is what you want to do. I've felt how happy being a hero makes you and how much helping people means to you. I wouldn't do anything to take that away from you. Besides, you're a badass, and you're smart. I trust you to keep yourself safe and kick ass at the same time."*

*"...Thank you. I know you wouldn't do something like that, but it was stuck in my head, and I couldn't ask you, so it just... Sorry."*

*"It's fine, hun,"* I assured her, giving her another squeeze. *"If it's something you're really worried about, we could always shift the teams around? Wally could work with me and Artemis, and you could work with Robin and Will."*

*"No, I like working with you,"* She responded emphatically, kissing my cheek. *"I was being silly."*

*"It's not silly if it's stuck in your head like that, but I promise not to hold you back, and if I struggle with it, we can consider other options,"* I suggested, and she mentally nodded. *"Now-"*

A knock on the door sounded, and we both looked over, seeing Kaldur and Tula standing at the door, the latter with a knowing grin on her face. M'gann slowly lifted off me, floating around until she was back, standing by the bed, her hands around mine. I squeezed her hand before gesturing for our friends to come in.