

Marvel Manifestor

- Chapter 381 - 381 – Darren Arrives

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[806 words]

Pym said nothing more. He simply connected the device to a power source and switched it on.

To his surprise, even after decades, it still worked.

Most things shared a common trait—they didn't fear use, but neglect. Electronic devices were especially prone to that.

"Now we can begin," Pym muttered, picking up the device and heading out.

But the moment he opened the door—

He froze.

A bald man stood in the living room, casually flipping through documents.

An uninvited guest.

Darren Cross.

Pym's heart skipped a beat, but he quickly composed himself.

"Darren?"

His voice drew the attention of Scott and Hope in the dining room. They both moved to come out—

—but Pym shut the door immediately, slipping the signal scrambler into his pocket without a sound.

"How did you get in?" Pym asked.

This time, it wasn't an act—he genuinely wanted to know.

"Your door wasn't locked, Hank," Darren shrugged, setting the documents aside.

Not far from him lay the team's plan schematics.

Pym couldn't tell if Darren had seen them—but he had to make sure he didn't.

"To what do I owe the pleasure?" Pym stepped forward into the light.

"I've got good news," Darren said, visibly excited.

"Good news? For me?" Pym replied calmly.

"What other good news could there be?"

"Pym Technologies—your company—is about to become one of the most profitable companies in the world."

Darren walked closer.

Behind Pym, several ants were frantically rolling up the schematics, trying to hide them.

Darren suddenly tilted his head slightly.

Pym's heart jumped into his throat.

Had he seen them?

But Darren simply placed a hand on Pym's shoulder.

"In fifteen days, I'll be holding a presentation," he said. "You must come. I want you to witness my success."

Pym looked at his once-proud protégé.

Now, that same man felt like a stranger.

Even... frightening.

"I'll be there," Pym said. "Of course."

As he spoke, he moved toward the small table. Seeing the schematics safely rolled up, he finally relaxed a little.

Darren turned to leave—

—but suddenly stopped.

He looked back at Pym.

"What did you see in me?"

"...What?"

"Years ago, you chose me as your student," Darren said seriously. "What was it about me?"

"I thought you were like me," Pym answered honestly.

"Then why did you push me away later?"

"Because you were too much like me."

Darren pressed his lips together, staring at him for a moment.

Then he turned and left.

Back in the dining room, Hope and Scott stood together, both visibly tense.

"He knows," Hope said immediately. "He was testing you. We have to call this off."

Given her understanding of Darren, there was no way he hadn't noticed the schematics.

Pym sighed and sat down.

"It's a risk either way. We have to try."

He couldn't be certain whether Darren had seen anything.

"What if he knows I'm here?" Hope asked.

"He doesn't," Pym said firmly. "He couldn't have seen you."

But before he could continue—

Hope's phone rang.

She glanced at the caller ID.

Darren.

She had no choice but to answer—she was still on the company's board.

"Hey, Darren. What's up?" she said, instantly adjusting her tone.

"Hope. Where are you?" Darren's voice came through, calm and steady.

"At home," she replied without hesitation.

Not this house—her own.

"I just visited Hank," Darren said. "Aside from his usual disdain, I got nothing."

His tone was eerily flat.

"Darren, don't get worked up over a stubborn old man," Hope said lightly.

Pym shot her a sharp look, while Scott frantically gestured that she'd gone too far.

"Listen, Hope," Darren continued, "finish setting up the production line immediately. Put it into operation at once."

"Triple the security."

"All entrances need full-body scanners. Install mesh filters over every ventilation shaft."

"We can't afford any mistakes."

He spoke like he was issuing orders—but whether it was intentional or not, it sounded like a warning.

"Understood. I'll have it arranged tomorrow," Hope said, then hung up.

"He's increasing security threefold," she said, turning to Pym. "He's gone paranoid. He's onto you!"

"But he's not onto you," Pym insisted. "Hope, we can still do this."

Hope was furious.

"They're installing full-body scanners at every entrance, sealing ventilation systems—how do you expect Scott to get in?"

Under that level of security, even shrinking wouldn't help.

This wasn't a plan anymore.

It was sending Scott to his death.

Pym fell silent.

Every possible entry point had been sealed.

There was no obvious way in.

Just as the two of them hit a dead end—

Scott spoke up.

"If land and air are blocked... we go through water."

Both Pym and Hope turned to him.

"The building's water system," Scott explained. "They can't exactly station guards inside pipes."

"If we lower the water pressure, I can get in."

He spoke with surprising confidence.

Hope considered it carefully.

"It could work... but there's a problem."

"If we use the water system, someone has to access the control center and manually adjust the pressure."

She paced back and forth, thinking it through.

"But on the day of the presentation, Hank and I both need to stay in Darren's sight."

"To keep him from getting suspicious."

"So who's going to the control center?"

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## **- Chapter 382 - 382 – The Three Stooges[ 741 words ]**

"Then we'll need to expand the team..." Scott said, clearly having thought this through.

"What else do we need?" Pym asked, immediately on guard.

He was extremely sensitive about bringing in outsiders. Aside from Hope and Scott, he trusted no one—just as he once distrusted Howard Stark and Peggy Carter, and now the Avengers.

"We need one person to infiltrate the control center and adjust the water pressure," Scott explained. "Another to hack into the building's power grid and

shut down the laser security system. And a third to handle extraction—routes and transportation."

By the time Scott finished, Pym already knew exactly who he meant.

Scott's three... idiotic partners.

Pym had been monitoring Scott for months. He knew those three all too well.

"No—no—absolutely not!" Pym snapped. "Those three idiots are completely out of the question!"

From everything he'd observed, they were more liability than help—especially that chatterbox Luis.

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The next day, however...

All three "idiots" were sitting in Pym's living room.

Hope set three cups of coffee in front of them.

"Thank you for the coffee, beautiful lady~~~" Kurt said cheerfully, as the others grabbed their cups.

"This is wild," Luis began, already in full chatter mode. "Scott, you break into someone's house, and next thing you know, you're friends—and now you've invited us over too. Why didn't you have this kind of skill before? We'd be rich by now!"

Hope leaned toward Scott.

"You know he got arrested for stealing an ice machine, right?"

"Actually, it was two," Luis corrected immediately.

"Are you sure these three can handle it?" Hope asked skeptically.

"Absolutely!" Luis declared. "We've got this. We're professionals."

"Frankly, I have zero confidence in you," Pym said from behind them, arms crossed.

"Trust me, Hank," Scott said. "They can do it."

"Yeah, we can!" Luis added. "By the way, are our credentials ready?"

He looked more excited than nervous.

After all, it had been months since their last "job."

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Scott then stepped forward in the Ant-Man suit.

The three men jumped in surprise.

"Whoa—dude, you look amazing in that!" Luis's eyes lit up, especially at the helmet.

Scott lifted the visor.

"Alright, what you're about to see might be... a little weird. Maybe even scary. Just be prepared."

"Please," Luis scoffed. "There's nothing about you that could scare us."

"Ready?"

"Bring it!"

Scott rolled his eyes, lowered the helmet, and pressed the button.

Whoosh—

He vanished.

Luis yelped, nearly jumping out of his seat. Kurt shot to his feet.

"This is insane... it's like David Copperfield!" Luis muttered, scanning for the trick.

But he had no idea—

Scott, now tiny, had already climbed onto his shoulder.

"Don't freak out, Luis—I'm on your shoulder!"

Luis froze, then slowly turned his head.

There, perched like an insect—

was a tiny Scott.

"AHHH—! AHHHH!!"

Luis panicked, slapping wildly at his shoulder as if trying to swat a monster, then bolted for the door screaming.

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"After Hank explained everything, they finally understood how the suit works," Hope said.

Scott looked at the three men now sprawled across the couch, fast asleep.

"I slipped a mild sedative into their coffee. They passed out instantly. Honestly... they're something else."

They had been so hyped up it was like they'd taken stimulants. Hope wasn't taking any chances.

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After Hope left, Scott—still in the suit—went to check on his daughter, Cassie.

Only after seeing her did he finally feel at ease enough to sleep.

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Over the next few days, they refined the plan repeatedly, running through simulations to ensure everything went smoothly.

"Alright, everyone," Scott said, standing over the table in the basement, covered in blueprints and schematics. "Let's review assignments."

"Dave?"

"I handle the getaway."

"Kurt?"

"I'll monitor systems and hack into the building."

"Luis?"

Luis grinned.

"You know me, Scott—I love uniforms. I look incredible in uniform. Super stylish—"

"Luis!" Scott cut him off.

"Oh, right—sorry. I'm just a little excited. Also, your girlfriend? She's gorgeous. My heart's doing flips back here."

He gestured toward Hope.

Pym looked like he was about to explode.

Scott opened his mouth to clarify—

—but Luis was already going again.

"Hey, I've got a great idea. When I go undercover, I can whistle or hum—makes it look natural, you know? Real smooth."

Scott shut that down immediately.

"No. No whistling. Absolutely no whistling. We don't want to hear that and suddenly feel the urge to go to the bathroom. So—no whistling. Ever."

Luis didn't take the hint.

Instead, he doubled down, listing every idea he could think of—up to and including acting like a suave secret agent, à la James Bond.

Everyone had reached their limit.

Even Kurt and Dave looked done.

Finally, Dave pulled out a roll of tape—

—and sealed Luis's mouth shut.

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**- Chapter 383 383: The Press Conference[
964 words]**

Fifteen days later, at night, a van was parked among the rows of luxury cars outside Pym Technologies. It was painted with "Road Maintenance" markings, with traffic cones placed around it to keep other vehicles away. Inside sat two people—Dave, responsible for the getaway, and Kurt, handling the hacking.

Meanwhile, the lobby of Pym Technologies was bustling. Alongside reporters were numerous leading figures from the scientific community, all passing through security one by one. Just as Hope had said, security tonight had more than tripled. Full-body scanners had been installed, and guards were manually scanning each guest as well.

At one of the scanners, Luis—dressed in a security uniform with a gun holstered at his waist—walked through. He even wore an official security ID badge. With ease, he entered the building, casually greeting other guards as he passed.

Back in the van, Dave sat in the driver's seat while Kurt remained in the rear compartment. With him was Scott, already suited up in the Ant-Man armor.

"I'm in, Scott. Heading to the control room now."

Luis's sneaky voice came through the earpiece.

"Copy that. Wish me luck~~"

Scott replied, then pulled down his helmet, yanked open the van door, and jumped out—shrinking instantly mid-leap and dropping straight into the sewer.

Keeping his head down, Luis used his access card to enter the central control room. He had expected it to be empty—but instead, he ran straight into a security guard inspecting the circuitry.

"Who are you?"

The guard didn't recognize Luis and immediately challenged him.

Thinking quickly, Luis replied, "The boss told me to watch this area, so I came over."

Unfortunately for him, the man he'd run into was the boss. Of all the bad luck—lying right to the guy's face.

"The boss? I am the boss."

The man was even bigger than Luis, his imposing presence overwhelming. Luis froze, stammering as he tried to change the subject.

"All units, attention—"

Just as the boss raised his radio to alert the others, a shadow darted in through the doorway. It leapt into the air, legs wrapping around the man's neck before twisting sharply. His massive body was lifted off the ground and slammed headfirst onto the floor, knocking him out instantly.

Luis barely saw what happened—it was over in seconds. He stared wide-eyed, stunned.

Dressed in black, with a flawless figure and shoulder-length auburn hair, Natasha stood there. Her tall, striking form instantly captivated Luis, who could only stare blankly, completely at a loss for words.

"Scott's friend?"

Natasha glanced at him, vaguely wondering if using someone this... not-so-bright was really a good idea.

Luis didn't respond, still staring at her, even forgetting to shut off the main water valve.

Amused, Natasha watched him. In his current state, she could probably coax every secret out of him with just a little effort—he looked completely smitten.

"You're not going to do your job?"

Natasha reminded him. She already knew who he was—the Avengers had thoroughly investigated Scott after capturing him, and naturally Luis and the others hadn't escaped their scrutiny. Seeing him here meant Dr. Pym's plan was already underway.

"Huh? Oh!"

Luis snapped back to his senses and hurried over to the main valve, twisting it shut.

Meanwhile, Natasha moved to the other side and casually placed a small device—no bigger than a USB drive—in an inconspicuous spot.

"Device planted. How's your side?"

Barton's voice came through her earpiece. "All normal. The building is under control."

High above, a Quinjet hovered silently. Alone inside, Barton had already taken over the building's systems.

"Good. Now we wait for Tony."

Natasha left the control room without a second glance at Luis. By the time she pushed open the doors to the press hall, she had already changed into a black evening gown. Her elegant figure drew countless glances as she walked straight to Tony and naturally looped her arm through his.

"Barton has secured control of the building."

Tony gave a subtle nod, then slipped back into his playboy persona, mingling with reporters and guests.

His presence instantly became the center of attention. After all, this was Tony Stark—Avenger, Iron Man, owner of Stark Industries, and one of the most famous figures in America. Any one of those titles alone would make headlines.

Reporters immediately swarmed him. Ever since handing Stark Industries over to Pepper, Tony had largely stayed out of the public eye—aside from appearances as Iron Man, he had become something of a recluse.

Inside the pipes, Scott was still playing Robinson Crusoe—riding a "boat" made of ants as he drifted along the current. After twisting through the labyrinth, he finally spotted an exit. Using a bridge formed by ants, he climbed out through a faucet, then, accompanied by a swarm of flying ants, made his way into the ventilation system.

At that moment, Dr. Pym also arrived outside the building.

Simultaneously, Scott commanded a bullet ant to bite a guard. Hope appeared, dragging the incapacitated guard into the server room.

With practiced ease, Hope placed a signal emulator into one of the server drawers and left without looking back.

"Natasha, another signal is trying to override the system. I'm blocking it, but it's not going well."

A sudden signal interrupted Barton's control of the system. Worse, it could mimic different frequency bands, catching him off guard.

"It's probably the device that Ant-Man took from the facility earlier. Don't worry—I've brought in some backup. She'll be here soon."

Natasha sounded completely unconcerned. Right as she spoke, the "backup" joined their comms.

"If Carl hadn't fully recovered, I wouldn't be here helping you guys."

Skye's voice came through. At the same time, a flashy Quinjet appeared beside Barton's—just as silent.

"Well, I guess we should thank that little brat Carl then? Seriously though, doesn't he have way too much control over you three? Haven't you ever wondered if that guy's a bit of a ?

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**- Chapter 384 384: The Avengers Join the Fray[ 996 words ]**

Tony spoke with a relish for stirring things up, completely unaware that his everyday interactions with Pepper weren't much different from Carl's. As the saying goes, those involved can't see clearly—Tony had no idea he was exactly the same.

"You're the real pervert! Don't think I don't know—Pepper told us all about it~~ Even Natasha knows."

Skye didn't spell out what she meant, but that only made Tony more anxious.

"Damn it—what did Pepper tell you? Listen here, you little brat, don't go learning Carl's scheming tricks. My feelings for Pepper are nothing but love, got it? I'd never restrict her freedom—unlike that little punk Carl!"

Tony was getting worked up, nearly spilling the champagne in his hand. Fortunately, Natasha smoothly covered for him. Everyone's attention was still on Tony—if he made a fool of himself now, it would've been quite a spectacle.

"Alright, let me be fair here. Tony, you and Carl are exactly the same—both of you have serious control issues. You just don't show it most of the time. I know everything, you know~~ After all, I'm the admin of the 'Little Fairy Group.'"

Natasha, clearly enjoying herself, added fuel to the fire.

While they bantered, Skye had already intercepted the constantly shifting signal and locked onto its source.

"The signal's locked. Barton, can you check if you've regained control?"

Barton immediately looked at the screen. Sure enough, the mysterious signal had vanished, and control was back in his hands.

"Skye, you're amazing—blocking that signal so quickly. Honestly, you should just take over. I'll head up to the rooftop platform and wait."

Barton felt mentally drained. He understood some high-tech systems, but only to the level expected of an agent. In cyberspace, he was out of his depth. He much preferred being a frontline operative—this kind of tech wasn't his forte.

"Alright~ I'll take over for you. By the way, Peter should already be here, right? Why haven't I seen him?"

Skye looked puzzled. Peter had been deployed as backup, but he hadn't shown up or joined their comms.

At that moment, Barton leapt from the Quinjet. With the sound of cables deploying, he descended onto the rooftop platform, bow in hand. The Quinjet switched to autopilot, now controlled by the Avengers' AI.

After several generations of upgrades, the Quinjet—now equipped with an Arc Reactor and Stark Industries' cloaking system—could achieve true physical invisibility. It was undetectable both visually and audibly; even its engine noise could only be heard within ten meters. It also featured AI-assisted operation—though not on Jarvis's level, it far surpassed standard systems.

On the platform, a helicopter sat quietly on the helipad. No guards were in sight. Barton sat openly nearby; after observing the area, he realized it was a blind spot. He could probably do calisthenics here and still go unnoticed.

"Hey~ guys~~ looking for me? I've been here for a while now~~"

Peter's voice suddenly came through the comms, and as usual, he started chattering nonstop the moment he joined.

At first, Tony had wondered if Peter had split personalities. Normally, he was a shy kid—but the moment he put on the Spider suit, he turned into an unstoppable chatterbox, talking endlessly for reasons no one could understand.

Within the Avengers, Rhodey was just as talkative. When he and Peter got together, they were the perfect duo of non-stop banter.

At the moment, Peter was crouched on the rooftop of a building across from the tower, monitoring the perimeter using a spider-drone launched from his chest.

That's right—Peter had upgraded his suit again. He was now wearing a nano-vibranium suit designed by Tony—the very one that, in the films, he wouldn't get until Thanos invaded Earth. Here, he already had it.

And not just him—every Avenger had upgraded their gear. Each suit incorporated some amount of vibranium, though only in limited quantities. Heavy equipment like Rhodey's War Machine armor or Sam's wings were still made of high-strength alloys. After all, large-scale use of vibranium required Wakanda's approval—it was the only place to obtain it.

Even so, their defensive capabilities were maxed out. Ordinary weapons couldn't harm them—at most leaving minor dents or scratches, which the nanotech would repair in moments.

"Guys, something's happening! Two cops have stopped Dr. Pym."

Peter's drone had locked onto the scene at the entrance.

"Looks like they're trying to arrest him. Should I step in? I've been itching for some action."

Peter was about to leap off the rooftop, but Tony stopped him.

"Not yet, Peter. That old man Pym can handle it. If he can't deal with something this minor, he wouldn't have been the previous Ant-Man."

Tony already knew Pym's identity and had reviewed all the Ant-Man files left behind by his father, Howard.

But to everyone's surprise, Pym didn't seem to be handling it well—the two officers weren't easily fooled.

"Listen, if I don't get inside, people are going to die."

The officers didn't buy it. One of them—Paxton, the current husband of Scott's ex-wife Maggie—snorted dismissively.

"That's a bit overdramatic. Save it for your statement."

They moved to forcibly escort Pym into the police car—when suddenly, sirens blared. The patrol car had been stolen. Right in broad daylight.

The two officers immediately chased after it, completely forgetting about Pym.

The bold culprit behind the theft was none other than Dave. Seeing Pym surrounded, he had come up with this risky but perfectly in-character plan. As it turned out, it didn't matter how ridiculous the method was—as long as it worked.

"Well~~ looks like the problem's solved. That accomplice—Dave?—has lured the cops away."

From his vantage point, Peter saw everything clearly through the drone. His helmet display even showed Dave's background information.

Meanwhile, Dr. Pym successfully entered the building and passed through security. As he walked inside, he came face-to-face with Tony, Natasha—and Darren Cross, his former protégé, who was currently talking with Tony.

"Oh~ you finally made it, Hank. I've been waiting for you for a long time~"

Darren spotted Pym immediately and greeted him with a smile, then began introducing him to Tony.

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- Chapter 385 385: HYDRA Resurfaces[940 words]

"This is Tony Stark—I don't think there's anyone here who doesn't recognize him."

Darren then turned to introduce Pym to Tony.

"This is my mentor, Dr. Hank Pym, and the founder of this company."

Of course Tony knew who Pym was. He was a scientist from the same era as his father, the inventor of Pym Particles. Although he had fallen out with Howard back in the day, Tony still admired him—especially for his achievements in quantum theory. Besides, with Howard's flamboyant personality, it would've been stranger not to fall out with people.

Like father, like son—Tony wasn't exactly low-key himself.

"Dr. Pym, I've read your paper on quantum mechanics and the quantum realm. Very impressive~~"

Tony truly was Howard's son. Whether it was his demeanor or his tone, it made Pym feel as though Howard himself was standing right in front of him again.

Pym, however, didn't give him the time of day. He didn't even nod, completely ignoring Tony. The moment he saw him, he already knew the Avengers were involved. As long as they didn't interfere with his plan, he couldn't care less what they did.

Tony, no longer the shallow playboy he once was, didn't take offense.

"Tony, a helicopter just landed on the helipad."

Barton was seated in a blind spot; the people disembarking hadn't noticed him at all.

"That should be the real buyer."

Tony spoke quietly. On the surface, this press conference looked grand—top figures from New York's scientific community were present, along with a swarm of reporters. But their investigation had revealed Darren's true goal wasn't unveiling new technology—it was finding a buyer.

Meanwhile, Scott wasn't idle either. Through the ventilation system, he had entered the server room where data was stored. A swarm of ants followed him, each carrying a small electrode. When grouped together, they could generate high-voltage electricity—enough to destroy every server.

Standing atop the towering racks of servers, Scott looked down like a general surveying a battlefield.

"Alright, guys, everyone in position. I'm about to fry the server room."

He spoke through his comms—unaware that Skye had already hacked their channel. Every word from Scott, Hope, and Pym was being heard loud and clear by Tony's team.

"Form up!"

At Scott's command, the ants spread out across the servers, positioning themselves at intervals.

"My little maniacs—now! Burn it all down!"

As he gave the order, small spheres rose from the devices on the ants' backs. In the next instant, powerful currents surged through the entire room. Within seconds, the central systems lost power, and the blackout rapidly spread outward.

"Anthony, let's go!"

Seeing the servers destroyed, Scott leapt onto Anthony's back and made his escape.

With the server room gone, all of Darren's experimental data and backups were effectively erased.

"The server room's been fried by electrical overload."

Aboard the Quinjet, Skye had already detected the outage. Combined with Scott's earlier words, the conclusion was obvious—the server room was finished.

"Did we get the data backed up?"

Natasha asked. Tony was still chatting with Darren, Pym, and other scientists—keeping up appearances—while Natasha moved freely.

"Relax, everything's backed up. Uploading to the Avengers' servers now. Coulson should've received it already."

Sure enough, the Avengers' base soon received all of Darren's research data.

"Now the real show begins."

Natasha glanced toward Pym and Darren. Tonight, the Avengers' mission wasn't just to secure the research—it was also to destroy Darren's suit and detain him.

After all, his technology could equip an army of super soldiers. If it fell into the wrong hands, it would throw the world into chaos.

At that moment, the buyer finally revealed himself. Darren promptly announced the start of the presentation, leading everyone toward a laboratory.

After fingerprint, retinal, and voice verification, the doors slowly opened, revealing the lab inside.

It was spacious, and everyone filed in—including the buyer.

"Just as we thought—the buyer really is this guy."

Natasha stared at the man leading the group. His profile had already appeared in their displays. Natasha and Barton wore contact lenses projecting the data, while Tony had his usual pale blue glasses.

The file identified him as Carson, former head of security for S.H.I.E.L.D.—and a surviving member of HYDRA, still at large.

No one knew just how many members HYDRA had left. They were spread across the globe. Figures like Alexander Pierce and Strucker—the one Carl had taken down—were only two of its leaders.

"So it really is him. We can't let him escape this time."

Barton's tone turned cold. HYDRA daring to resurface—it was practically a death wish.

There was one more person present who knew Carson's identity—Dr. Pym. Carson had once been his colleague, and their relationship had ended badly.

"Mr. Cross, my associates have agreed to your terms."

Carson shook Darren's hand as he spoke.

"Mr. Carson has introduced me to several associates," Darren said to Pym. "They belong to a very ancient organization."

As he spoke, Carson's gaze shifted toward Tony and Natasha.

"Mr. Stark, I didn't expect to see you here. Time flies—your father and I were once partners. Hard to believe it's been so long~~"

Carson extended his hand, but Tony didn't move. Everyone present—especially the reporters—knew Tony had a particular quirk: he disliked physical contact with strangers, especially men.

Sure enough, Tony simply smiled, making no move to shake hands.

"I'm curious—what's this 'ancient organization' of yours? Don't tell me it's HYDRA?"

The moment Tony said the name, Carson and the people behind him visibly stiffened. The feud between the Avengers and HYDRA was well known—especially after the mysterious Carl had blown up S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters because of them.

"Mr. Stark, you must be joking. HYDRA no longer exists—it was wiped out by the Avengers themselves. Surely you haven't forgotten?"

Carson recovered quickly, his smile returning in an instant.

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## **- Chapter 386 386: Darren's Trap[ 1,030 words ]**

"Good. Let's hope it's not HYDRA—otherwise, you won't be living very long~~"

Tony said it casually, but a cold glint flashed through his eyes.

While everyone was exchanging barbs, Scott quietly infiltrated the particle storage room. It was filled with rows of tubes containing the yellow particles Darren used for size alteration. Scott's goal was to blow up this place—or even the entire building.

At that moment, red ants had already gathered in the storage room, each carrying a timed explosive.

"Begin planting the charges."

At Scott's command, the ants immediately moved, placing explosives at designated points. Once secured, the explosives reverted to their original size.

Before long, all the charges were set. Scott then moved to a position directly above the chamber containing the Yellowjacket suit. A vertical metal shaft led straight down to the glass case below.

Standing at the edge, Scott looked down. A red glow filled the bottom—he knew it was a laser security grid.

"I'm in position."

He dropped a screw. The moment it passed through the laser grid, it disintegrated into ash without even a spark.

"Kurt, what's going on? Are you not done yet?!"

Scott asked anxiously.

Kurt was still working, progress only at around sixty percent—far from complete. Just as the two of them nervously watched the screen, Paxton and his partner suddenly knocked on the van door. Dave had been spotted earlier while stealing the police car.

"Occupants of the vehicle, step out now for inspection!"

Paxton pounded on the door. No matter how loudly he shouted, the people inside didn't respond.

Just as they were running out of options, the loading speed on the computer suddenly surged, quickly passing ninety percent.

Then, for some reason, the rear door of the van suddenly swung open. Paxton and his partner immediately aimed their guns at Kurt and Dave.

At that exact moment, the progress hit one hundred percent. Kurt seized the opportunity and slammed the Enter key.

High above, Skye sat leisurely in the pilot's seat, a progress bar displayed before her.

"No need to thank me~~"

She grinned and turned up the music.

"Scott's directly above the container—he's about to drop in. Natasha, be ready."

In the lab, Natasha subtly shifted her attention toward the container holding the Yellowjacket suit.

Above the shaft, Scott received the signal and leapt in, plummeting rapidly toward his target. The laser grid at the bottom had already been deactivated.

He landed smoothly inside the chamber and immediately reached for the suit—but just before his hand touched it, the suit suddenly dropped downward. There was space beneath it.

Scott instantly realized something was wrong.

He'd been played.

No—not just him. All of them had been played. Darren had known their plan all along. Everything had been a trap.

At that moment, a massive face loomed into view, holding a small glass container—with the suit inside.

"Hey there, little guy~~"

Darren grinned maliciously, clearly reveling in his success.

Natasha saw it. So did Pym and Hope, who had been watching the container closely. In that instant, they understood—this had all been a setup.

"I always suspected you were hiding an Ant-Man suit somewhere. I just didn't know where. And I kept wondering—who would be the next Ant-Man? Who would be the one my teacher trusted more than me?"

Darren stared coldly at Pym, devoid of emotion.

"Scott Lang—a thief, a repeat offender. And yet he earned more of your trust than I ever did. You'd rather believe a criminal than me."

His gaze never left Pym.

"Scott Lang will pay for stealing my research. He'll lose his wife and his only daughter—and the one responsible for all of it is you, Dr. Pym. You're the one who pushed him into the abyss!"

Darren grew more agitated, gesturing wildly. Behind him, a large screen displayed Scott's criminal record—and images of his family.

He placed the container holding the Yellowjacket suit into a briefcase, then turned back to Scott, who was pounding helplessly against the glass.

"And now, you've personally delivered the Ant-Man suit to me. How could I refuse such a gift?"

As he finished speaking, the laser grid above Scott reactivated, slicing through the line suspending him and dropping him back into the chamber.

"Darren, you can't do this. If you sell the suit to these people, the whole world will fall into chaos. You won't come out unscathed either. And there are Avengers here—you won't get away with this."

Pym sighed. He was utterly disappointed in his former student. Darren was beyond saving.

"I've already made the deal. And the Avengers? Once I have the Yellowjacket suit, they're no match for me!"

Darren's confidence bordered on delusion.

"I'm selling them the suit—but I'm keeping the particles. The suit doesn't run on fuel. If they want to recharge it, they'll have to come to me~~"

He spoke with absolute certainty, completely disregarding both Carson and Tony.

"That's enough, Cross. This farce ends here."

Tony and Natasha stepped forward.

"Ends? It's only just beginning."

As Darren's voice fell, more than a dozen armed men suddenly appeared, their guns trained on everyone present.

But at that moment—

The container holding Scott shattered violently. Using his size-changing ability, Scott expanded and blew it apart in one burst.

Taking advantage of the chaos, Natasha struck instantly—snatching a gun from one of the guards. Hope followed suit, disarming another. Back-to-back, the two women aimed their weapons at Darren's men.

"Drop your weapons, Darren!"

Hope's expression was icy as she pointed her gun at him.

"You chose the wrong side, Hope."

Darren raised his weapon, about to shoot Pym in the head.

Suddenly, Scott shrank and shot forward like a bullet, slamming into one of the armed guards and knocking him to the ground.

At the same time, Natasha opened fire, taking down three guards in an instant, while Scott charged toward the next.

The scene descended into chaos. People screamed and fled the laboratory. Carson, escorted by several subordinates, tried to escape as well—but before he could take more than a few steps, a red-and-gold armored figure blocked his path.

"Going somewhere? You don't get to see a show like this every day."

Tony stood firmly at the lab entrance.

Carson discreetly signaled his men. Just as they were about to fire, a series of micro-missiles shot out from Tony's arm, embedding themselves into their necks. They collapsed instantly.

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**- Chapter 387 387: The Plan Falls Apart[
901 words]**

"A newly developed anesthetic—fast-acting, no side effects~~"

As Tony spoke, he raised a hand, the light in his palm gradually glowing.

Carson immediately understood he wasn't getting out of this. But as a member of HYDRA, surrender was never an option.

"Hail HYDRA!"

He shouted, then pulled the trigger on himself without hesitation—swift and decisive.

Tony froze for a moment. He hadn't expected the man to kill himself. That complicated things—they hadn't even extracted the location of HYDRA's remaining forces.

Fortunately, Carson's bodyguards hadn't followed suit. Maybe they could still get something out of them.

Taking advantage of the moment, Darren grabbed the briefcase and bolted. Hope fired several shots at him, but none hit.

Natasha moved swiftly, having already taken down all the security personnel. She touched the necklace at her neck, and a black suit materialized, wrapping around her perfect figure—the upgraded nanotech suit Tony had designed.

"You handle these guys. I'll go after Darren."

With that, Tony shot off in pursuit, clad in his armor.

"I'm going too. Hope, look after Hank."

Scott chimed in before shrinking instantly.

"Anthony!"

He shouted, leaping onto his ant mount and speeding after Darren.

"Alert all units—anyone coming out of the lab is to be shot on sight!"

As Darren ran, he opened the case, took out the container holding the suit, and tossed the briefcase aside.

Soon, the entire building went into lockdown. Thankfully, the reporters and scientists had already evacuated. Once they were out, the building was completely sealed.

"The alarm's gone off—I need to check it out."

From the building across the street, Peter heard the sirens. Without hesitation, he leapt off the rooftop, swinging into the building with a webline.

Inside, Natasha had already bound several HYDRA bodyguards with specialized restraints. After searching them, she found nothing useful—but she did extract a few of their teeth, each hollow and containing a capsule of deadly poison.

On his way through the building, Tony encountered waves of security personnel. But against his vibranium armor, their weapons were useless. He dealt with them effortlessly.

Darren reached the rooftop helipad, one foot already stepping onto the helicopter—

Whoosh!

An arrow shot in from afar, embedding itself right beside his hand. Startled, Darren recoiled, losing his balance and falling. The container slipped from his grasp, but he quickly snatched it back up.

Barton stepped out from the blind spot, bow in hand, another arrow ready—this one tipped with high-voltage electricity.

"You're not going anywhere."

"An Avenger... didn't expect one here too."

Darren stood up, brushing off the dust—while secretly opening the container and taking out the Yellowjacket suit.

"We need to leave now. Scott planted explosives throughout the building."

Hope supported Pym as she spoke to Natasha.

At that moment, Peter burst in, hands poised to shoot webs.

"Where's the bad guy? Where is he?!"

He had crawled along the ceiling to get in—the hallways below were packed with people fleeing in panic.

"Were there still people inside when you came in?"

Natasha asked.

"Yeah—they're all trying to get out."

Peter answered.

"Good. Go evacuate them. There are bombs in the building—it'll blow in about ten minutes."

Natasha spoke quickly.

"What about you?"

"We'll get out ourselves. I have a way."

Pym suddenly interjected—he had already planned their escape.

"Alright—be careful."

Peter nodded and dashed off, searching the building for anyone left behind.

"How are we getting out?"

Natasha turned to Pym, curious.

Pym pulled out his keychain—a tiny tank dangling from it.

"Now's not the time for keys, is it?"

Natasha raised an eyebrow. Even Hope looked confused.

"This isn't just a keychain."

Outside the building, crowds poured out in waves. Gunfire echoed within. Police cars had already surrounded the area—Paxton had called for backup the moment he heard shots.

As officers directed the evacuation, the wall above them suddenly exploded outward—

A tank burst through and crashed down, slamming into the ground with a thunderous boom. It even rolled forward a short distance before stopping. Behind it trailed a thick chain with a metal ring.

Everyone froze.

Police. Civilians. All of them stared in disbelief. A tank had just fallen from the sky—and no one had seen anything like that inside the building.

The hatch opened. Hope climbed out first, looking a bit disheveled. Natasha followed, then finally Dr. Pym.

Seeing them, the police quickly surrounded the tank. They didn't recognize Natasha or Pym, but Hope—the head of Pym Technologies—was unmistakable.

"Coulson, send someone to take over. We've got several HYDRA operatives in custody."

Natasha spoke immediately.

"Agents are en route—ETA five minutes."

Coulson was as reliable as ever. He had already dispatched Avengers agents to handle the aftermath. Since this involved the Avengers, it was their responsibility to clean up.

On the rooftop, Tony had arrived. He and Barton boxed Darren in from both sides. Scott soon followed, riding Anthony, jumping down and returning to full size.

Tony couldn't help but feel intrigued by the shrinking tech. If his Iron Man suits could be miniaturized too, it would make transport far more convenient.

"Give it up, Darren. Your plan has failed."

Scott lifted his mask and looked at him.

"Shut up, thief! Do you think stealing the suit will stop anything? That's wishful thinking! The suit is just a vessel—I've already recreated the so-called Pym Particles. That is the real breakthrough! Compared to it, Stark is nothing—my research will go down in history! Next to me, Tony Stark is just a clown!"

Darren ranted, completely ignoring the fact that Tony was standing right there.

"Alright—that's it. I'm officially done being polite. You don't get to trash-talk me to my face like that!"

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**- Chapter 388 388: The Three-Month  
Deadline Arrives[ 834 words ]**

"Damn it—I've had enough of this! You trash-talk me to my face?!"

Tony immediately raised his hand, ready to fire a repulsor blast at Darren—but Scott stopped him.

"I'm not just taking the suit... I'm taking everything."

Scott didn't finish his sentence, instead signaling Tony to leave with Barton.

Tony understood instantly. He grabbed Barton and shot into the sky. At the same time, Scott shrank down and leapt onto Anthony.

The countdown hit zero.

As the bombs detonated, the golden particles reacted violently with the explosion. The entire building began to collapse inward. At the center, it looked like a miniature black hole, devouring everything around it. In the blink of an eye, the entire skyscraper was gone—completely swallowed—leaving behind nothing but bare ground.

Darren stood there in shock.

Everything he had—his life's work, all his research, all his data, all the particles—vanished along with the building.

As the structure collapsed, Darren and the helicopter were dragged downward.

Boom!

The helicopter exploded upon impact, engulfing Darren in flames.

"Nicely done! I'm starting to like you, Scott."

Tony, still holding Barton, gave Scott an approving nod as he looked at the now-empty lot and burning wreckage.

After dropping Barton off on the Quinjet, Tony descended to the ground, where Scott had already returned to normal size.

"Finally... it's over..."

Scott looked at the flaming debris and let out a long breath.

But suddenly—

A yellow blur shot toward him.

Before he could react, Scott felt like he'd been hit by a bullet and was sent flying backward, pain exploding in his chest.

"Jarvis!"

Tony shouted, rushing toward Scott.

"Target locked, sir."

Jarvis immediately identified the source—a tiny, fly-like figure in a yellow suit.

Darren.

He wasn't dead.

Scott quickly reacted, shrinking again and engaging Darren mid-air. But Darren had no intention of fighting—he turned and fled. His suit had built-in propulsion; he didn't need an ant to fly.

Scott mounted Anthony and gave chase, with Tony following behind. Without the ability to shrink, Tony relied on Jarvis to track both of them.

"Damn this shrinking tech—my weapons are useless!"

Tony cursed. To him, the two were like flies. Using repulsors would be overkill—and worse, he risked hitting civilians—so he could only trail behind.

Darren sped off, with Scott close behind. Scott had already guessed Darren's destination—his daughter Cassie's home was in that direction.

"Anthony, faster!!"

Scott urged, but Anthony was already at top speed. It still wasn't enough—Darren's modern propulsion far outclassed a flying ant.

"Damn it!"

Scott swore, then stood up on Anthony's back.

"Anthony!"

With one last burst of acceleration, Scott used the momentum to launch himself forward—

At that exact moment, Darren turned his head.

Bang!

The two collided mid-air. Darren's trajectory went wild as Scott clung to him. They grappled violently in the air—

Then crashed straight through a nearby window.

Glass shattered as they tumbled into a room.

Suddenly—

A crimson energy surged around them, freezing both in place.

"Scott Lang... this is the second time you've broken into my place. And this time you brought a little yellow guy with you. Ever thought about picking a different location?"

Carl's voice sounded from behind.

Wanda raised her hand, Chaos Magic flowing into both of their suits. Instantly, Scott and Darren were forced back to full size, crashing heavily onto the floor.

They had just smashed into Carl's office.

Strangely, Moguri hadn't activated the barrier this time, which piqued Carl's curiosity.

Floating nearby with his staff, Moguri frowned, deep in thought.

Carl himself had been too excited to sleep. Gwen wasn't home—she had gone back to deal with her two younger brothers after their disastrous exam results—so only Carl and Wanda were at the office, chatting.

Because—

The three-month deadline had arrived.

Carl's powers had fully returned, and he was in the process of receiving his system rewards.

[Ding~ Congratulations, Host. The three-month period has ended. All your abilities have now been fully restored. Issuing mission rewards~]

Carl listened with delight. For the first time, the system's voice sounded genuinely pleasant.

[Ding~ Congratulations, Host. You have completed the mission and successfully destroyed Ultron's plan. Reward: Summoned Beast—Ifrīt~]

Boom—!

The moment the system finished speaking, intense flames erupted around Carl. The air in the office was instantly dried out, filled with a scorching, violent aura.

Fire flashed in Carl's eyes—then, just as suddenly, it subsided.

Miraculously, the flames caused no damage at all. Not a single piece of furniture was burned—not even a spark. The fire moved entirely according to Carl's will.

"System, what's going on? When I got the Phoenix before, nothing like this happened."

Carl asked quickly. He could clearly feel it—Ifrīt's flames were far more violent than the Phoenix's, even surpassing Ram's lightning in sheer destructiveness.

[Ding~ Host, the Phoenix's flames are Flames of Rebirth, while Ifrīt's flames are Primordial Fire. Their nature is fundamentally different. The Flames of Rebirth focus on healing, with weaker offensive power. The Primordial Fire, however, exists purely to destroy. Furthermore, your template—Clive Rosfield—is inherently compatible with Ifrīt, making the flames even more intense.]

Only then did Carl understand.

So this was his true "native" summon.

No wonder the reaction was so overwhelming.

With that realization, Carl's consciousness sank into his inner spiritual sea...

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- Chapter 389: Defeat Me, and You Can Leave [882 words]

Around the massive crystal, the once colorless statue of Ifrit suddenly erupted into raging flames. Its roar echoed throughout Carl's spiritual sea, so powerful that even the other summon statues trembled slightly in response.

At the same time, streams of magic flooded into Carl's mind. Among them was the one he had been waiting for the most—

Limit Break.

When activated, blazing flames would engulf his entire body, erupting from within. It would massively amplify all of Carl's magic. Whether it was the Ultima Weapon or Judicator, both would be imbued with fire, each strike carrying explosive flame damage.

Just as Carl was immersed in studying his new abilities, Scott and Darren suddenly crashed in, shattering the office window. Wanda reacted instantly, restraining both of them.

Looking at the dazed pair, Carl couldn't help but tease:

"Scott, this is the second time you've broken into my place. The first time you were unconscious—I let it slide. What's your excuse this time? Don't tell me you and this yellow-looking guy got drunk and wandered in."

Carl stood up and strolled over.

Under Wanda's restraint, neither Scott nor Darren could move—let alone speak.

Scott was still confused, but a flash of killing intent flickered in Darren's eyes. It was brief—but both Wanda and the ever-observant Moguri caught it instantly.

"Kupo!"

Without hesitation, Moguri smacked Darren on the head with his staff.

Boom!

Darren was sent flying like he'd been hit by a truck, blasting out through the already shattered window. Even so, the Chaos Magic still held him in place, so when he hit the street, his body remained frozen in that same rigid posture.

Only then did Carl realize—if Moguri had acted, it meant Darren harbored hostility toward him.

A minor villain... trying to kill him?

Carl almost wondered if Darren had lost his mind.

Wanda's expression turned icy. She had not only seen the killing intent—she had felt the foul aura radiating from Darren. She was ready to crush him outright—but then, an idea crossed her mind.

Scott tried to speak, but the Chaos Magic held him tightly. At Carl's signal, Wanda finally released him.

Scott gasped for air, having been unable to breathe the entire time.

"Haa... haa... I know you... strongest Avenger... the one who turns into a monster..."

The moment he said monster, crimson energy surged again, freezing him in place.

"Do you want to die?!"

Wanda's voice was ice-cold, her eyes devoid of emotion. The word "monster" clearly struck a nerve.

Carl waved a hand.

"It's fine, Wanda. Let him go. I don't mind."

To him, it didn't matter. The summons were monsters—it wasn't inaccurate.

Only then did Wanda release Scott again.

Scott immediately tried to shrink—but Chaos Magic wrapped around his belt, cutting off the Pym Particles.

"What—what's happening?!"

He stared at the red energy coiling around his belt. The controls were completely unresponsive.

"Scott, seems like you know who I am."

Carl gestured for him to sit.

"Of course I do—the strongest Avenger~~"

Seeing no hostility from Carl, Scott relaxed a bit. And as one of the team's resident chatterboxes, once he relaxed... he started talking.

"I'm not an Avenger. I just run a little office. If you ever need something, you can come to me—my rates are very reasonable."

Carl didn't miss a chance to advertise, even now. Unfortunately, his office had been completely deserted—no one had actually come for business yet.

"Alright, what happened?"

Carl got to the point.

At that moment, Tony walked in from outside.

"Man, Carl, your luck sucks. Your window's smashed again~~"

Tony casually flopped onto the sofa, grabbed a random fruit, and started munching.

"That guy outside—tell Wanda not to kill him. I need him alive. He's connected to a HYDRA safehouse."

Tony spoke through bites of fruit, completely at ease.

"No problem. But you're paying for the window."

Carl didn't hesitate.

Tony rolled his eyes. "Fine, fine—I got it."

Watching them chat like this, Scott finally couldn't hold back:

"Uh... so... am I free to go now?"

"Oh right—you're staying too. You're coming back to the Avengers base with us."

Tony shut that idea down immediately.

Scott didn't argue.

Meanwhile, Carl headed outside. Darren was still frozen in place. With a gesture, Carl had Wanda release him.

The moment he could move, Darren opened his mask and shouted:

"Who the hell are you people?!"

The earlier killing intent was gone—Wanda's power had made him feel death up close. Now, he just wanted out.

"Simple. Beat me, and I'll tell you. Win, and you walk away."

Carl stepped forward, wielding the Ultima Weapon.

"You serious?!"

Darren was stunned. He had thought he was doomed—but now someone was offering him a chance?

Carl nodded.

"Beat me, and you leave."

Confidence surged within Darren.

He had only seen Wanda's power and assumed she was the real threat. As for Carl? Just some protected nobody. His own suit was even more advanced than Iron Man's—there was no way he could lose.

"That's a mistake—you can't let him go!"

Scott rushed out, shouting. If Darren escaped, he would definitely go after Cassie.

"Shut up, you thief!"

Darren roared. The mechanical appendages on his back fired a beam—not at Scott, but straight at Carl.

Carl scoffed.

With a casual wave, an ice wall rose before him, blocking the beam. The wall shattered instantly—

—and from the shards, three flaming sword arcs burst forth, carrying violent, destructive energy as they shot toward Darren.

Darren dodged frantically, barely avoiding two—

—but the third sliced clean through the mechanical arms on his back.

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**- Chapter 390: You Agreed That Easily? [ 713 words ]**

"Damn it!!"

Darren slammed the button, trying to shrink—but a bolt of lightning suddenly struck his suit. Sparks burst out instantly, and all its functions failed. Shrinking was no longer possible.

At the same time, Carl appeared behind him, one hand already pressed against his back.

"Pathetic. Where did you even get the confidence?"

Boom—!

A pillar of flames shot skyward.

By the time Tony took Darren away, the Yellowjacket suit was completely gone. All that remained was Darren himself—charred black and utterly defeated.

Scott followed Tony as well. Their destination: Avengers Tower.

---

A few days later.

With nothing better to do, Natasha was killing time at the office. Wanda was cleaning as usual, while Skye tinkered with her newly bought computer.

"What happened to that Darren guy?"

Carl suddenly asked, having just remembered him.

"He's locked up. As for his research, it's been archived. Tony doesn't seem interested—called it 'a defective product not worth studying.'"

Carl nodded. That sounded exactly like Tony. If anything was worth studying, it would be the real Pym Particles—not Darren's unstable knockoff that collapsed an entire building.

"Oh right, I'm heading to see Dr. Pym tonight. Want to come along for fun?"

Natasha asked. Nick Fury had given the order—recruit Pym into the Avengers. If he refused, then bring in Scott or Hope instead.

Carl had zero interest in that stubborn old man, so he declined.

---

That night, Pym, Scott, and Hope sat together.

Scott had just returned from seeing his daughter Cassie. Paxton had dropped the charges, and Scott was now a free man.

As Hope walked him out, Pym—who had been waiting—finally opened the door... only to see Scott kissing his daughter.

The old man's eyebrows shot up instantly.

"This is how you 'see him off'? Since when?!"

"Nothing happened!"

Hope denied it immediately. Anyone would in that situation.

"Well... something happened~~"

Scott, on the other hand, had no such restraint.

"Get out of here before I shoot you!"

Pym snapped.

"Uh—how can you say that? You're the one who suddenly hugged me and kissed me—I wasn't prepared at all~~ Anyway, I've got stuff to do, I'll get going—bye~~"

Scott bolted.

"Full of nonsense!"

Pym muttered.

But the moment Scott opened the door—

Natasha was standing outside, looking at him with amusement.

"Your lips look... pretty red. New lip balm?"

She traced a finger playfully in front of his mouth.

"Cut it out~~ What are you here for?"

Scott waved her off. After a few days of constant interaction, they were already familiar.

"I'm here to see Dr. Pym."

"Alright, come in."

---

In the living room, they all sat down. Natasha got straight to the point.

"Impossible. I will never join you. Give it up."

Pym rejected her instantly.

Natasha didn't push further. She already expected this. Her real target tonight was Scott.

She left—but didn't go far. Instead, she hid nearby, waiting.

Soon, Scott walked out.

After following him for a few hundred meters, Scott suddenly stopped and turned.

"Agent Natasha, I know you're there. Just say what you want."

A top-tier thief still had sharp instincts.

Natasha stepped out.

"Not bad. You're pretty perceptive."

"So what do you want?"

"Nothing much. Just want you to join us."

"I'm in."

Scott answered immediately.

Natasha froze.

"...What did you say?"

"I said—I'll join the Avengers."

She blinked. She had prepared an entire speech—but he just... agreed?

For a moment, she didn't know how to respond.

She had never recruited anyone this easily before.

"...Alright then."

---

Soon after, Natasha brought Scott to Avengers Tower. They boarded a Quinjet and headed straight for the Avengers base.

---

Meanwhile, Carl continued his aimless lifestyle—either wandering around or lounging in the office. Truly entering his "slacker era."

That day, he was assembling a limited-edition Gundam model—made of pure gold. Skye had hacked the official backend to get it.

After carefully placing it inside a glass display case, Carl locked it.

From now on—no one else was touching it.

Just as he finished—

A massive surge of magical energy flooded in from outside.

Wanda immediately sensed it and pushed open the door, scanning the surroundings.

At that moment, several strangely dressed figures flashed past the entrance.

The one in front wore a sleeveless yellow robe. Behind him were more than a dozen followers in dark red robes.

"Kaecilius?"

Wanda recognized him instantly. He hadn't noticed her—likely because she had completely suppressed her magical presence.

Carl stepped out and glanced around, catching only a glimpse of a red-robed figure disappearing at the corner.

"Kaecilius? You sure?"

He turned to Wanda and asked.

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