



xxxiii. Chasing a Ghost

A/N: Look at Bucky with his "black camouflage war paint" so intimidating, that eyeshadow.

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Auralie, Steve, and Sharon looked at each other in shock. Sharon called it in, saying, "Director Fury is down. There was an assassin. We don't know who he is. Someone has to go a er him."

Auralie and Steve exchanged looks. Steve called to Sharon, "tell them Auralie and I are in pursuit."

The two raced for the shot out window of Steve's apartment. Steve made a flying leap through, Auralie following him. Steve's supersoldier enhancements made it easy for him to make the jump. Auralie only just cleared it, but her training was enough to keep her on her feet.

They raced a er the shadowy figure. He was the same man from the street, Auralie could tell. He had the same metal arm and the same gear. He was fast, and Auralie struggled to keep up with him and Steve as they raced through the neighboring building. She panted like crazy as Steve broke open another window. He leapt through it onto the roof of another building, Auralie swearing ferociously, knowing she was going to have to follow him, but cursing his recklessness. Why had none of these strong, fast, tough people never heard of a damn elevator?

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Auralie leapt out the window, hitting the ground roughly but bouncing back quickly and regaining her balance. She knew she would hurt like hell in a little bit, but she would just have to get over it and keep going. That was the life of a Shield agent.

Auralie and Steve got to their feet, and then Captain America threw his mighty shield. Which the assassin promptly caught. His metal fingers closed around the star-spangled disc, and his head whipped around, brown hair flying, to look at them. He no longer had on the goggles, only the muzzle. His eyes were ringed with dark eyeliner and eyeshadow. Auralie had looked through so many of the Shield records, but she had never heard of someone like this. Yet he was no amateur.

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How had he come out of nowhere? Where had he come from? And why was he a er Fury? So many questions spun around her head, and she didn't notice the metal-armed man dropping the Shield and fleeing into the night, as quietly and dangerously as he had arrived that a ernoon.

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Steve and Auralie looked at each other in shock as Steve walked to the edge of the roof to retrieve his shield. Auralie strode over to him, and they looked across the skyline, brimming with buildings and lights that drowned out the stars but saw no sign of the man.

Auralie turned to Steve, "who the hell do you think he is?"

"I don't know," Steve replied, "I'm more worried about who hired him to kill Fury."

Auralie nodded solemnly and Steve asked her, "do you think Fury will make it?"

"I don't know," Auralie admitted, "the medics are on their way. I hope he pulls through. Shield can be terrible, but without Fury, it would be far less e ective. Without him, the world would be more dangerous, and you know, the world is a bad enough place as it is."

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A few hours later, Auralie and Steve were watching them operate on Fury. Auralie hadn't spoken to anyone since the roof, allowing Steve to give the orders while she watched the heart monitor intensely.

Natasha had gotten back, having heard about everything that had happened. She was worried out of her mind. Fury wasn't the easiest person to work for, but he had taken a chance on her, and she didn't want to see one of the only people who had truly believed in her die.

"Don't do this to me, Nick," she breathed, looking at the glass, fear reflected in her eyes. Steve and Auralie both looked at her in concern but didn't say anything.

Maria came running up next, and she asked, "what's happening?"

"We don't know," Auralie replied, finally speaking, her voice tight, "he may pull through, he may not. No word yet on the guy who did it."

Maria nodded, and they watched. Suddenly, a loud beeping filled their ears. One of the doctors called, "he's flatlining."

They grabbed and attempted to use the AED, but it wasn't working. They had lost him. Natasha's mouth moved, saying the word "no" but no sound came out. Maria's eyes became misty as she looked at the body of the man who had taken a chance on all of them. Steve and Auralie couldn't speak or move. Shield had been changed forever, and not for the better.

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A few moments later, they stood in front of the sheet covered body. Steve standing by the door, looking at the ground and Auralie and Natasha standing in front of the body. Natasha looked down at Nick, saying her goodbyes. Auralie couldn't look. She had seen enough death already, she didn't want to have to see anymore.

Maria came in, her face an emotionless mask that hid the turmoil she must have been feeling. She whispered, "I have to take him."

Then she did, removing the man who had brought them all together. Auralie only hoped that his death would not be the thing that managed to tear them apart.

She fell into step with Steve as they exited the room. They passed Sharon Carter who said, "Captain....." as though she was about to say something.

"Neighbor," Steve replied, strolling right on past her, Auralie in tow.

Natasha had followed them and grabbed Steve by the arm. He whirled around to face her, and she asked, "what was Fury doing in your apartment last night?"

Steve shrugged, but his face was painted with fright and sweat glistened on his forehead as he said, "I don't know."

Auralie winced. He did know, but he wasn't going to tell. That was fine. She respected that. But if he was going to keep secrets, he really needed to become better at it. Every emotion he had was shown on his face.

Rumlow, who Auralie was very unhappy to see, came down the hall. Auralie made a point of giving the man her death stare, but he ignored it and delivered his message of, "Captain Rogers, Agent Shadow, Secretary Pierce would like to see you."

Auralie grumbled under her breath. Pierce was another person she had a bad feeling about. He was too much of a broad scale thinker to be a normal politician, who normally went with party lines, but he was also too high profile to really know the agents and o icers that he worked to command. A combination that, when combined with her innate disliking of the man, was enough to make her stomach turn at the very thought of him.

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Steve nodded, "in a minute."

"He says he needs to see you now," Rumlow replied, before walking away.

Natasha took a step away from Steve and shook her head, amused, "you're a terrible liar." Then she too was gone.

"We should probably go," Auralie sighed.

"Yeah," Steve nodded, but he took something out of his jacket pocket, a flash drive, and he gave Auralie a look. She knew from that one look that he was trusting her and that this was important. He looked around, and his gaze finally fell on a vending machine being reloaded with snacks.....

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