

## Chapter 14 - Vote

M'gann and I spent a few hours compiling a list of potential new teammates, whittling down the giant list of known heroes and vigilantes that the Justice League had down to around a dozen people, all around our age.

*"I didn't expect there to be so many."* M'gann said after we had finished. *"How come I haven't heard of most of these people?"*

*"Not sure to be honest. Maybe news networks don't consider non local heroes to be news?"* I suggested with a shrug, reading through the list one last time before setting back in my chair. *"Either way I think that's a good first pass. We can start digging through rumors and news reports once we share the list with the group."*

*"When are we going to get together again?"*

*"The day after tomorrow."* I answered, grabbing a handful of chips from the bag. *"Unless you or Superboy are busy...?"*

*"I don't have anything planned."*

*"Good. I forgot to ask Superboy earlier so I'll check when he gets back."*

M'gann nodded and took a sip of her drink, leaning back in her chair as well. She was still reading the files for one of the candidates we had picked. When she was done she clicked off her projection and looked over at me, blushing softly.

*"Do... would you like to help me make some cookies?"* She asked, hesitating a bit.

*"Yeah, sure. It's been a while since I had a good chocolate chip cookie."*

Both of us made our way to the kitchen, M'gann stopping and starting to pull out everything we would need while I dropped off my notepad in my room. By the time I got back she had everything out on the counter, as well as a big baking cookbook.

*"Have you ever tried baking before?"* I asked, reading the recipe over her shoulder.

*"Once, but they came out terrible."* She admitted. *"Once they were cooled they were really hard."*

*"Hmmm... Why don't we look that up?"* I suggested, pulling out my phone. *"Baking really isn't my strong suit so we'll be learning together."*

A quick search on google turned up a number of results, but a few suggested that too much sugar or over mixing was the likely culprit for rock hard cookies, which M'gann agreed with.

*"It's possible. What's the proper amount of mixing?"* She asked before continuing.  
*"Should we go light on sugar?"*

*"We can measure on the low side, but let's not reduce it by too much."*

Together we made our way through two different batches of cookies. We used just a hint less sugar than the cookbook, which I learned M'gann had brought with her, called for, while also making sure to stir as little as possible. When we were done making the cookie dough we put it into containers and put them in the fridge.

*"Do you really think letting the second batch rest for twenty four hours will make a difference?"*

*"That's what the experts were saying."* I answered with a shrug, gathering most of the dishes we had used and carrying them to the sink.

As I turned the faucet on and started soaking the dishes, M'gann brought the rest over and together we started cleaning and drying everything, making quick work of the pile before putting everything away. When I was done I quickly rinsed and dried my hands and tossed M'gann the towel so she could do the same. When everything was cleaned up I made my way over to the couch, plopping down with a sigh.

After a minute or so M'gann joined me on the couch and we started watching a TV show, some random drama that just happened to be on. It seemed vaguely familiar, and was pretty tolerable as far as TV day dramas went. M'gann seemed to enjoy it, so at about the half hour mark got up and put the cookies in the oven so she could keep watching. When I came back to the couch M'gann had moved, now sitting right next to where I had been. I smiled and sat back down, the Martian leaning on me as the show continued, her mental presence getting closer as well. We sat together, leaning back on the couch and on each other as the show continued and eventually ended. Not long after Superboy returned, stopping at the entrance of the kitchen, looking around and taking a few deep breaths.

*"It... smells really good in here."*

*"Hey Superboy!"* M'gann said with a smile, slowly sitting up straight. *"Warren and I made some chocolate chip cookies!"*

*"They have about five minutes left in the oven, so don't go to far."* I added with a smile

He nodded and dropped onto the couch in the farthest corner, putting his book down on the end table, making no comment about M'gann and I sitting so close together. About five minutes later we all gathered in the kitchen as I pulled the cookies out of the oven and M'gann used her telekinesis to move them onto a wire rack to cool, while I grabbed the milk, pouring three glasses while the cookies cooled a bit.

"Why the milk?" Superboy asked, looking down at the glass.

"It's traditional." I explained while M'gann nodded. "Some people dip the cookies, other people just drink it. Either way it goes well in my opinion."

Superboy simply nodded, waiting a moment before picking up a cookie. He took a bite without the milk, his eyes going wide as he chewed the warm gooey goodness.

"Is it good?" M'gann asked, suddenly nervous through our connection.

"Really good." He responded, taking another big bite.

M'gann smiled brightly, both of us picking up our own cookies. They were good, definitely some of the best cookies I had ever made, though the list was small to be fair. M'gann seemed ecstatic with the taste, actually lifting off of the floor a few inches as she chewed.

"Ish sho good!" She said, still chewing, a brilliant smile on her face, happiness pulsing from her presence.

"Guess we nailed it pretty well." I said, giving M'gann a smile, enjoying my own cookie.

We sat around and talked about our adventure in baking, each of us having another cookie, this time experimenting with milk as we ate them. The entire time M'gann's presence stayed as close as it had been before while we were together on the couch. By the time we were done we were all comfortably sitting back around the table, empty glasses of milk in front of us.

"Are you free the day after tomorrow Superboy?" I asked. "We are going to get together on Bioship again and finally vote on what this team is going to be."

"I should be." He said with a nod. "I'm meeting more potential guardians tomorrow, but the day after should be free."

"Great, that's good." I said, nodding and scratching my chin. "With any luck we will have a direction to work in rather than this waiting game the League seems to be satisfied with."

The three of us were quiet for a minute before I leaned forward and looked at Superboy.

“So, how did your meeting go today?” I asked cautiously,

“It was... a lot.” He admitted with a shrug. “I met three people. One was a woman living in Maryland, the other two were a couple from Central City.”

“Wow, that far away?” I asked, surprised and a bit worried.

“Warren... The Zeta Tubes?” M’gann pointed out.

“Oh... Right.” I said, rubbing my face. “Sorry, that concept is still pretty new to me. But that's good.”

“Did you like them?” M’gann asked after a pause, a strong sense of worry and hope coming from her.

“I... didn't dislike the woman from Maryland.” Superboy admitted with a shrug. “The couple from Seattle was nice. They seemed... more understanding?”

“Did Black Canary explain how they found these people?” I asked, doing my best to seem curious but not pushy.

“They are people who worked with the Justice League or with a member.” He explained. “The woman helped with decorating the interior of the Hall of Justice. The couple is apparently a friend of a member, who knew they were looking to adopt.”

“That sounds promising, Superboy.” I said. “Sounds like you liked the couple?”

The teenager’s mood seemed to dip, enough that I noticed the change and M’gann physically reacted.

“...The truth is, I don't know what to think.” Superboy admitted, looking away. “Or feel. Or anything. And I'm beginning to see that that may be a bigger problem than I realized.”

The teenager stood after that, picking up his book and leaving the kitchen. He stopped by the exit and looked back at us.

“Thank you for the cookies. They were good.” He said, before looking away and leaving.

M’gann began to float up, but I grabbed her hand and pulled her back down, shaking my head.

*“He felt so empty and confused Warren.”* She explained, her worry pressing against me.

*"We can't push him."* I responded, before continuing on to explain. *"Pushing him now would just annoy him. He doesn't know the answers to the questions you want to ask and struggling to figure them out would just make him more frustrated."*

*"How do you know?"* She asked, settling down beside me without resisting. She wasn't accusatory, just simply curious.

*"I've been where he is. Well in general at least, never to this extreme"* I explained. *"He is lost, struggling to figure out his place and how he feels. If he needs us he can find us here."*

*"Is there anything we can do?"* She asked, leaning her head on my shoulder again. I couldn't help but smile at the undercurrent of happiness I felt from her despite the worry she was feeling.

*"We remind him occasionally that we are here for him, and help him if he needs it."*

As we sat together I focused, sharing a memory with her, one filled with emotions. I was much younger, sitting in an office and holding a bandage and ice pack against my lip, a growing bruise on my left eye. Worry, anger, anxiety and confusion all wrapped in a ball. The relief when the man who would one day be my stepfather walked in, dressed in grease stained coveralls. The confusion at my own relief, because someone showing up meant I was going to get in more trouble.

But someone had shown up.

M'gann looked at me as the memory faded, giving me a double hug, mentally and physically. She could feel me missing my family.

*"Maybe someday we can figure out a way to get you home"* She said mentally.

*"Maybe. Or maybe I need to start treating this like my home."* I responded with a sad smile. *"It hasn't all been bad."*

I sent her an image of us sitting down in the grotto, a blanket wrapped around us. I could feel her slight embarrassment, and I could tell she was blushing. We made our way back to the couch after a while, spending the rest of the day watching random shows on TV.

-----

The next day was simple and enjoyable, even if it was on the boring side. I worked out in the morning with Superboy, with M'gann joining us to work on her cardio and general fitness. Superboy was working the limits of his strength, the new machine easily keeping up with him while M'gann and I watched. After we were done we all sat down for breakfast, a simple meal of

cereal and fruit, since Superboy needed to leave shortly to go meet the rest of his potential guardians.

After Superboy had left I headed down into the grotto to train while M'gann went off to fly with Bioship and visit her uncle. Apparently the last time she had asked if he could train her more in shape shifting and other Martian abilities. He had agreed as long as she could meet around his busy hero schedule.

I skipped over forms practice, now pretty sure that I had all of the basic forms down pat between my improved memory and the implanted novice level skill. Instead I jumped to making a half dozen surprisingly smooth and accurate spheres before moving on to endurance training. I was still more than a bit off from my target of a solid minute but I was making progress. After a few hours of training I managed to keep my single small rock connected to my palm for thirty seconds. On a whim I tried doing it with two stones and found it was easier than I thought it would be, but still much more challenging than holding up a single stone.

After training I spent the rest of the day bouncing between reading and watching TV. Eventually M'gann and Superboy returned, the former returning first and joining me in the living room, the latter heading off to the library after returning an hour or so later. M'gann and I spent a while talking about our respective training efforts, mostly about how much progress we had made and what we were looking forward to being able to do. Eventually we said goodnight and headed off to bed.

The next day went by even faster, especially with the schedule mostly the same. Again we worked out together, shared a breakfast, although this time I made french toast and sausages. After that I got in my training while M'gann worked on her own. While I lifted and sculpted rocks she stretched and shifted, pushing the limits of her shape shifting abilities. It was honestly a bit distracting watching her grow extra limbs, shift her skin tone, and otherwise push her limits. Eventually though, M'gann left to go put the cookie dough we made into the oven, baking them for the meeting. Not long after she left, I finished our training and returned to the more accessible parts of the cave to prepare for the meeting.

After a quick shower, shave and change of clothes I met M'gann and Superboy in the main room. M'gann was carrying a plastic container of cookies, and I could feel her trying to push down her excitement at sharing them in an attempt to stay serious. I had already ordered an inordinate amount of pizza from a local restaurant, one different from the place M'gann and I had already been. We waited for our three missing teammates, and after a quick greeting and small talk we headed off to Bioship, picking up our Pizza before blasting into space.

-----

"I believe it may be time to discuss the topic of our last meeting." Kaldur said after we had finished eating, pizza boxes stacked off to the side.

“Yeah. Just to let you guys know, Batman had a lot of questions” Robin said. “About tonight and our last meeting.”

“What did you say?” I asked.

“What we agreed on. That we were talking about what the team was, what we wanted it to be. And that there was no point talking about it before we voted on it. He didn't agree by the way.”

“You didn't get in trouble, did you?” M'gann asked.

“No, he just got more and more suspicious.” Robin explained. “I had to switch outfits twice to lose all the listening devices and trackers.”

“Well, past tonight it won't matter, you can tell him yourself.” I said with a shrug. “So would you guys like to jump straight to a vote? Or do you have any more questions.”

“Yeah, I have one.” Wally said, leaning forward. “You have all of these big idea's but how are you going to convince the Justice League to allow all of this?”

“Well... I'm hoping our genuine desire to improve will change their minds about anything they disapprove of. Beyond that, it all comes down to how much they are willing to control us.” I explained with a shrug. “If they won't let us hire an ex military specialist to train us, will they prevent us from visiting a friend who just happens to be ex military? Will they force us to stop practicing his advice? Will they demand that we return home if we go for enthusiastic walks in Gotham or Central City?”

“So do what they approve and engage in malicious compliance if they don't?” Robin asked. “They won't approve of that for very long.”

“I'm not suggesting we attempt a coup on the adults fascist regime.” I said with a chuckle. “To be clear, I don't think most of this stuff will be an issue. It's hard to imagine they would shut down genuine attempts to be better heroes, especially if we aren't going out gung-ho and screwing shit up. If they constantly refuse our attempts to become something better, for genuinely no good reason, we can talk about malicious compliance. ”

In all honesty I could see a few scenarios where they got upset about what we were attempting to do. Beyond them being worried about seeking military-esque training, you could never tell when people would freak out from their own control issues, or feel threatened by people wanting to help. I was hoping that kind of situation wouldn't happen here, but Steve had seen it enough that I was wary of the possibility.

“I have a question as well.” Kaldur said, getting my attention again. “Why are you so intent on forging us into something new? You are new to this, in every aspect. Why are you so determined to push the boundaries?”

The whole group turned and looked at me intently, even M’gann. I let out a slow breath, trying to center myself.

“I could say any number of things honestly. It’s the right thing to do. It’s how we could do the most good. With great power comes great responsibility.” I said, catching each of my teammates’ eyes as I looked around. “And those would all be true, at least in part. But at the end of the day, if I’m really honest with myself, I want this because I’m not satisfied with just being a Justice League hopeful. I’m not happy with waiting patiently to get a little older, to get a bit more experience, and I’m sure as hell not going to cross my fingers and hope real hard that one day they pick me to join them. I know it will probably take longer to achieve, and I know that it’s going to be a rough road. But I would be making my own way, scaling my own challenges, carving out my own story, not getting tacked on to their coattails if I’m a good little hero who eats his vegetables and does what he’s told.”

Kaldur, Wally and Robin looked at each other before looking back at me. Robin nodded while Kaldur kept his usual stoic face.

“Alright, so do we do it ‘all in favor’ style or...?” Wally asked.

“No, it should be anonymous.” I said, turning to M’gann. “Do you think Bioship could tally the votes without keeping track of who made them?”

“Ummm... .” She trailing off for a moment, her eyes glowing before she answered. “Yes, she says that wouldn’t be a problem.”

In front of each of us, pulling up from the table, a small screen appeared. Two options were highlighted, a green checkmark and a red “X”. Wally tapped his screen almost immediately, as did M’gann and myself. Robin considered for a long moment before clicking his. Kaldur and Superboy took the longest, both of them finally tapping their screen after a few minutes of consideration.

When everyone was done a final screen descended from the ceiling, blank for a moment. After a few seconds it blinked on and displayed a list. Six Checkmarks and no negatives. I looked around the table at my new teammates, who all smiled.

“It looks like anonymity was not necessary.” Kaldur said with a nod.

“I guess not.” I said with a smile, feeling M’gann’s excitement while sharing my own. “This is a big deal guys. I think one day we will all look back on this moment as the start of something special.”



“As long as it doesn't blow up in our faces.” Wally muttered, cursing under his breath when Robin smacked him in the shoulder without looking. I couldn't help but frown.

“So what's next?” The youngest member of the team asked. The way he asked seemed more like a test than actually wondering what we should do next.

“We plan the next couple of days out. Starting with what we are going to say to Batman and the League.” I explained confidently. “We need to convince him and everyone else that this is a good idea.”

“Oh, so nothing difficult then?” Robin responded with his usual smirk.

“Our mentors are not stupid, nor will they dismiss us out of hand.” Kaldur said with his own confidence. “As long as we keep our cool and present well thought out ideas they will at least listen. I suggest...”

I nodded along as Kaldur continued to talk, looking at Robin as he spoke up next. The rest of the team seemed excited, eager to talk and plan, even Wally. I couldn't help but smile. This was the beginning.

Today's the day.