



xxxv. Another Ally

Steve pulled Natasha into a little alcove that offered privacy. Auralie followed, wondering if the two of them could be any less subtle. They had just been attacked for crying out loud. The last thing that was needed was Steve and Natasha yelling at each other over a lot of gum and a flash drive.

"Where is it," Steve asked, holding Natasha by the arms, looking her dead in the eyes.

"I don't know," Natasha cried, "I only act like I know everything, Rogers."

Steve glared at her, his eyes boring into hers, "really?"

"I don't know what it is," Natasha replied calmly analyzing him, "Fury gave it to you though, didn't he?"

"What, no!" Steve protested, "stop lying to me."

Natasha rolled her eyes slightly but then seriously said, "I know who killed Fury."

Auralie interjected, "well that's all well and good all, but you look like you two are about to make out. I won't judge, but if you are, please tell me so I can give you some privacy. Other than that, can we get back to the conversation? Yes, Steve got the flash drive from Fury. We don't know what it is, but we know it's important and Pierce can't get it."

"Right," Steve agreed, choosing to ignore her first remarks, "who was it?"

"He's a ghost story. Most of Shield doesn't think he exists. Those who do call him the Winter Soldier. Credited with assassinations throughout the last fifty years," Natasha explained.

"Well, how do you know about him? I've never heard of him, and I went through so many of the old records, I know a lot about our history," Auralie asked.

"I was escorting a nuclear engineer out of Iran when someone shot out our tires," Natasha explained, "I pulled us out and there he was. I was covering the scientist, but he shot him, right through me. Soviet slug. No rifling. Bye Bye bikinis."

"Yeah, I bet you look terrible in them now," Steve trailed off, ever the polite man.

She had pulled up her shirt a bit to show the scar. Auralie stared, realizing that the bullets were probably the same. This assassin really was no amateur.

"I tried looking for him but, like I said," Natasha shrugged, "he's a ghost story."

She took the flash drive from her pocket and gave it to Steve who looked at it. He looked up at the two people who he could maybe trust to help him on this mission and said, "alright, let's see what the ghost wants."

"No chance what he wants is just a decent breakfast I suppose," Auralie muttered, rolling her eyes, "just for once I want an easy assignment that has to do with donuts."

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Soon they were walking through the mall. Natasha had provided them with disguises, which weren't much, but for some reason, they were working. Steve had a hat and glasses, and Natasha had a hoodie covering her hair. Auralie had gone a little more in-depth with hers. She had thrown her hair back into a ponytail and wore completely different clothing - a rainbow hoodie and grey leggings - and she had stuck temporary tattoos on her face - a flower on one cheek, a curling of vines and leaves on the other. It wasn't much, but she felt it was a better disguise than glasses, hats, and hoods.

They had gone to one of the information booths, filled with computers, to figure out what was on the flash drive.

"Can you decrypt it?" Steve asked.

Natasha sighed, "the person who made this is slightly smarter than me. Slightly."

"Ali," Steve asked, hoping for someone who could figure it out.

Auralie shook her head, "I'm better with the magical and otherworldly, not the technical. Glowing cube, I can deal with, secret flash drive, not my thing. Nat has a plan though."

"These things usually have a homing beacon. We can't decrypt it, but we can find out where the signal came from. Once I plug it in though, we'll only have nine minutes before they realize we're here," Natasha explained.

"Alright," Steve said, ever the Captain, "let's try it."

Natasha plugged it in. Auralie held her breath as the master spy began typing in codes. This information could make or break the future of Shield. It could lead them to avenge Nick, or it could give Pierce the upper hand. The tension was overwhelming.

Briefly, she allowed herself some time to wonder what was happening to the other agents. And the officers, and the medical team, like Amanda. She hoped they were all ok. She also hoped, while she was dreaming, that she and Steve had managed to put Rumlou in the hospital. But mostly she hoped Maria was alright. If anything ever happened to her sister, she could never forgive herself. Maria was the only person she had that she could truly say she loved in the world, and to lose Maria would be to lose the only fragile piece of her heart that hadn't been completely shattered yet.

An assistant came over and said, "Can I help you three with anything?"

"Oh, no," Natasha said, coming up and putting an arm around Steve, "my fiance and I were just working on some honeymoon destinations. And my cousin came along because she's going to be watching the pets while we're away." Auralie held up her hand in a sort of wave.

"Right," Steve said with a goofy sort of grin, "we're getting married."

"Oh, great, where are you thinking about going?" the employee asked.

"Uh," Steve said, looking over at the screen, "New Jersey."

Auralie rolled her eyes, "there visiting family there, then heading for Hawaii." Leave it to Steve to make up something so ridiculous, she had to cover for him. Sometimes her friends were just a whole other level of overdramatic and ridiculous.

"Huh," the assistant commented, "you know, I have the exact same glasses." Auralie hid her laughter.

Natasha just smirked and said dryly, "wow, you're practically twins."

"I wish," the man said, gesturing to Steve and his muscles, "specimen. Well, if you need anything, I am Erin."

He left, and Auralie broke down into silent giggles, her shoulders shaking with the laughter. That whole interaction had been a train wreck to watch. Natasha and Steve ignored her, and they went to see what location the computer had brought up. Auralie quickly regained her composure and went over to see as well.

Steve's face had taken on an odd expression when he read the name. Natasha looked at the supersoldier and commented, "you knew it?"

Steve sighed, "I used to."

A/N: I know she's usually really serious and smart, but when she's sarcastic, she is insanely sarcastic. I guess I love the Winter Soldier part of the fanfic because I can let her humorous side show through, while still keeping Auralie as a deep character.

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