



## xx. Time Bomb

They were all gathered in the lab, with the exceptions of Maria and Phil. Everyone was in a bad mood thanks to what Natasha had discovered. Auralie was the last one there, as she ran in, her face flushed from her desperate run to the lab, but they were already arguing like arch enemies.

"Guys, I think we're playing right into Loki's hand," Auralie said, trying to get their attention. But her voice was timid and shy. Sometimes it was easy to forget that she was only sixteen years old, and introverted at that because she was a superpowered secret agent. But in this room full of other heroes, who were older and louder than her, it was hard to get the words out.

Fury bellowed, "I think you should remove yourself from this environment, Dr. Banner."

"Move to where. You guys are already renting out my room," Bruce snarled.

Fury sighed, "the cage was just a precaution in case....."

"In case you needed to kill me, but you can't," Bruce yelled, "I know, I've tried."

The room went quiet, and Auralie whispered, "oh Bruce."

"I got low," he looked at the floor, "so I put a bullet in my mouth and the other guy spit it out."

Auralie walked over to the scientist and put a gentle hand on his arm. She couldn't even begin to imagine what that was like. Sure she had her own anxiety and depression, but never thoughts of suicide. She had never felt so bad that she wanted to end it, and she pitied Bruce for having been pushed to that point.

For the first time, Auralie was able to see that this wasn't a team of heroes, not really. They might be super and want to protect the world, but in the end, they were all broken. It was just a team of shattered hearts and dark minds.

They continued to argue, but Auralie wasn't really paying attention. Instead, she was recalling the information on her team that she had been given. Natasha had been robbed of a childhood and forced to become a killer. Steve had lost everyone he had when he crashed the plane into the ocean. Bruce thought he was a monster. Tony had suffered from alcoholism and made reckless choices when he was down. Thor probably had a world of pressure on him, being both the heir to Asgard's throne and a hero. Clint wasn't even able to be with them because his mind was being played with like it was nothing.

Auralie realized then that she had no reason to fear the people in front of her, or try and live up to their expectations because they were just like her. Trying to hold on and get back up in a world that constantly knocked them down. Hoping that they would survive the next blow and be able to face the next threat. They faced hate and violence and threats. They hoped with all their hearts that their loved ones wouldn't be hurt. They went into the fire, again and again, to save others, knowing that one day, it would burn them up.

And Auralie realized that maybe Nick hadn't just brought them together to save the world. Maybe he had brought them together so they could save each other. But they couldn't do that if they fought.

When she came back to the real world, Auralie found that Steve and Tony had discovered Shield was using the Tesseract to build weapons. Auralie felt anger rising up inside of her at the revelation. None of them had any idea how to control the power, and why they thought they did, she would never know.

"You didn't come here because I batted my eyelids at you," Natasha said to Bruce.

"And I'm not leaving just because you're getting a little twitchy. Now, I would like to know why Shield is using the Tesseract to build weapons," Bruce cried.

"Because of him," Fury answered, pointing at Thor, "last year, we had a visitor from another planet with a grudge match that leveled a small town."

They launched into another argument, this one about the Tesseract and a "higher form" of war. At one point, Steve asked Tony, "big man in a suit of armor. Take that on and what are you?"

"Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist," Tony replied.

"I know guys with none of that worth ten of you," Steve said.

Thor chuckled, "you humans are so petty, and tiny."

Fury glowered, "excuse me, do we come to your planet and blow stuff up?"

As the arguing became worse, Auralie looked around desperately, only to see the scepter's gem was glowing. She tried to push her way over to it, but before she could, Bruce picked it up.

"You wanna know my secret agent Romano, you wanna know how I stay so calm," Bruce scowled at them all.

"Dr. Banner," Fury said, "please put down the scepter."

Bruce looked down to realize he was holding it and sighed, "sorry kids, looks like you won't be seeing my party trick anymore."

In the moment of silence that followed, Auralie mustered her courage and yelled, "ENOUGH! You all are not acting like a team whatsoever."

"A team," Bruce cried, "we're not a team. We're a time bomb."

Auralie's shouting had done nothing, as Tony and Steve went back to fighting, and Steve kept encouraging Tony to, "put on the suit."

Auralie dashed over to them and tried to calm their tensions, but they were not listening to her.

"Please," she begged them to stop, "please don't. We have to stop Loki."

"Stay out of this kid," Tony replied.

"I'm sorry Ali," Steve said, "but I can't work with this man."

"Yes you can," Auralie cried, "I know you can. Just listen to each other instead of brawling like children fighting over toys."

They quieted down, and Auralie wasn't sure if they had listened, or were about to come to blows. That was when they heard the humming of an unfamiliar aircraft, and suddenly, the engine was shot out. Auralie let out a scream as one side of the helicarrier began to plummet. She clutched the nearest thing, which happened to be Steve's arm. He helped get her back on her feet, then looked at Tony and said, "put on the suit."

"Yep," Tony agreed, and the two ran from the room, the teenager on their heels, ready to help.

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