

Chapter 23

Stark sets me up in one of the rooms in the Tower, and a few days pass. I'm getting more anxious the longer I spend in this alternate universe or whatever the hell this can be called. I begin to suspect I must have fallen into a comatose state and this is my brain's way of handling it. Banner and Stark conduct some more test on me but find nothing else of importance barring the unknown material they detected in my bloodstream. When I told them about the glowing of my hands at the moment the world was paused, they both visibly light up like children on Christmas morning, but I can't seem to make it happen again. I do tell them about the weird mist, but they've never heard of anything like it. And so, with no real clues, they slowly drift back away into their lives before I showed up, and I'm left to entertain myself. If you're going to be bored, there are worse places than the Avengers Tower.

I spend some time trying to figure out if my brain has created some weird new timeline in which only this version of me exists, or if there is me, and then the me of the past, but I honestly do not even know where to start with all of this, and frankly, I'm not too interested. I just want to wake up. At first, I explore the Tower and all of the lavishness that Stark has pruned it with, but even that loses its shine and I just stay in my new room, chatting to Jarvis (who is surprisingly interesting, for a robot), and watching movies.

One of the first days of my stay in the Tower, something finally happens. Me, Stark, Potts and Banner are having dinner. I've noticed Banner spends a lot of time in the Tower, experimenting and researching, and I've actually enjoyed spending some more time with him. I can't really remember the last time I've actually enjoyed the company of another human being. We're halfway through desert when Stark suddenly slams his cutlery down on the table and looks up at me with an expression on his face that tells me I'm not going to like whatever he is planning.

"Hey, kid. Tell me again what happened just before your hands became silver."

"I told you, I was crossing the street-" I gently place my spoon back down, swallowing the piece of brownie I've been enjoying.

"Yes, yes, and?"

"And I turn around and this cab is about to hit me-"

"And then it happens!" Stark yells and spreads his arm out in victory.

We all look at him with differing levels of confusion. I get the feeling Potts has seen her fair share of Stark's sudden aha! moments, and Banner must have long learned that a Stark on a roll can't exactly be stopped.

"Yes, and?" I echo his earlier words and he laughs and pushes himself away from the table and stands there, looking at me.

"You almost got hit by a car."

"Yes, genius." I roll my eyes. "That is what I've said all along. And then it happened."

"Well, let's try that again." Stark says merrily and lifts his right palm towards me.

"What, run me over?" I ask, incredulously. "Thanks, I'll skip."

"Not practical." Stark shrugs, looking around the apartment meaningfully. "But we can try something else."

A glow suddenly appears on his palm and I notice the same subtle glove-like structure has crept up his hand again before he fires at me. I just about manage to duck, feeling the searing hot energy barely miss my left shoulder.

"What the fuck?" I yell, emerging from under the table just as he fires again.

I flinch, but the light never hits me. I cautiously open my eyes, and recoil as the white ray of energy hovers just in front of my face but doesn't move.

"What the-" I say as I notice I am once again the only moving thing as far as the eye can see.

Stark is standing in front of me still, hand outstretched, Potts on his left, mid-getting out of her seat, and Banner on my right looking utterly taken aback. But none move even an inch.

I get up and walk around the table. Everything is still just as it was, even the energy from Stark's palm dutifully waits in mid-air. I look at my hands, and as expected, the silver mist trails across my skin. I walk up to the window and look outside. It looks frozen in motion as well.

I turn back around to look at the scene at the table. It almost looks like a scene out of a play, and the actors have just been told to keep still. I chuckle and walk up to Stark, taking his half-eaten brownie off his plate and eating it. That'll show him.

Once I've swallowed, I go to pull out a chair and sit down, this time next to Stark. And so I wait for the world to resume as I study my hands. They're trembling slightly, and the mist seems to want to stay close to my skin, trailing along it like water in a lazy stream. I pick up a glass on the table, and hold it out in front of me. Then, I let it drop. I try to make the mist move towards the glass, but it shatters on the floor.

"Damn it." I mutter and grab a napkin instead. "Should've probably tried with this first."

I repeat the motion, this time being able to somehow force the mist to take hold of the napkin, freezing it in mid-air just like the ball of energy from Stark's palm.

"Look at that." I say, impressed.

I'm beginning to feel the familiar feeling of tiredness, the same as the previous time the world paused. I continue to feel weaker and weaker, and I know all I can do is wait to pass out. I make myself comfortable on the chair, and let myself fall into darkness.

CRASH!

"Tony, stop!"

"Shit!"

I open my eyes, seeing all three of them looking at me in shock. I smile lazily and weakly push myself up slightly.

"Looks like I did that."

"You sure as hell did, kid." Stark taps me on the shoulder and notices the smashed glass by my feet. He frowns, and sits down in his seat and leans back. Potts and Banner sit back down too, still staring at me.

"Did you eat my brownie?" Stark suddenly asks.

"You shot at me." I shrug.

"Call it even." Stark says and smiles. "You can control time, kid."

"Well, technically this is all happening inside my head, so I guess I control everything." I chuckle, head pounding. "It's tiring being a God."

"Is it happening in your head?" Banner seems to think out loud. "How do we prove that this is not real, or that it is?"

"Well, if you're making this up..." Potts begins. "But then again... if you're not making this up... would there be two of you?"

"What?" I shake my head, lost.

"Where would you typically be at 8 pm on a Thursday evening in 2015?" Stark looks at me.

"Eh..." I rake my tired brain. "Probably the library at Columbia?"

"Be right back." Stark says, and without further explanation just strolls out of the room.

"Where is he going?" I ask Potts.

"He's going to find you." She smiles at me. "You look exhausted. Are you alright?"

"I guess stopping time is rather draining." I smile at her apologetically.

"Did you faint before, too?" Banner asks me.

"Happened the same way. I just get gradually more and more exhausted."

"If you are indeed causing time to freeze, then maybe it drains you somehow at the same time." He looks at me, perplexed.

"I did manage to stop that napkin from falling to the ground." I nod at the napkin, now down by my feet.

"Maybe..." Potts crosses her legs under the table as she leans back in her chair. "Maybe you could be trained to consciously use your power at your will."

"Yes, well, that's all nice and fun, but you're forgetting I am actually probably lying somewhere in a hospital bed with tubes sticking out of me, in a coma. So, this-" I point at them and me. "Is all a fabrication of my mind."

"Olivia, I really don't think it is." Banner looks at me sympathetically.

"No, of course, you don't." I cross my arms over my chest defensively.

We sit silently for a while, me resuming eating the brownie I was enjoying before Stark's fun little experiment. I know Potts and Banner's minds must be racing, but I'm too tired to be able to think properly and assess the implications of what we just discovered.

"I'm back." Stark's voice suddenly rings out and we all look up. "I've just come back from seeing you studying in the library. You're quite the nerd, you know that?"

He walks up to the table and sits down again. "This is interesting." "You saw me?" I frown. "In the library?"

"I didn't talk to you or anything, don't worry. Looked like you'd bite someone's head who dared disturb you."

"But... how can I...?" I go silent, not understanding at all.

"Olivia." Banner speaks up. "You can control time. You've just stopped it twice. What if you can also travel through it?"

"What are you saying?" I ask him, on the defensive for some reason.

"That this is all real?"

"I'm saying that material you broke free back in -or in the future, in 2023, has somehow allowed you to travel back eight years in time."

"That's just-" I shake my head.

"Trust me kid, I've seen crazier things." Stark smiles at me, looking like he is trying to console me.

"But... how do I get back?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry." Banner lowers his head.

"But... but I have to get back. I have to get back." I look from one to the other, but all three just look at me with sympathy.

"I need some space." I say and get up on wobbly feet. "I'm sorry."

I make my way to my room in a haze. This cannot be real. Time travel is not a real thing. I must be hallucinating. I pace around in my room, not being able to calm down. All I know is I need to get back.

"Wanda!" I try shouting, as if she is going to be able to pull me out.

"Wanda!"

I sit down in front of my bed, pulling my knees up to my chest, hugging them with my arms. It feels like I cannot breathe. I stay down there, silently panicking for what feels like hours, but might just be minutes.

"Wanda." I plead, but nothing happens. I'm all alone. I let out a small sob and bury my face in my arms.

Someone knocks softly on my door, bringing me back to the here and now. I quickly dry some of the tears I've been allowing to escape, not wanting anyone to see me cry. I've not sunken that low. Yet, anyway. I can survive longer than five days in 2015 without having a full-on breakdown.

"I don't want to see anyone." I tell the person on the other side of the door with a raspy voice.

"Tony said you might say that." An unfamiliar voice replies and I see the door handle being pushed down. "He also said I should ignore you."

Into my room walks a red-haired woman clad in jeans and a grey hoodie. She smiles at me and invites herself in, walking right up to me and sitting down next to me, so that we're both leaning our backs against the bed.

"I'm Natasha." She introduces herself. "Call me Nat."

A/N: Don't worry, Wanda's coming back soon...! How are we feeling with the sudden major shift in the story? Eager to get back to the future or are we happy exploring the past some more? I'm happy to share my ideas according to what you lot enjoy reading! Let me know!

Tata! x