



## xix. Cooperation

Auralie watched, invisible, as Natasha approached Loki's cell. The god of Mischief was looking out of it from one direction and Natasha was trying to sneak up on him. She succeeded in arriving at the entrance without him noticing, then he turned around.

He smirked, "there are not many people that can sneak up on me."

"But you knew I'd come," Natasha replied, unfazed.

"A er," Loki said, "a er whatever horrors and torture they could dream up, you'd appear as a friend, a balm." Auralie rolled her eyes a bit. People always underestimated Natasha, when really she could kick most people's asses without breaking a sweat. When would they learn that beauty didn't mean weakness?

"I'm here of my own accord," Natasha glared at him. Auralie smirked to herself, knowing that Natasha was a master of interrogation, and they had a good chance of winning.

"Tell me," Loki took a seat, looking at the Black Widow, ready to listen. Not realizing what sort of danger he was in.

"Agent Barton. You took him, and I want to know what happens to his mind a er you're king of the mountain," Natasha answered.

"This is interesting, your world in the balance and you bargain for one man," Loki commented.

"Regimes fall every day," Natasha responded, "I tend not to weep over that. I'm Russian. Or at least, I was."

Loki laughed, "is this love, Agent Romano ." Auralie rolled her eyes at his teasing tone. Of course, Natasha loved Clint, they were the best of friends, basically brother and sister. Why was it that every time a man and a woman had a close friendship, people assumed they were in love? It was so stupid.

Natasha replied, "love is for children, I owe him a debt." Auralie knew that was a lie. Natasha loved Clint and Clint's family, and they had saved each other so many times, there were no debts between Clint and Natasha anymore.

Loki cocked his head in question, and Natasha elaborated, "I made a name for myself. I have a very specific skillset. I didn't care who I used it on. I got on Shield's radar in a bad way. Agent Barton was sent to kill me. Instead, he made a di erent call."

"And what would you do if I promised to spare him?" Loki questioned.

Natasha snorted, "not let you out." Auralie felt fear bubbling up in her, fear that Loki would see through Nat's lies, know that she would never betray Shield and that the interrogation would get nowhere. Natasha was their best chance at getting information. And Auralie really wanted to know what would happen to Clint. He was her friend, and she didn't want him to get hurt.

"Then why?" Loki asked.

Natasha answered, "it's simple really. I've got red in my ledger, and I'd like to wipe it out."

"But can you really wipe out that much red," Loki said, "The hospital fire, Drakov's daughter. Barton told me everything. Your ledger is gushing with red, and you think saving a man no more virtuous than yourself is going to fix anything?"

Auralie and Natasha both bristled at the insult to Clint. Who was this man to think he could insult their friend, who treated his coworkers with compassion and his friends like family, and who would give anyone who needed it a second chance? Who was this man to think that their funny and kind friend was a toy to be played with?

"I won't touch Barton, not until I make him kill you, slowly, intimately, in every way he knows you fear. Then I'll have him wake just long enough to see what he's done, and when he screams, I'll split his skull," Loki pounded his fist against the glass and Natasha staggered back as the god said, "that is my bargain you mewling quim."

Auralie had to admire Natasha's acting skills, but she winced when Loki described Natasha and Clint's deaths. It was such a gruesome thing and one more reason why they couldn't a ord to let the Asgardian win.

"You're a monster," Natasha stammered, in a show of fantastic acting. She had turned around, and Loki assumed she was in tears.

He smirked, "no, you brought the monster."

Natasha turned around, composed as ever, having just figured out his plan. "So, Banner, that's your play," she said.

She tapped into the intercom and said, "Loki means to unleash the Hulk. Keep Banner in the lab. I'm on my way there. Send Thor as well."

Then she turned back to their enemy and gave him a small smile, "thank you, for your cooperation." Auralie smiled at their triumph, but then a thought crossed her mind. Loki was said to be the god of lies. How could Natasha have tricked the trickster?

Suddenly, it hit her. Loki had wanted Natasha to figure it out. It was all part of his plan. Maybe he did want to unleash the Hulk, but he wanted them to know about it. He wanted the team to be divided. Still, how could he assume they wouldn't be able to think reasonably at all?

He couldn't assume that, so he had let them take his mind-controlling scepter.

Terror overtaking her, she lost her grip on light and became visible. Loki turned and smiled at her, asking, "did you figure it out yet?"

Auralie nodded and tried to organize her face into a defiant glare, "you won't win."

"I think I just did," Loki replied tauntingly. Auralie didn't stop to try and argue with him, it would get them nowhere and only make things worse. Instead, she ran for the lab, where everyone was gathering, and hoping that she wasn't too late and that it wasn't utter chaos.

Somehow, Auralie thought, it would be.

**A/N: Damn, I'm on a roll with these chapters, I have so much inspiration today. This is the third chapter in 24 hours. I might be able to get a fourth out. Be impressed with me, because this doesn't happen much.**

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