

Jane snuggled in closer against Mark's stomach and wondered if there was any simple pleasure nicer than that of spooning with a loved one. She doubted it.

The past three years had gone well, although they hadn't entirely been easy. The Foundation had finally found its center and, as it moved from strength to strength, Jane couldn't help feeling less essential. True, she had skills that weren't duplicated within the group, but she knew that she was hardly unique in the world. A recent reorganization of the team's structure had provided food for thought and so Jane had taken advantage of her significant stock of vacation time – *you know your superhero outfit has gone legit when you hire an HR person*, she thought with a smile – and had come to England to think things through. Ongoing – and recent – changes had given Jane much to think about.

The not-quite-long-distance relationship had suited Jane, so far. Despite being several thousand miles apart, Jane could make the trip almost instantly – given a little help from another team-mate – but incompatible schedules had done what distance could not. Between Jane's obligations as a nova elite and her boyfriend's slow-but-steady climb through the ranks of London's Metropolitan Police Force, they saw each other infrequently. Lately, as Jane found herself with more free time on her hands, she found herself rather wistfully wishing that she could spend more of it with Mark Gillen.

"I've got an idea," Mark's half-sleepy murmur interrupted her thoughts.

"Not like the last one, I hope." Jane chuckled. "I think I pulled a muscle."

"You'll live," Jane heard his amused non-sympathy. "No. It's a different idea."

"Alright, let's hear it."

"Let's get married."

Jane sat up suddenly, almost tumbling Mark out of bed. She had expected a suggestion for a late dinner – not this. "What?"

Mark had the grace to look embarrassed. "I was afraid you'd react like that."

"What did you expect? *Of course, darling, let's just nip down the registry office?* Have you forgotten that I'm number thirteen on Interpol's list?"

"Sixteen, actually." Mark replied, risking a clout from Jane for his levity. "Hear me out." He pleaded.

Jane's eyes narrowed, but she said nothing. Instead, she leaned back against the headboard and waited for him to continue.

"You've told me a lot about what's been going on at your job. It sounds like you're not as keen to be there as you once were – not that you were all that keen in the first place, in some ways." Jane nodded at that. "And in the meantime, we've been seeing more of each other. Correct me if I'm wrong, but we *are* getting along rather well, aren't we?" Another nod. "So I, er, had this idea..." At this point, Mark's voice trailed off and his expression became furtive.

Jane smelled a mouse. "There's more to this than marriage, isn't there?"

"Yes, there is." Mark continued with care. "I know that you believe that your career options are limited."

"They are."

"And your prior training was in counter-terrorism."

"It is."

"Well, as it happens, I know that MI6 is putting together a nova team with intelligence applications, including counter-terrorism."

“You just *happened* to hear about that, huh?”

Mark refused to be cowed. “Indeed. And – don’t get angry – I talked to a chap I know over there. About you.”

“*What?*”

Mark flinched. “Shit. You’re angry.”

“Can you blame me? Oh my God, Mark. I know that I’m not wanted for anything in the UK but, come on, you *know* I don’t like to advertise my presence-“

“And I didn’t walk around Whitehall with your picture on a placard, alright?”

Mark snapped back. He took a deep breath and continued. “You’re right, Black Widow is hardly the person of the week anywhere in the world, but you’ve walked away from that – as your association with The Foundation proves.”

“And so you thought maybe I’d toddle on over to MI6 and make an application, huh? Never mind that I’m not a British Citizen and have a past that could cross the line from *unsavory* to *squalid*?”

“Jane, shush. Just listen to me. There are factors that I don’t think you understand.”

She scowled at that, but said nothing.

“We’ve got a severe brain-drain going on, in terms of nova talent. It seems that as soon as someone erupts, they’re off to America with a Wheaties-box and comic-book deal. Not only that, but a nova with your training is usually snapped up by the Directive or one of the other flashy organizations long before a smaller government can put in a good word.” Jane nodded. Mark had a point. “So to make a too-long story short, the Brits are willing to overlook your past, set you up with a new identity *and* offer you a job. In return for a ten-year commitment to the project.”

Jane shook her head, boggled. “Jesus, what did you *not* tell them about me?”

“Your shoe size. That didn’t come up.” Mark deadpanned.

“Are they for real?”

“I have every reason to believe so.”

Something sunk in. “*Ten years?* In the field? That’s hardly going to be conducive to a relationship, is it? I mean, it’s not a low-risk thing, you know. And, god forgive me, but I’m starting to get a bit old for that sort of thing.” Jane didn’t like admitting it, but as she passed her mid-thirties, her priorities were changing.

Mark smiled slightly. “Who said you’re going to be in the field? Oh, I’m sure you will be at some points, especially at first, but I was told most emphatically that you would be expected to spend a significant whack of time training other novas. Newcomers and the like. Probably a few other things, too. I got the impression that the team’s going to have to cover a lot of ground.”

“I’m amazed you got any sort of impression at all. Do you even have the clearance to hear this sort of stuff?”

“Probably not but, like I said, there’s a shortage of seasoned talent around here. They had to talk to me, or lose any chance of talking to *you*.”

“Why do I have the sinking feeling that you’ve already scheduled an interview for me?” Jane muttered.

“What a thing to suggest,” Mark said, his tone satirical. “Although if you’ve not got any plans for the day after tomorrow...”

“My god, you’re the limit. The absolute limit.” Jane smiled wearily. “So what does this have to do with us getting married?”

“Well, if you took a job in the country – right here in London, in fact – I really don’t see why we *shouldn’t* marry. I think we know each other fairly well. And I *do* love you, you know.”

Jane smiled suddenly. “That’s nice to hear, considering you’ve knocked me up.”

Now it was Mark’s turn to look shocked. “What? You’re joking.”

For the first time in something like fifteen years, Jane blushed. “No, I’m not.” Her unexpected pregnancy was one of the things she wanted to think through. Jane doubted that she could stand giving up another child, but also doubted her ability to raise a child alone – particularly given her current career of battling various threats across the globe. But now, maybe, she wouldn’t have to do it alone.

“How long? I mean, how far along are you?”

“Not long. Six weeks, just about.” She smiled. “It must have been that night I came over for the opera.” Mark’s expression delighted Jane. Surprise and wonder battled for dominance. “Is Andrew going to be okay with having a brother – or sister – twenty years his junior?”

“Who cares?” Mark blurted, then looked shamefaced. “Wait, I don’t mean that. I’m sure he’ll be thrilled.”

“That’s a relief.”

“So, will you?”

“What? Marry you? I don’t know...” Jane made a show of considering the matter, during which Mark threatened a pillowfight. “Oh, alright. If you insist.” She grinned and allowed Mark to tackle her for a hug.

She felt a pang of regret at the idea of leaving the Foundation, but it lasted for only a moment. The decisions made tonight came as suddenly as a lightning strike, she knew, but she believed that it made sense, in its way. Never mind the tiny voice of doubt that persisted in her mind, Jane believed that maybe this time, things would work out.