

THE AFTERMATH

The second Pepper Potts and Happy Hogan had felt the earth move, they knew something had gone wrong.

New York was on fire. Buildings were burning from helicopter crashes and cooking stoves that had no one left to attend to them. The roads were jammed with cars full of dusted people, a frenzied panic settling over the city as those that remained tried to make sense of the events that were occurring.

The bodyguard left Pepper in their car as he dashed to the car in front of them, where Nick Fury and Maria Hill had been driving. They were all heading to the HQ to be prepared for the Avengers return once they had put a stop to Thanos, since there was certainly going to be a large debriefing waiting for them all. Obviously, that wasn't going to happen now.

Pepper jumped out of the car behind the man, rushing over to look in the vehicle and covering her mouth in shock at the sight of nothing but dust in the wind at where Maria and Nick had just been standing. Tears filled her eyes as it started to dawn on her that no-one was immune from what was happening. She didn't even know if Tony or Scottie had made it. She might never get to know.

Happy moved from his frozen position behind her, his foot having stepped on something that was cracked on the pavement below them. Furrowing his eyebrows at the sight of an old pager, the man slowly crouched down to pick up the red and blue flashing device.

"Pep," he grumbled, causing the woman to turn around and rush to his side. She stared at it in confusion, both of them looking at where N.F. was enshrined on the side. The strange pattern on the middle was still lit up, causing them to both share a worried look.

"What is it?"

"I don't know, but I think we better head to the compound. Maybe there's someone left who can help us figure it out," Happy suggested, his sentences sounding monotone as he still tried to wrap his head around what had just happened. Pepper nodded, her mind moving faster than the speed of light at all the possibilities running through her head.

"Whatever it was, if it was the first thing Fury tried to do when he thought the world was ending, it's certainly damn important."

"Pepper," Natasha breathed out as the blonde woman rushed out of the compound at the noise of the quinjet landing outside. Happy was hot on her trail, running out with his hand firmly placed on the gun in his belt.

"Oh god, Nat," Pepper breathed, taking in the state of the woman. She flung her arms around the other blonde, knowing that this exchange would never have happened under normal circumstances. They held on to each other tightly, aware that they were all they had left now.

Pepper pulled back, her eyes skimming over the rest of the remaining Avengers as they all slowly started to exit the quinjet. She turned back to look at Natasha with a clouded pain in her eyes, not wanting to watch either of the two people she wanted to see the most not walk down that ramp.

"Are they...?" Pepper's voice croaked at the end, her sentence hanging unfinished in the air between them all. She watched over Natasha's shoulder as Bruce and Rhodey stepped out of the quinjet, followed closely by Thor and a walking racoon. She knew she would have questions about that in particular but it was the last thing on her mind at that moment.

"We don't have whereabouts on Tony, Pep," Natasha told the woman softly, watching as she slouched backwards slightly into Happy. The man lightly rested a hand on her shoulder to keep her steady, knowing that he had just lost his friend as well. "Scottie's alive, but she's not..."

Natasha didn't get to finish her sentence as a soft gasp fell from Pepper's lips at the sight of Steve Rogers walking down the ramp, cradling Scottie in his arms as he held her tightly to his chest. The blonde's eyes were shut as her head was lolled back and resting on Steve's arm, her legs hanging over his other as he walked quickly towards where the survivors were standing at the entrance. Pepper rushed over to meet him halfway, her hands reaching out to touch the girl's arm as they moved as a group towards the medical bay.

She found herself being held tightly by Steve as Bruce and Rhodey rushed around their small medical office, grabbing supplies from the right and centre as they got to work on the bloodied and broken girl. After a couple of hinted looks from Bruce, Natasha and Steve managed to calm down the woman who was unofficially Scottie's mother and escort her out of the room.

As they sat in the large study room of the headquarters, Steve and Natasha shared a look before beginning to explain everything to Pepper and Happy. They spared no details as they recounted their battle with the aliens dog-like creatures, a talking tree creature to aid them in their fight. Natasha told the duo about how Wanda had been forced to kill Vision to stop Thanos from getting the stone, while Steve explained that the action had seemingly weakened Scottie until Thanos used one of the other stones to reverse the decision. Natasha told them about how Scottie had tapped into the power source of the stone that had been haunting her since she met Vision, and how she bravely stood up to Thanos despite having watched how easily he had taken down her friends. Pepper and Happy cried throughout the story as it went on, the blonde having to stop a couple of times to process everything that they had all gone through. As if the whole story hadn't been worse enough, they then broke the news that they thought Scottie might have lost her hearing - and from Bruce's limited examination while they flew back from Wakanda, it was unsure if it was fixable.

"We lost." Steve finished, the look on his face sending chills down everyone's spine as the hopeful captain had turned into gloom and doom. Even when there had never seemed like any options, Steve had always believed in them all. But this? This was something that none of them knew how to be hopeful about.

Natasha finally looked at her phone that had been on charge throughout the entire events across the room. Standing up as the screen lit to life, she peered down at the device to notice that she had received various missed calls from different S.H.I.E.L.D. agents across the globe. Most notably, she had several from Nick Fury and Maria Hill.

"Fury tried to call me, I should probably call him back," Natasha told them all, her hand already moving to lift the phone to her ear. Just before she could press anything, Happy spoke up and interrupted the ex-assassins thoughts.

"You won't get an answer, they're gone. All they left behind was this stupid pager that won't stop sending some signal," Happy angrily told them all. He was angry at the fact this was something they were seemingly going to have to survive from while his bestest friend in the world was either dead or dying in space somewhere.

Steve looked up from where he was slumped, his eyes narrowing and head tilting in confusion as he looked at them all.

"A pager?"

When Scottie woke up, she knew four things.

The first being that she knew where she was. She had seen this hospital bed a lot in the past week, and the distinct smell of medical supplies attempting to be masked by orange and cinnamon would have told her easily that she was in the Avengers Headquarters.

The second thing she knew was that she was deaf. The bedsheets around her made no noise as she pulled them off her. The metal sides to the hospital bed made no clunk as she pushed them down. The door made no noise as it slammed behind her. She was truly deafened to the sounds that she had taken for granted her whole life.

Thirdly, she knew that Thanos had won. They had lost. She knew it was her fault for hesitating at the man's lie that Tony was dead. If she had just hit him with all she had left, then maybe he wouldn't have been able to close his fingers together and wipe out half of the population.

Finally, she knew that half of everyone she ever loved was dead. She had watched Wanda literally disappear before her eyes into a pile of dust. Her hands had grasped frantically at the air as she ignored the pain throughout her body at the sudden movement. She had seen that look on everyone's face as Steve had lifted her onto the ground - that it wasn't just Wanda who had died. Visions of her broken body was a reminder of that too.

A lot had changed in the past twenty four hours, but little did she know things were about to get even more crazy.

Scottie sat in the lab, her head resting in her hand as she continued to study the small pager that was blinking away in the chamber that housed it.

It had been a week now since the event that Scottie had dubbed the dusting. It was also safe to say that the girl hadn't even begun to properly grieve yet, as she was holding on to the hope that this small stupid device would somehow bring everyone back. Somehow bring her Wanda back.

Yawning slightly, Scottie allowed her eyes to close for a brief second as memories of her and Wanda continued to rotate throughout her head. Not even being able to hear herself yawn had meant that the constant thoughts of how she had failed and caused the deaths of half the earth seemed to shout at her these days.

As she opened her eyes, Scottie stilled in her seat as she noticed the pager was no longer lit up or flashing. Sitting up properly in her seat, the girl stared at it for a minute to make sure it wasn't her imagination before she sprang to her feet and raced next door to where Bruce and Rhodey were sitting.

They both looked up at her frantic entrance, jumping from their seats as she started trying to get her breath back. Bruce moves quickly towards her but Scottie took a step away and motioned over her shoulder to the room she had just came from.

"Somethings happening."

"What have we got?" Natasha asked as she walked into the room, lightly placing a hand on Scottie's arm as she walked up alongside the girl.

Scottie smiled gently at her, knowing that Natasha was the one most tuned into how scary it was to not be able to hear your own breathing.

"Whatever the signal is sending, it finally creeped off," Bruce explained, making sure his lips were in view of Scottie's eyesight so she could hopefully lip read some of the conversation. In the past week she had improved significantly with the help of the team and pepper too.

"I thought we bypassed the battery," Steve checked, not understanding how the device could have died if they were constantly charging it.

"We did. It's still plugged in, it just... it just stopped," Rhodey explained, shrugging as they all looked back at the now turned off device.

"Reboot and send the signal again."

"We don't even know what this is."

"Fury did. Just do it, please. You tell me the second you get a signal. I want to know who's on the other end of that thing."

"Bruce please," Scottie interrupted the adults, causing them all to look at her in surprise. "This might be our only chance."

Bruce nodded, moving back round to the other side of the chamber. Scottie and Natasha nodded in thanks as they both turned around to head out of the room.

They both jumped at the same time, not aware that a blonde woman had snuck up behind them. Scottie wasn't surprised she hadn't heard the woman come in since she couldn't hear but she was amazed that the woman had snuck in with Natasha's super spy senses.

"Where's Fury?"