



xv. A Dangerous Plan

The good cheer that Scott had brought them faded fast. Tony and Rhodes had returned, with none other than Pepper Potts herself, who was still as awesome as ever, despite the chaos. As soon as Auralie saw Pepper, she was hugging the other woman, who stayed on balance despite her heels and hugged Auralie back.

"I heard about the wedding," Auralie cried with delight, "I'm so happy for you and Tony!"

"Thanks, Ali," Pepper smiled warmly, "and I'm, well I'm sorry..... about everything."

And that was about the end of the good mood.

Soon they were all gathered around a big table, arguing over what to do. They all knew they needed first to replenish their numbers and turn the tables by getting back their dead comrades. But the only way to do that was with the Infinity Stones, which Thanos had. Thus, arguments commenced.

"We can't launch an assault on Thanos to take the gauntlet," Natasha said, "we'd be dead in seconds."

"Nat's right," Rhodes agreed, "I've participated in some hopeless missions, but nothing on that level. It's impossible."

"What other choice do we have? We need to stop Thanos before any more damage is done," Thor argued.

"I agree, but maybe there's a better way," Bruce added timidly. The conversation kept circling around to that. Thor and Rocket wanted to attack Thanos when he wasn't expecting it. Nat and Rhodey thought it was too big a risk. Bruce and Scott thought they needed a more unified decision-making process before they could do anything.

Auralie, Steve, and Tony had been quiet. Pepper had as well. She looked fearful, she kept glancing at Tony with such love and worry on her face.

Auralie, meanwhile, was getting an idea. Things were floating around in her mind, but they weren't clicking together in a plan. She wasn't sure how to voice them, to ask her friends for help. It was as though the silence was strangling her.

"We don't have the numbers for a direct assault on Thanos," Steve announced, "he would crush us. We need to get more allies before we can do anything. But I agree that conflict is inevitable. What we need is to get our people back."

"But how can we do that without the gauntlet?" Rocket asked.

"Well actually," Tony interjected, "I was thinking about that too. Steve is correct, we can't launch an assault now. But I was thinking of the gauntlet in terms of any other machine - what if we can latch onto its source and hijack it? Like, if we could generate an immense amount of energy and latch it onto the gauntlet, overwhelming it, it could short out the snap and bring everyone back. It has worked when I tried similar things on technology."

Thor sighed, "but this is magic. It can be unpredictable and does not work like your technology."

"Yeah, plus, the infinity stones are all powerful!" Rocket yelled.

"No they aren't," Steve said, "Wanda destroyed one. If we brought her back, she could do it again."

"Well right now, there's nothing in this world that affects the stones!" Rocket pointed out.

"What about something from a different universe. Another dimension," Scott asked suddenly, "because I have a portal to the Quantum Realm in my van. It's very very useful, actually."

Tony nodded, "that could work. But we'd have to find a way to bring that power to our world and find a way to direct it. I can create a machine to help "hack" the gauntlet, but it will take me a bit. We don't have any time to lose. Can you bring the power to our world?"

Scott looked down, "well, no. There was a lot of tech I couldn't bring, or haven't been briefed on. We did things as a team, me and Hope, Hank and Janet. And Luis or some of the others joining in..... well, I could hook it up so it acts as an energy source, but I don't think I could figure out how to direct it. You don't have the time. It could power the machine but we need another power to put pressure on the gauntlet. Unless the machine could do it on its own?"

"No, not if we're gonna move fast," Tony replied, "Thor, what about the lightning? Could that work for an otherworldly power?"

"No. I am from another planet, but I am still from this universe. The laws of the Infinity Stones still apply to me," Thor replied sadly.

Auralie met Natasha's eyes over the table. Natasha was good at reading people. She could tell exactly what Auralie was thinking. The assassin shook her head, telling the younger girl that she didn't have to do this if she didn't want to. But Auralie would do anything to save the world and save the people they lost.

"What about me? My power? Elory came from another dimension. She altered my DNA so I became like her in ways. That's why I have these powers, and why I sometimes see glimpses of other worlds. Well, I used to. Not as much these days, but that's ok. My light technically does come from another dimension. With help from the machine and the quantum realm, maybe I could pull this off," Auralie said, looking down at the table, feeling very small. It was scary, the thought that she could maybe be the one whose power saved them. Suddenly, she knew why Wanda had been so scared.

"That might just work," Tony replied, "but you are a hybrid, you aren't fully from another dimension. And I'm not actually sure how powerful you are. It could be dangerous, and you would have to push all your limits."

"If that's what it takes," Auralie replied, "then I'll do it. You all have been willing to make sacrifices for the fate of the world. Now it's my turn."

Tony looked at her, and it struck Auralie hard, how old and tired he was, "Ali, you don't understand. That much power.... it could kill you."

Auralie thought about that. About Dying. She was twenty-two. She had a lot of life left. But that life wasn't worth living in a world where everything had been ruined. It wasn't worth living in a world where everyone was broken, where their friends were dead, where she didn't have Wanda.

Auralie knew what it was like to lose your other half. She knew that all around the worlds, billions had suffered that fate because of Thanos. She would make it right, at any cost.

She meant it when she looked her friends in the eyes and said, "then I die. But I'm doing this."

She said it with such determination that they couldn't even find it in them to argue.

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Tony, Bruce, and Scott were all working on the machine they were going to use to channel Auralie's power and the power from the quantum realm. Rhodes, Nebula, and Rocket were gathering undamaged weapons for the inevitable battle. Pepper was keeping the tower up and running, trying to boost moral where she could.

Natasha, Steve, and Auralie had their own mission to go on before they could start prepping for battle. They were going to find Clint Barton, no matter what it took, and make sure he was alright. Not only because they could use his help, but because he was their friend, the heart and soul of their group.

Auralie was sitting in the back of the quinjet, head bowed, her hair falling limp in her face. Natasha and Steve shot her worried glances from time to time. Natasha was also worried for Steve, and it showed.

"This is gonna work, Steve," she reassured him.

"I know it is," Steve replied, "cause I don't know what I'm going to do if it doesn't."

Auralie did not hear her friends talking. She was in her own mind. In her hand was a picture, one that she was trying not to tear up while she stared at it.

While most of her friends kept pictures of family or a lover on hand, Auralie did not. The only person's picture she would ever think about carrying with her for herself was Wanda's, and she never wanted to think of a time when she would need it when Wanda would not be fighting beside her.

Auralie did, however, keep a picture for Wanda, a picture of Pietro. Auralie looked at this picture now, a silent promise to a dead man that she would save his sister and take good care of her. She hoped Pietro's ghost could hear her.

She would save Wanda. Even if the price was her life.

A/N: So, this chapter was a little intense..... just a little.

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