

prologue

Natasha rolled her eyes as she tucked the phone back into her pocket, not impressed with Nathaniel Barton in the slightest. Hearing the so steps behind her, she grimaced for a second before turning to face the man that had started them on this path they were all on. a2

"One of our tech boys flagged this, splashed down in the Banda Sea. Could be the Quinjet. But with Stark's stealth tech, we still can't track the damn thing," Nick Fury told the assassin, passing her a tablet with the information of the last sighting of the Hulk. It was no secret that the events of Ultron had certainly brought the anger machine and the assassin significantly closer, even if they all knew it wouldn't have worked out anyway. a3

"Right," Natasha murmured, trying to avoid giving anything away. She was upset, yes, but this was just another person to have le them in the space of a week.

"Probably jumped out and swam to Fiji," the man told her as he tried to lighten the mood slightly. "He'll send a postcard." Nastaha sco ed slightly, rolling her eyes as she passed the tablet back to the one-eyed man. a0

"Wish you were here!" She joked, a small but happy smile gracing her lips for a quick second. Her mood turned instantly, remembering why the man was standing in front of her. "You sent me to recruit him, way back when. Did you know then what was going to happen?"

Fury shrugged, his hands flittering across the tablet as they searched for the recent file that he knew the spy was also wanting to see. "You never know. You hope for the best and make do with what you get. I got a great team."

Natasha looked out across the grounds of the new Avengers training facility as she nodded slightly in agreement. She could see Tony, Steve and Thor walking across the grass deep in conversation and she knew that once Steve was the only one remaining they would begin their first training session with the new recruits. Wanda and Sam were settling into the team nicely and Vision was providing them with some strange but interesting insight into everything they were doing. There was just one person missing.

"Casey?" She murmured, not even attempting to hide the concern in her voice as she turned around to actually face the man. He scowled slightly, an obvious sign that there either had been no news on the girl or the news certainly wasn't good to hear. Natasha knew that when he opened his mouth it was going to be the latter.

"Scottie was last spotted crossing the border of Albania and into Greece, but that was three days ago now. We have no idea where she is, and her tracking device has sparked out - something that the tech boys think has been caused by a surge in her powers. Making Ultron, even if she barely helped, it really took a toll on her. She's not going to come back for a while, if ever." a0

Natasha nodded, putting back on her stoic face as she looked out the window again.

"Nothing lasts forever," she reminded him, but also herself. They had been walking a dangerous line for many years now and she knew that sooner or later they were all going to be shaken o it. a

"Trouble, Miss Romano . No matter who wins or loses, trouble still comes around."

Natasha supposed he was right. A er all, Scottie Casey had only seemed to bring them more trouble by her leaving. a7

"The Mind Stone is the fourth of the Infinity Stones to show up in the last few years. That's not a coincidence. Someone has been playing an intricate game and has made pawns of us," Thor told the other two men, his hammer grasped tightly in his hand as he prepared to make the jump back to Asgard. "But once all these pieces are in position..." a

"Triple Yahtzee?" Tony interrupted, not liking the sound of Thor's voice as he discussed who or what may be trying to collect all of these so called infinity stones. a

"You think you can find out what's coming?" Steve asked, ignoring whatever reference Tony was making that he was still not quite sure on.

The God of Thunder nodded, looking around at the grass before he turned back to face them "I do. Besides this one," he said, motioning to Tony who faked a hurt look, "there's nothing that can't be explained." a

With a flick of his hand, the god raised his hammer into the air and was instantly swept away by the bi-frost. Tony sighed as he noticed the strange Asgardian stains that were now burned into the grass. It was new and fresh turf, and now it was ruined. a

"That man has no regard for lawn maintenance. I'm gonna miss him though. And you're gonna miss me. There's gonna be a lot of manful tears." a

"I will miss you, Tony," Steve truthfully replied to the man as they walked towards his car. While Steve appreciated many things about this new age, he would always find himself missing the style of the old cars back in the 1940s. There was just something about them that made them more interesting to him. a0

"Yeah? Well, it's time for me to tap out. Maybe I'll spend my retirement days trying to track down Scottie. Maybe I should take a page out of Barton's book and build Pepper a farm, hope nobody blows it up," Tony murmured, knowing fine well that it was something he would never be able to actually do. Retiring from the Avengers was a big enough step for him as it was, and he was already beginning to doubt if he would actually be able to stay away. a

"The simple life."

"You'll get there one day."

"I don't know, family, stability. The guy who wanted all that went in the ice seventy-five years ago. I think someone else came out," Steve muttered, thinking back to the vision that Wanda had shown him during their first proper encounter that had le the whole team shaken. a0

"You alright?" Tony asked him as he reached to shut the car door.

"I'm home."

"You want to keep staring at the wall, or do you want to go to work?" Steve called out to Natasha as the woman looked at the wall in front of them. His eyes fell on the mark she was staring at and he knew exactly who had le a cracked burn on the cement. "I mean, it's a pretty interesting wall."

His words carried meaning as they both thought back to when they had first watched Scottie lose control and slam her hand into the wall. Steve wanted her back, but they knew so little about her whereabouts that it was more hassle than it was worth. The girl had been hiding all her life - of course she wasn't going to stop now. a

"I thought you and Tony were still gazing into each other's eyes. How do we look?" She asked him, reaching for the tablet that he was extending towards her. Ignoring the profile that was open at the side of the page, the woman's eyes flickered through the other profiles. a

"Well, we're not the '27 Yankees."

"We've got some hitters," Natasha fired back, a small smirk on her face as she studied the team. "Shame we're missing a decent pitcher."

"They're good," Steve started, "but they're not a team."

"Let's beat 'em into shape."

Natasha and Steve shoved the doors of the training room open, looking out at Sam, Rhodes, Wanda and Vision as they studied the new Avengers.

"AVENGERS! ASSEMBLE!" Steve shouted, causing Natasha to groan and roll her eyes. a

"If Scottie was here she would destroy you for that." a

"If you do not apply some lotion to your skin, you are going to burn." Scottie opened her eyes slowly, turning her head to her le to study the person that had broken her moment of peace. The sand felt so on her hands as she pushed herself up into a sitting position as she looked at the man that was standing beside her.

She laughed without humour as she realised just who had somehow managed to find her in the depths of the Greek beaches. The man had his familiar sunglasses resting on the bridge of his nose as he squinted down at her, looking unusually casual in only a hawaiian shirt and a pair of light shorts. a8

"Barton," she mused, rolling her eyes as she smirked up at him. "Fury sent you to find me?"

The man shrugged, jamming his thumb over his shoulder as he motioned to where she could see two kids and a woman with a young baby standing in the distance. Scottie squinted slightly, seeing the resemblance immediately.

"You didn't stay around long enough to hear about the big farm secret," he joked, a so tone of pity in his voice that she was simply going to be ignored, she got annoyed at it. "But that's my family - my actual family away from the team - and Laura wanted me to extend the invite to you."

Scottie titled her head in confusion as the man continued.

"Our house will always be a safe place for you, even when you don't feel like you deserve it."

Scottie smiled widely at him, standing to her feet as she rammed her toes back into the cheap flip-flops that rested on the ground below her.

"You're really about the only family I have le ," she murmured, leaning forward and wrapping the man into a hug. "But I don't think I'd ever change that."

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