

After turning to John and asking who was next, several people around the camp started shouting, asking to be next. For a moment, I was worried the whole camp would rush us, and I would need to demonstrate my other magic, but John was on top of it. He quickly stood on a small stack of pallets and shouted for everyone to be quiet, and surprisingly, they listened.

"Hey! Everyone calm down!" He said, lit up by the various fires and lights that illuminated the otherwise dark camp. "I know everyone is anxious, but we need to do this one by one. Arcanum has already agreed to help everyone, so take it easy, and we will get to you, even if it takes all night."

People seemed to settle at his words, and he climbed down off his stage, nodding for Tony and I to follow. He led us through the crowd to a much older tent, one layered with ratty, hole-filled tarps. He climbed inside and, a minute or so later, came back out helping an older woman. She was struggling to stand up straight, and as John helped her sit back in a weathered old rocking chair, I could see the joints of her fingers swollen with arthritis. I wince when she whimpered in the process of shifting in her seat.

John gave us a brief introduction, and I quickly got to work. A half a dozen bone and general healing spells later, she was doing much better. Usually, I wouldn't use such general healing spells, as they tended to decrease the effectiveness of other healing while also doing a poor job of actually fixing significant problems. However, in this case, I was using it to ease the signs of old age, which they did rather well. I was *not* de-aging her, simply healing a lot of the issues that crop up as people get older. Since it was so widespread, general healing spells were quite effective in soothing them.

When I was done, the older woman stood up straight, tears pouring down her face. She thanked me profusely, switching between praying for me and asking if there was anything she could do. I told her to live well and that I was happy to help. As John guided me to the next person, Tony stayed behind to talk to her, apparently familiar with the older woman.

For the next few hours, we traveled around the camp, taking care of dozens of different injuries, ranging from a simple case of the flu all the way to a serious issue with an older man's leg, which was infected from a dog bite. Of course, there were some things I couldn't fix, but even the genetic issues I found could be mitigated with some healing to wash away the symptoms. They would return, but some of them would take years. Several people tried to pay me, trying to hand me meager amounts of savings, but I, of course, refused, assuring them that I was happy to help.

I was about halfway through this when Alya whispered to me.

"The woman from earlier, Mary, is watching from the roof," she said softly, directing me to look up and back with a gust of wind.

Sure enough, Mary was looking over the camp from the roof of the abandoned car dealership. She was sitting with her legs hanging over the side of the roof, watching us as we worked. She clearly spotted me looking at her, but I simply waved before returning to healing. I had had time to think about what John had said, and I realized that he had mostly been right. Had she wanted my help, she would have stuck around, and I wasn't about to try and force healing on anyone.

When I finally finished healing everyone from the camp, I happily shook hands with John before saying goodbye to the few people who had been following me around, watching my work. I also passed John my cell phone number so he could call me if there was an emergency. After that, I picked up Tony, who had hung back to talk to a few of the people I had healed, before leaving the encampment behind. Quite a few people wished us both well as we left, stepping out of tents to shake our hands or simply say goodbye. As we left, both of us were quiet until we reached his car.

"You did amazing work today," He said with a smile. "The people you helped didn't have many options, and many of them would have been dead in the next few weeks, or been forced to do some unkind things to get the help they needed."

"Just happy to help, Tony," I said with a smile. "Any news on where I can go next?"

"The other people I knew were hesitant to agree to a meet-up," He admitted with a frown. "The only reason John did was because he recognized that a few of the people at his camp were really starting to struggle. I'm hoping that will change once the word of what you did today gets around. Give it a few days, and I'll know more."

"Sounds good. Thanks for setting this up."

"I was happy to Ma- Arcanum," He said, correcting himself and pointing at me with a cheeky grin. "I'll be in touch in a few days."

I watched him climb into his car and pull away, waving as he did. Once he was around the corner, I looked around to make sure no one was listening in.

"That went pretty well," I said, feeling the weight of Alya's presence as she pulled in close to focus on me. "Any thoughts? Notice anything weird?"

"Nothing worth noting," She responded, the wind tugging at my arm, pulling me towards home. "I did not notice anyone around the camp who didn't belong."

"That's good," I responded as I crossed the street.

I made my way through the city, stopping where I had changed the first time to stuff my costume back into my bag. When I finally arrived back at my temporary home, I climbed in

through the usual window, sealing it back up after I did. By that time, I was starting to really feel the late hour despite having taken a nap earlier. It was almost two AM, and when I finished putting my bed together, I was out like a light.

The next morning, I woke up late, my mind foggy from the lack of sleep. I used a general healing spell, which washed away some of the fatigue and fog, but it wasn't a complete fix. I found myself finishing my morning routine slowly before making my way to buy some breakfast.

"I need better magic to mitigate sleep," I mumbled to myself, taking a long sip of a large coffee. "I have to imagine it's possible to do it with magic, and being able to cut down on sleep would give me a lot of free time."

A cold wind whipped around my legs, and I rolled my eyes, feeling pretty clearly that Alya was telling me to stop complaining.

With breakfast in hand, I made my way to the city library, which was my primary source of information for the last week. I quickly sat down at one of the computers in the corner, tucked away from prying eyes. I was pretty sure I would get yelled at for having a drink near the computer, but I would be careful.

It took me a few minutes to log in, but soon, I was scrolling through PHO. It took some time to scroll through the unfamiliar message board, but eventually, I did find the Brockton Bay string, immediately finding what I was looking for.

"Didn't take them very long," I mumbled, clicking through the post labeled "New cape sighting at BBCH."

I read through the thread, chuckling to myself at just how similar it was to some of the boards at home despite the crude structuring. I was half expecting a "and my ax!" joke to pop up at any second.

Details were, unsurprisingly, scarce about who I was, but people did notice that when I was leaving, I was moving quite a bit faster, almost stalking out of the building. The general consensus was that I was there to get healing from Panacea, and either she couldn't help because she couldn't do brains, or she refused to help, potentially because she was known to refuse people who made demands or ambushed her.

A few people commented that they were surprised that Glory Girl herself hadn't responded to the thread, as she had been tagged, and she apparently liked to pop in when she was, even just to confirm that she couldn't talk about anything.

I stopped after about ten minutes of reading, making sure that no wild theories had developed. I half expected to open it up and find the website filled with insane ideas, but everything seemed to be tame, at least for now. None of it was close to the truth, mind you, but I wasn't worried about that. I quickly shut down the computer, but stayed sitting for a moment, staring at the screen.

"What's wrong?" Ayla whispered into my ear.

"Kinda felt like snooping on Facebook, wondering if anyone was talking about me," I responded, grabbing my coffee and standing from the seat. "It's not a nice feeling, and it reminded me of why I deleted social media back home."

I tried to pull on the connection we shared, more closely showing her the emotional bundle that the whole FOMO, missing out, gossip rag bundle of issues that social media caused. It was a very particular combination of emotions, and I could feel her reaction as she studied the glimpse I was giving her.

"I can understand why you don't engage," She responded once I had pulled the familiar feeling back, letting it fade. "Will you not use PHO officially, then?"

"Needs must when the devil drives, unfortunately," I mumbled back as I left the library. "Apparently, a lot of cape business is done there. I'll probably have to set one up eventually."

Shaking off the funk, I focused on what I would be doing for the rest of the day. I could go out and find some more high-quality steel. I had enough for now, but since I was using between 16 and twenty pounds of it a day. It didn't sound like much, but considering I was basically stealing it in rebar form from abandoned construction sites and lugging it around the city, it was a pain and tended to go down quickly.

"Do you think it might be time to make a statement?" Alya asked, voicing a thought spinning in the back of my mind. "You have a few days before Tony gets back to you. Why not patrol the city?"

"... It's not a bad idea," I admitted, though I said it with a frown. "But I'm not prepared to start pushing back the gangs, not yet. I could take down some thugs, sure, but I'm not hedging bets on the capes. Also... The whole patrol thing feels so useless. What are the chances of actually stumbling into a crime happening while walking around the city?"

"Considering I would be guiding you?" She asked, holding back a chuckle. "Very high."

I stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, her words surprising me.

"Dammit," I said, shaking my head as I started walking again. "I can't believe I didn't think of that. Alya, please poke me when you think I'm forgetting about stuff you can do."

"I already do, when I notice things, at least," She assured me. "However, the gift of free thought I gained from binding to you does mean that I am just as capable of missing things as you are."

I nodded in understanding before heading down a street that would eventually lead us back to the shop. I had left my costume at home, so I would need to retrieve it before we could go out on patrol. The more I walked, though, the more I realized I had a problem.

"I'm too slow," I said, finally climbing through the window of the shop, sealing it back up with a practiced hand. "You might be able to find people who need help, but past a short distance, I won't be able to get there in time to actually help. "

"And there's nothing you could do to increase your speed?" Alya asked, reforming into her solid shape, following me as I walked further into the temporary home.

"Hypothetically, I could run until I was exhausted and then heal away some of the fatigue, but that only works so much, and it's still just running speed," I added. "Not fast enough. Technically, if I got my hands on some mercury, I could use that to increase my speed and buff my stamina, but it would only be double at max."

"Forty miles per hour is not bad in a city," Alya pointed out.

"Forty? You think I can run twenty miles an hour?" I asked with a snort. "Yeah, mercury would get me to twenty, maybe twenty-two, tops. No, I need something else. Besides, where the hell would I get that much mercury?"

"What else could you do?"

"Well... long term, we could start selling stuff again until we have enough for a ride," I suggested. "A motorcycle could work since a car would just get stuck in traffic. But even that would take a while and... I think I have a better idea anyway."

"The spare charge?"

"Yeah. It's only one, so I would have to be extremely specific and pick something relatively low-end in terms of power and complexity," I said, now standing and pacing around the room. "Maybe if I focus on a singular spell?"

"Do you know a spell you could focus on?" Alya asked.

"...no, at least not specifically enough to count," I admitted.

We spent a few minutes brainstorming ideas before eventually settling on some things to try. First, I tried to think of a lighting-themed teleportation spell, something that would ping off my two levels of lighting spells. Unfortunately, Marvelous Mage considered that to be too similar to the existing topic, so it wouldn't work.

Next, rather than trying a pure teleport spell like blink, which we assumed would be too powerful and complicated, we settled on trying to increase my speed and stamina. While I doubt it would get very far with one charge, being able to run a bit faster without stopping would drastically increase my range.

With the decision made, I dove back and reached for the charge. I pushed towards the concept, focusing as much as possible on physical movement enhancement spells, hoping to keep the category separate from any teleportation concepts.

The charge took to the concept easily, forming into a chunk of knowledge that flowed into my mind. Once it settled into among my other charges, I smiled and looked at Alya.

"I take it it worked?" She asked.

"Yeah, and pretty well, to....come on, let's go out and I'll show you."