Tony Stark didn't know what to do with himself.

The billionaire had walked out to the dock that rested on the side of the lake, the bench that Scottie was o en see sitting on now occupying the man. Steve trailed so ly behind as he came to stand on the dock, watching as Tony stared out across the water. There was a tough silence between them as Tony seemed to stare out across the lake at nothing. Steve knew he was picturing the amount of times they used to find the girl swimming in the lake or out on a paddle boat with Wanda.

3.7

"She was my everything, Cap. I have Pepper and I have Morgan, but Scottie was the first person that really fully brought me back to being just me. I said I'd always protect her, and I've failed her."

Steve shook his head, placing a firm hand on Tony's shoulder as he heard a few more sets of footprints approach them. They didn't know for sure that Scottie was dead the way Clint knew Natasha was, but they were pretty sure they would never be seeing her again. She had made the fact she might not return very clear.

"She'd never believe that, Tony. She knew the sacrifices that we might need to make and she wouldn't want you crying over her decision. Whatever reason she did what she did, she thought it was right. And she's a better person because of the lessons you taught her."

There was a deep silence as the rest of the original team joined them. Clint stood closest to the water as he tried to wrap his mind around the fact he had just lost two of the closest friends he ever had. đ

"Do we know if she had family?" Tony asked, his question directed towards Clint as it was obvious who he was asking about. He was Scottie's family obviously, but he never knew if Natasha had family.

"Yeah, us."

Clint knew Natasha had biological family. He didn't know if they were still alive or not but he knew she had them. But this was her real family, the people sitting on the patio overlooking the lake. No one had ever loved and supported Natasha the way the Avengers had even if Bruce and Natasha had an awkward failed romance in the mix too.

Thor grunted behind them in a heavy frustration as he stared at the four other men standing on the dock with him.

"Why are we acting like they're dead? We have the stones, right? As long as we have the stones, Cap, we can bring Nat back, isn't that right? We can bring them both back! So stop this shit. We're the Avengers, get it together!" Thor yelled at them, his gut swinging slightly as he exclaimed with force. He knew what had happened, but he just couldn't let himself believe he had just lost more people.

Clint rested on the ground as he didn't look up. "We can't get them back. It can't be undone. It can't."

a

Thor dryly laughed, Tony's head snapping to face him at the noise. "I'm sorry. No o ense, but you're a very earthly being. Okay? We're talking about space magic. And "can't" seems very definitive don't you think?"

Clint rose to his feet, his chest heaving slightly as he got angry at Thor's misplaced optimism and condescending words. No-one else had been there - they didn't understand that Natasha had truly made the biggest sacrifice yet.

"Look, I know that I'm way outside my paygrade here. But she still isn't here, is she? It can't... be undone. Or that's at least what the, great floating guy had to say!" His voice rose to a shout as he got more emotional at the fact Natasha, his partner in crime, was gone. "Maybe you wanna go talk to him? Okay? Go grab your hammer, and you go fly and you talk to him!"

Everyone fell silent as the man's angry face fell into one of a deep grief that they all understood. Tony wanted nothing more than to get up and tell the man that he understood what he was feeling, but they were di erent people and they grieved much di erently.

"It was supposed to be me. She sacrificed her life for that goddamned stone. She bet her life on it."

Thor didn't seem to want to give up his remaining hope. He turned to look at Steve and Tony, ignoring the warning look that Steve sent him as he opened his mouth.

"How do we even know Scottie's dead?"

a

a

đ

ส์

"Even if she weren't," Tony started, "she used her last pym particle to go wherever she did. She can't come back." a

His face was as cold as stone as he avoided making eye contact with any of the others, knowing if he did that he would have started to tear up again. Bruce snarled suddenly, picking up the unused bench and throwing it across the lake. His roar echoed slightly as he seemed to realise just what he had done, crawling in on himself.

None of them knew the details of the sacrifice Natasha had made other than Clint. They weren't sure they'd ever really want to know the details, but one day down the line Clint would eventually tell everyone what had happened between him and Natasha on Volmir. They would all hear about how she had outsmarted him one last time, how she had always been the better fighter and this had proved it. Steve would support Clint as he cried, and they would finally learn the reason why Clint knew she wouldn't be coming back of her own accord any time soon. a

"They're not coming back. We have to make it worth it. We have to."

"We will," Steve promised them all, all five of them turning to look out across the lake once more in a deep thought. There was a pause before Tony spoke up.

"This was her place, yanno?" He mused, not waiting for a reply from any of the others. "Even when she had nothing, she had this spot. I told her about the wedding sitting right here, I told her about Morgan sitting right here. She taught me how to sign sitting right here. I told her about the nanite hearing injections right here." a

Steve nodded, his hand sliding along the bench slightly as he looked down at Tony to see the man's eyes red from crying. Bruce nodded his head, looking at the bench that he had just thrown. He too had shared a moment with Scottie Casey on this patio, suddenly realising that maybe the girl had been wiser than her years.

"She sat with me here, the night before I decide to merge myself and Hulk," Bruce admitted, never having told anyone of their conversation. "I'd always looked at Hulk as having some alien inside of me, and she told me that I was looking at it all wrong. She made me realise that Hulk was like my Wanda Maximo : my other half. Wanda and Scottie couldn't really function without the other like we've seen the past five years just the same as I can't really function without the hulk. She saved my life, right here on this patio."

a

đ

Steve nodded in agreement before reaching out a hand to help Tony to his feet. They would have time to grieve later, but they had things they needed to do first. Tony looked up at him with tears looking in his eyes as he studied the man's outstretched hand.

"She doesn't end here, Tony. We're going to keep her memory alive but we need to get everyone back first."

Tony nodded, getting ready to stand up and head to work on the Iron gauntlet that one of them was going to have to snap to reverse just what Thanos had done to them 5 years prior. He couldn't help but think about how he was going to have to try and break the news to Pepper and to Happy and to Morgan that they'd never see her again. He didn't even want to break the news to himself.

A set of heavy footsteps caused them all to turn quickly, a panting Scott Lang standing at the start of the dock as he looked frantically at them all. The five men all squinted at him in confusion, unsure what he was about to tell them. đ

"I know you're all having like a sappy montage moment where the main characters side kick has just died but dude something INSANE is happening!"

Clint almost went to go for the man at how insensitive his comment had been about Natasha and Scottie being sidekicks in a movie, but the firm hand of Steve on his shoulder held him back from doing anything that he would maybe regret down the line. Everyone continued to stare at Scott blankly before he sighed in despair at them not realising he was trying to tell them what they needed to do.

"What I'm trying to say is you better get back inside quickly, something really strange is happening to the machine."

Tony and Steve shared one look of fear before booting towards the hangar. The entire group sped towards the building they had just potentially saved the universe in, nothing but worry and fear on their minds.

Natasha Romano had much more experience with the cold than warmth her entire life.

ď

a

Her upbringing at the Red Room was significantly cold in more ways than one; from the cold showers and thin clothing to the lack of emotional stability, while her surroundings in Russia had o en been the white snow. It had taken her a long time to warm up to others, and an even longer time to find a tolerance for the warmth of a sunny place - although she had learnt pretty quickly how to mask her discomfort due to her line of work.

The first thing she knew was the cold.

The freezing water lapped at her ankles and knees as she kneeled in the river, her eyes adjusting to the scene around her as she suddenly

found herself breathing and living. There was no deep gash on the back of her head from her sacrifice, there were no broken bones in her body from the collision of hitting the ground and more importantly, she didn't seem to be dead.	4 8
She had wondered if this was the a erlife as she slowly started to gather information on her senses. A purple sky hung in the air around her, her eyes growing wide at the beauty of the sick planet. It was so distant from Earth yet she was sitting on its grounds breathing as easy as anything. She really would have thought it was the a erlife, if only it hadn't been for the source of the weight on her knees.	a ⁸
When her eyes finally had adjusted to the scene, she had suddenly felt the weight of something in her lap. The warmth and light that started to radiate from whatever it was caused her to shield her eyes for a moment, before they eventually adjusted to reveal the one person she would never have wanted to see in the a erlife anyway.	
Scottie Casey looked like shit, in the words of Clint Barton only hours prior. Her blond hair almost seemed to be dyed red from the dried blood that seemed to have coated most of her head, while her blue eyes were scrunched together as her body twitched slightly in silent whispers of pain. Her face was covered in bruises and cuts, but Natasha knew she was going to survive whatever had happened to her, because in Scottie's open fist was two small red cylinders that	
told Natasha exactly what the girl had needed her to do.	ď
Scottie was bringing Natasha back to their home.	å
"What is going on?!" Rhodey yelled out over the loud noises of the machine whirring and crackling. Tony and Bruce were fiddling frantically with the controls, confused as to how it was suddenly trying to start itself.	a
"It's trying to reboot!" Bruce yelled back, flipping switches as he tried to allow the machine to boot up. He didn't know what it was doing, but he was sure there was a reason for this. Tony and himself had installed hundreds of fail-saves and there was a small nagging of hope in his mind that told him something was about to happen.	
"Well let it then!" Clint yelled back, his eyes wide as he subconsciously reached for the bow that usually hung on his back. Taking a quick breath as he remembered where his bow was - and would remain forever, he guessed - Clint turned to look at the rest of the team as Bruce and Tony continued pressing buttons on the system.	
Thor was yelling something at them all, partially drunken thoughts as he tried to comprehend what was happening in front of them. Everyone's voices quickly were drowned out as the machine frantically shot into life, a blinding light causing everyone to turn away and shelter their eyes.	
Clint was the first to remove his hand from his eyes, a sinking feeling in his stomach as he heard the sound of feet crashing against the metal floor. He didn't need to have superpowers to have instantly recognised the red and blonde hair that he could just make out if he squinted his eyes.	đ
Natasha was struggling with the weight of Scottie as they materialised in front of the rest of the team who sheltered their eyes from the blinding light. Falling to her knees in exhaustion, Natasha caught Scottie just before she came into contact with the ground. Clint rushed forward, almost knocking over Rocket as he rushed over to help his best friends.	ක්
He slid to his knees as he reached their side, allowing Natasha to lean against him as he pressed his hands hard against one of Scottie's many injuries she had sustained from throwing herself o the cli to attempt to save Natasha. Almost letting out a chuckle at the fact the girl had his bow hanging across her body, he looked at Natasha with nothing but admiration and hope in his eyes as he allowed his spare hand to lightly touch her face.	
Natasha leaned into his touch, placing her hand on top of his as they both let out a short relived laugh. This didn't make any sense - but it was real.	
"SCOTTIE!"	a°

Tony rushed forward, tears streaming down his face just as Clint had gathered the girl in his arms. Her head was lolled back against his arm, her eyes now fully shut as if she was asleep. Natasha stood slowly, Steve helping her to her feet as she looked at Tony with joy in her eyes.

"She's alive, but unconscious."

a

Bruce motioned for Clint to follow him, the team all running behind as they headed towards what they might as well have made Scottie's quarters of the HQ since she always seemed to be in it - the med-bay.

"She did it," Natasha breathed to Steve as they followed behind everyone else in their pursuit of the young woman. "She saved us both."

a

"We always seem to end up here, huh?" Clint lightly joked to them all as everyone looked through the window of the medical room to where Tony and Pepper were sitting at either side of Scottie's beside. Pepper had been called as soon as they had managed to get Scottie into the room, the woman rushing over with the help of the RESCUE

suit that Tony had intended to gi her much later on. Morgan was tucked up in her bed, being watched carefully by none other than Happy Hogan himself.

"I have never met someone who seems to just love death quite the way Scottie does," Rhodey deadpanned, rolling his eyes as he lightly laughed at Clint's comment. She had been in the med-bay almost once every time they'd had a big mission and of course this time had proved no di erent. ส์

"At least she's alive," Bruce noted, just grateful that she was sitting up and now fully awake. She had came around pretty quickly, but no one had the heart to step into the room and ask her questions about what happened. "I think we better find out how."

When they entered the room, it was clear that Tony had just gotten around to ask her that exact question. Her head was freshly stitched up, and the girl had already joked about how if they pulled this o that she hoped Wanda found scars hot since she'd gathered significantly more since they last time they had seen each other.

"At what cost?"

đ

a

đ

ď⁴

a

ď

Scottie looked at them all sheepishly as the entered, not really wanting to tell them what she expected had happened to her when she willingly tried to give her life for the stone.

"I meant it when I said whatever it takes."

"Scottie. What did you have to do?" Steve interrupted, sending Tony and Pepper a supportive smile as Scottie pushed herself up slightly on the medical bed. She winched a little, but everyone was surprised to see that when she moved her hand from her head the redness of the injury had seemingly disappeared. Bruce moved forward, slowly pulling o the bandage that he had wrapped around it and gasped as it revealed nothing but a healed scar - one that looked like it had been there for years.

"I had to sever my connection to the mind stone. My last connection to her."

"Scottie..."

"I had to do it so the soul stone could form the bond." She continued, not wanting everyone to have a pity fest for her about losing the last connection she had to Wanda. She smiled slightly as everyone's faces scrunched up in confusion at her words.

"What bond?" Bruce asked, taking a slight step back as he felt her skin get a little warmer. She smiled at them all, holding up her palm with a child-like grin on her face they hadn't seen since before Thanos had originally snapped.

When she opened her palm, a beam of pure light came shooting out and straight into the ceiling above them. Everyone yelped slightly as the light flickered before exploding, not handling the extra energy as she grinned at them widely. ď

"Turns out the soul stone was jealous of what the mind stone did for others, so it promised me Natasha if I let it use me just the way the mind stone had."

"Scottie, that makes literally no sense," Scott Lang interrupted, confusion across his face as he looked between everyone who was nodding as if they understood what she had just said. "That is the worst explanation I've ever heard."

Scottie shrugged as she looked between them all.

"I think it's time we bring our friends back."

Continue reading next part