



xxxii. Package for Tony Stank

A few days later, Tony was helping Rhodes practice walking with his new braces when there was a knock at the door. Tony turned to see a very old fed-ex delivery man standing there.

The old man called out, "excuse me, are you, Tony..... Stank?"

Before Tony could correct the old man, Rhodes called out, "yes, this is Tony Stank. Thank you, thank you for that."

Tony just sighed and went to sign for the package. Rhodey, meanwhile, was extraordinarily happy, and Tony knew that his new nickname wasn't going away any time soon. He had a fed-ex man..... Stan Lee, whoever that was, to thank for that.

"Table for one, Mr. Stank," Rhodes called, "by the bathroom."

Yeah, that definitely wasn't going away soon.

Tony opened the package at his desk to find a burner phone and two envelopes. He opened the first one to find a letter from Steve Rogers. He read through it, and though he was still endlessly mad at Steve for hiding that secret about his parents, part of him knew that it was irrational. It was not Barnes's fault. But the day for forgiveness would come long a er the hate and the grief. Maybe it wouldn't come at all.

If you need me.....Tony read before the phone went o .

"Stark, there's been a break-in at the ra ," Ross's voice came.

"Please hold," Tony said, a slight touch of amusement in his voice. He pressed hold, despite Ross's protests. He had some reading to finish.

Tony read the end of Steve's letter. I'll be there.

Tony knew what the phone had been made for. Tony knew that if he were to call, Steve would come. He hoped that day would never come. But he also knew, that with his crazy life, it probably would.

Taking a deep breath, he opened the other letter. It was written in pen, in semi-messy handwriting that Tony recognized to belong to his superpowered light-manipulator friend. He unfolded the paper and began to read.

Tony,

Hi..... I'm not really sure what to say. You've always been one of my close friends, but well, our lives have led us separate ways.

Alright. So, I guess I should start by saying, well, I didn't want us to fight. I hated the very idea of it. But we have dierent mindsets, di erent morals, and I guess it was inevitable. I couldn't support the very people who called me and Wanda monsters. You know I couldn't. I guess I just never thought it would end with us paying the price.

I'm not going to lie. I am angry. I am pissed as all hell. But I know it is not your fault. Just like what Bucky did is not his fault. None of us deserve the blame. That can be hard to see. But I hope that we can someday forgive each other. You will always be my friend Tony, and I hope that our paths cross again someday.

For now, don't worry about me. I am among some good friends. I will keep going. It will be alright. You too will find people to help you. You will be alright. We just have to keep moving forward and hope for the best.

I'd like to say I know what to do. I don't. I feel like I've lost all control. But maybe I'll find myself again. I'll miss you, Tony. I know Steve said we'd come if you need us. That's true. But not just if the world is at risk. If you personally need our help, we will come. It's what friends do. In the meantime, promise me one thing. Promise me that no matter what, you won't blame yourself. Because it is not your fault.

Your friend,

Auralie.

PS. You by no means have to do this, but I would appreciate it if you did. Can you make sure no one deletes my cartoons o the DVR at Avengers HQ?

Tony looked at the piece of paper. He thought of the broken thing in the cell that had looked at him with a world of hate. He hoped that Steve and the others would help her. He hoped she would find happiness with Wanda. She had been right all along. None of them were monsters. He had to remember that.

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Though Auralie said she was relatively ok in her letter, when Steve and Bucky and Natasha, who had apparently decided to run away with them, found her in her cell and rescued her, she was far from ok.

She had just been released from her cell, her wrists bloody with cuts from the cu s. There would be scars there, and right now she hurt, but not enough to care. She collapsed, sobbing, in Natasha's arms as Steve went to let the boys out.

"Auralie," Natasha held her tightly, like a sister or a mother would have, "Ali, what happened? Let me see."

Auralie held out her wrists and Natasha sucked in a breath. This was inhumane. They should not have ever done anything like this to anyone. Auralie blubbered, "Nat, Nat, Wanda, we need to save Wanda. They have her in one of those collars. They could kill her if they wanted."

"They won't kill her," Natasha soothed, taking Auralie by the hand as they went to go find Wanda.

"No," Auralie agreed, lighting up, anger blazing in her eyes, even as she cried, "I'll kill them all first. They even think of touching her, they're dead."

"That would kind of ruin the discreetness of this rescue," Natasha commented.

Auralie cried, "I hate them, Natasha. Why do we protect them? Why do we protect this world when they are so horrible? Why does it matter?"

Natasha looked her dead in the eyes, "Auralie, I know. I know you hurt. I know this is all so confusing. But you have to trust that not all the world is bad. You have to work with me here. Hold it together. We'll be out of this soon."

Auralie nodded and allowed herself to be pulled away.

They found Wanda and managed to get her out of that cell. Then Natasha made quick work of the collar. Though it went fast, it still hurt. Wanda screamed and Auralie had to look away. When she looked back, she found Wanda's neck looked similar to her hands, that was to say, a bloody mess covered in tiny cuts.

Natasha helped the shaking witch to her feet. Auralie had begun crying again. She breathed, "oh Wanda."

Wanda staggered into Auralie's arms, her frail body collapsing. Auralie held her up, sobbing. Wanda whispered, "Auralie thank goodness. I was so worried."

"I know," Auralie whispered back, her hand running through Wanda's hair.

Wanda murmured, "promise me you won't leave."

"I promise," Auralie sobbed into Wanda's shoulder, "Wanda there is no way in the world that I would ever leave you."

A/N: I think you all have noticed that her experiences in Civil War have not been kind. Auralie is very unsure and she no longer is certain the world is worth protecting. She has a lot of fear and anger. She's going to have a lot to work through. Fortunately, Wanda is here to help.

Continue reading next part