



vii. Sparring

Auralie had been at Shield for a month when it was time for her first combat training session with the famous Black Widow. Maria had told her not to be nervous, that Natasha Romano was a person, just like everyone else. While that might have been true, she was also an extremely talented woman, and was far more experienced than someone like Auralie.

Auralie entered the training room, dressed in the slightly too big gear she had been given, her hair pulled back in a ponytail, ready to meet Natasha. The spy was waiting for her, and Auralie gulped when she saw that Natasha was every bit as intimidating looking as she had heard.

Natasha seemed surprised that Auralie was on time, but just said, "I'm Agent Romano, or Natasha if you want to call me that. Now, I think we should start with seeing what you can do. I'm gonna need a demonstration of your powers so I know what I'm working with."

"Yes mam," Auralie replied politely. She held out her hands and allowed them to glow. She created so many beams and orbs of light. Then she showed how she could use her powers to heat things up and cause them to combust or disintegrate. She demonstrated how she could wrap light around herself to make herself invisible to the human eye. And finally she showed how she could warp light to create reflections, mirages or illusions of solid objects, including herself.

Natasha watched with interest. She turned to the girl, "you seem to have advanced control over your powers. You are self taught?"

Auralie nodded, "yes, except for this past month, Maria has been having me try new things and exercise my powers."

"How did you find the time to teach yourself while living in the orphanage and attending school," Natasha asked, trying to figure out the best way to instruct the teen.

Auralie sighed, "I'm an insomniac, so when I couldn't sleep I either read or worked with my powers. I suppose 6 years of it paid off."

Natasha smirked a bit, "probably. Now, let's see your hand to hand combat skills. Try and hold your own against me. I won't go easy on you, but we have to see how long you last. No powers. You alright with that?"

Auralie nodded, she and Maria had done several similar tests. Natasha took her to the mats and they began to spar.

Naturally, Natasha won within the minute, but then something odd happened. Auralie, who had hit the mat on her side, kicked Natasha in the shin. It wasn't a real move, or a fair one, but it shocked the Black Widow long enough for the blonde teen to pop up, fists raised in defense.

Natasha backed away, "whoa there kid, didn't anyone tell you that sparring ends when someone hits the mat?"

"But that's not how real fighting works," Auralie argued, "in real fighting, you have to play every advantage."

"Smart thinking," Natasha agreed, "but Shield training uses the hit the mat method."

"But I don't want to be a regular Shield agent. I want to be one of the best, like Maria, so I can actually change things for the better instead of running around firing a gun when anyone tells me to. Maria says that she'll have me trained like that," Auralie argued.

The assassin cocked her head, "really? Then why'd she send you to me?"

Auralie answered, "because you're one of the best there is. If you train me to be like you or Maria instead of like a normal Shield agent, I can be far stronger."

"That's hardcore training, and takes a lot of effort," Natasha countered.

Auralie replied, "I'm willing to do what it takes."

Natasha nodded, that small smirk creeping back onto her face, "alright kid, let's start with some balance and centering. What do you know about ballet?"

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3 months later, Auralie had made huge progress in her training with Natasha and Maria. She had even begun weapons training with a man named Clint Barton, AKA Hawkeye, who was really cool, even if he made a lot of dad jokes and drank too much coffee. However, there was one thing on the teen's mind. Natasha knew so much, but never revealed how she became so good at her job. Auralie was a curious girl, so one day, she decided to ask.

Natasha's reply was, "We're done for the day Auralie."

Auralie knew she had struck a nerve with the assassin and decided she wouldn't ask again. But even more than that, she had a feeling that she had somehow failed.

Two days later, she found a file open on the computer in the apartment she shared with Maria. Natasha's file. It made sense that Maria would have it, and the spy was scheduled to go on a mission with the assassin, and therefore would brush up on their knowledge of each other. Maria and Natasha were friends, and Maria always looked through her teammates files before the mission as a force of habit.

Maria had gone out for groceries, and Auralie was so tempted to have the answers to her questions. She wanted the knowledge so bad, but she hesitated.

If Natasha wanted to keep her life private, Auralie wasn't going to get in the way. She had come to like the assassin, and Natasha didn't seem to hate her. They had a good dynamic, her, Natasha, Clint, and Maria, and Auralie didn't want to ruin this fragile home she had only gotten a bit ago, but had come to care for.

Plus, Auralie knew what it was like to have a weird past, and she didn't really want people knowing everything about her without permission. She wouldn't disrespect her trainer by invading her privacy.

She walked away from the computer. Little did she know, that she had passed the test and not given into temptation. She didn't realize that her sister and her trainers were proud, and even if she had known, she wouldn't have confronted them. Auralie just went back to her book, and stopped thinking about the computer as best as she could.

Her smarts and respect were rewarded when Natasha told her about the Red Room during their next training session. The assassin expected the girl to be horrified, but Auralie just respected Natasha more for being able to come out of their with a decent set of morals.

Then the light bender told Natasha her story, and Natasha found that she admired this young child with a broken heart who just wanted to make the world better. Anyone who could trek through the fire and come out wanting to help others was alright in her book. After all, if good people like Clint hadn't helped her, Natasha would be dead.

In a way they were similar. Natasha had become a sister to Clint and joined Shield, Auralie had become a sister to Maria and joined Shield. And those similarities and respect let their relationship to change. Now, they could each say they considered the other a friend.

After the stories were told, Auralie looked Natasha in the eyes and said, "you know you can call me Ali if you want, everyone does."

Natasha smiled, "and by everyone you mean Clint and Maria."

Auralie laughed, "yeah."

"Well," the assassin replied, "if I get to call you Ali, it's only fair that you get to call me Nat."

A/N: Nat and Auralie's friendship is one of the most important friendships that Auralie will have. It will definitely play a large roll in the first part, particularly the Winter Soldier part of this fanfiction.

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