



xxxv. A Family Of Sorts

"Ali, Ali, are you ok?" Natasha called to the twenty-one-year-old. It had been a year since they first went on the run, and their missions had been getting harder and harder. Since the breakup of the Avengers, more threats had come about. The team had heard that Wakanda had some issues, but T'Challa had taken care of that and everyone, including Bucky, was fine. There had also been some trouble with someone called Vulture in NYC, but that was left to Tony and his protegee Spidey to handle. Still, there were hundreds of criminals for Steve and his friends to handle.

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Currently, they were in a shootout with a group of illegal drug traffickers. A bullet had whizzed passed, narrowly missing Auralie.

"Yeah, it missed," Auralie replied, slamming her fist into a man's face. He went staggering back, blood trailing down his broken nose. Another man, who was being propelled backward by a blast of red, crashed into him. Auralie whirled around to see Wanda, her fingertips glowing.

"Thanks," Auralie called.

Wanda smiled, "any time my dearest."

They made quick work of their opponents. Though their enemies were formidable, they were nothing against former Avengers. As Sam tied up their opponents, Natasha made a quick anonymous call to the police, who would be happy to have these people in jail.

"Good work team," Steve said in his leader's voice.

"Yeah," Sam groaned, rubbing his bruised side, "now can we go home and sleep and eat. And shower. I could use a shower. A hot one, so none of you can waste all the water first."

"We don't take that long in the shower," Natasha scooped.

Sam smirked, "I was talking about Steve."

Steve, the ever strong and just leader, rolled his eyes, wondering what the hell he had ever done to end up with such a snarky team. He sighed, "Let's just go. You sure they aren't going anywhere, Nat?"

"I'm positive," Natasha assured him.

They drove back to their current apartment, a tiny little place with two bedrooms and a pullout couch. Sam raced to the shower first and no one protested because he was taking one for the team and sleeping on the couch.

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"Who's turn is it to cook?" Wanda asked, "I did it last night."

"Mine," Steve raised his hand, "everyone ok with breakfast for dinner?"

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"That depends on the breakfast," Natasha pointed out.

Steve sighed, "pancakes?"

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"Those work," Auralie said. Natasha and Wanda both nodded in agreement. Apparently, fugitive superheroes were fans of pancakes. Steve went and began getting out the stuff needed for pancakes, Natasha helping him. Over the past year, the team had not only become close when it came to fighting crime, but also to living life. They all had come to trust each other.

While Steve and Natasha (who, according to Auralie, were becoming more like parents each day) worked on dinner, Auralie and Wanda went to their room. It was a small room, with two beds on either side of a nightstand. Sometimes they slept in that arrangement, other times they moved the table and pushed the beds together so they could hold each other in case one of them got a nightmare.

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They sat on Auralie's bed, the light manipulator automatically resting her head on the witch's shoulder. Wanda smiled fondly and asked, "what's up?"

"Oh, nothing. I've just been missing Maria a bit lately, that's all. I know I saw her a few months ago, and we talk on the phone all the time, but well, I still miss her. I know it sounds silly, especially to you, cause well, at least I still have my sister....." Auralie tried to explain.

Wanda wrapped her arms around her girlfriend, "dearest, nothing you could say is silly. I understand exactly what you are feeling, and you have every right to feel that way. I just want you to be happy."

"I am happy," Auralie declared, "you make me happier than anything. I just miss my family."

"I know," Wanda said, "but you have a new family too. I mean, you're the one who says Steve and Nat are like parents to you. You and Sam tease each other like brother and sister. Even Clint, on the rare occasion we can sneak a call to him, he's like a weird and awesome uncle. It's a weird family, but a good one."

"Yeah," a smile found its way to Auralie's face, "I hope it lasts. I like being like this. Being with you especially."

Wanda laughed, "well, if I had it my way we would be together forever." They turned, and Auralie leaned in to give the witch a quick peck on the lips. It probably would have turned into a long kiss, but then they heard Steve calling their names.

"Ali, Wanda, I need you two in the kitchen," the super soldier was saying.

Wanda sighed, "not a moment of peace around here."

"Yeah, but that's part of this family," Auralie agreed. They got up and went to the kitchen, only to find the most delightful surprise sitting there.

Auralie flung herself into the arms of a grinning Maria Hill, tears of delight streaming down her face. Though she loved the family she and the others had built, Maria would always be her sister, the one who had saved her and introduced her to this world of insanity.

"What're you doing here," Auralie blubbered into her sister's shoulder.

Maria smiled, "I was in the area on a mission, and I called Nat and found out you were here. And well, what kind of sister would I be if I didn't stop by?"

Auralie grinned, "I've missed you, sis. I've missed you lots."

"I know, I have too," Maria nodded, "but we've both had lots of work to do. Hell, this world is horrible at sorting its issues out. I swear, Mr. Incredible was right when he said being a hero was like being the maid." Auralie laughed at that reference, she and her sister both loved that movie.

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Maria turned to Wanda, "so, are you gonna be my sister in law yet?"

Auralie groaned. Maria had been extremely supportive of Auralie and Wanda's relationship, but the teasing was getting old.

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Wanda laughed, not phased at all by it, "not yet Maria, but Auralie and I are as happy as can be together."

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"Good for you two, you've earned it," Maria said, her tone sincere.

"So Maria, you staying for dinner?" Natasha called.

Maria smiled politely, "well, I don't want to be a bother....."

"Please stay," Steve declared, "we're having pancakes and we made a lot of batter. We could use your help eating everything."

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"Well, in that case, I would love to stay," Maria grinned at them all.

Auralie found herself drifting back over to Wanda, who kissed her on the cheek. Auralie smiled. They really were insane, but this group of people was her family, and she was glad to have them.

A/N: I've missed Maria, so she obviously had to show up in this chapter. One more chapter after this, and then Part Three.

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