

Moving Forward

TRIGGER WARNING: Mentions of being forced into sexual situations.

After leaving the airport I'd gone the long way back to the house, making sure I wasn't being followed. The streets of New York were busy but I was always able to tell when someone's eyes were on me. Something you pick up on when you're on the run for as long as I had been. Once I was sure, I headed back through the alleyways.

Opening the door the last thing I expected was to be greeted by Loki jumping out, a dagger at my throat. "Whoa! Loki it's me!" He immediately removed the offending weapon and took a step back. "Sorry." He came in front of me while my hand rested on my throat. I had to hand it to him, it had been a while since someone was able to get a jump on me.

"When did you get back?" He looked different, older somehow. Walking into the living area I slumped down on the sofa, enjoying the way the soft cushions relieved some of the stress in my back. "Not long ago." I began to undo the laces on my boots as he came and sat in the chair opposite me. "What was all that about?" I gestured towards the hallway.

"They've been looking for me since I took Steve." That explained the stress he was wearing on his face, and why he looked different. His hair was short and brown rather than the long black that I was used to. He certainly blended in. Knowing they were looking for him still only meant one thing. "We'll find somewhere new tomorrow." Kicking off my boots I curled my legs up beside me. "Speaking of Steve, anything useful yet?"

Loki stood and walked to the small kitchen. He looked almost at home pulling cups out from the cupboard, and putting the kettle on. He dropped two teabags into the cups before leaning against the counter top. "Not yet. How did it go in Madripoor?" He turned back round as the kettle began to whistle. He poured the steaming water into the cups before walking over and handing me one. It wasn't one I drank tea, but the smells coming from this one had me intrigued. I gave him a confused look.

"It's Asgardian, just try it. Good for stress and has healing properties. By the looks of the bruises on your face, you could do with the help." This side of Loki was weird, it was almost as if he cared.

I nodded a thanks, not really sure what else to say. Taking a sip of the liquid I was shocked by how sweet it was. I could taste honey but the rest were flavours I couldn't quite place. Strange but nice.

"So Madripoor?" He asked as he sat back down.

"Yeah it went as well as can be expected. Another name on the list and no more serum."

We settled into a comfortable silence, it wasn't until Loki let out a deep sigh that the silence was broken. "We're running out of time." He only said what I already knew, but there was more to this for him. He'd made it clear from the start, his only concern was the tesseract. Technically I had no use for it now, I could give it to him and have him out of my life. Yet the idea of being alone didn't seem as appealing as it once did.

"Don't worry, you'll leave with the cube." I snapped.

"Winter..." I looked up to see a almost caring look coming from him. That was a look I didn't need or want to see, especially from someone I didn't particularly like. Being alone was better than having someone else care, so I made a decision. "I only needed it to get to the sceptre. To control Steve. Take it and leave."

Resting the cup on the table, he leant forward, arms resting on his knees. "What of the soldier?"

"James?" I couldn't help smirking as I sat back. "All in good time. I want to rip his world to shreds before I take his life."

"Then why go after the Captain?" I expected to hear judgement in his voice, but there wasn't any. He seemed genuinely curious. It wasn't something I'd ever had to explain to someone. Yet something told me I could tell him. "I need something stronger for that explanation." In a flash of green, the tea was replaced with a tumbler of whiskey. I let out a small laugh as I looked over at him, he was sat with a smug grin on his face. I downed the drink in one, smiling as the glass refilled itself. Taking a deep breath, I mirrored his position, leaning on my knees. "When I was at Hydra, I had more than just combat skills. They taught me how to use my body to gain information."

"He is known for revealing secrets after he's fucked his women. Make sure it's you." His hand swept across my cheek. His sly smile making my stomach churn. "Our soldiers have taught you well. Give him what he wants and come back with the information." He gripped my face painfully tight. "Unless you need more training. I'm sure Rumlow is more than happy to refresh your memory."

"I'll get it done." I grit out, not letting them see how sick I felt.

"I'm good at what I do. Steve made it easy, he is James' closest friend. Then he let slip that the sceptre could be used to control peoples thoughts. I saw a different way." I finally looked up from the ground to see him hanging on my every word. He was actually listening to me, which was new.

"Then let me show you how to use it." He stood and walked towards the case we kept the sceptre in.

Placing my drink down I stood up, wiping the condensation from the glass on my trousers. "Answer me one thing. Why do you suddenly care?"

He turned to me, a soft look in his eyes. Far from the hardened exterior I'd seen from him so far. "I may be a villain Winter, but what you've been through." He shook his head slightly. "No one should be violated in that way."

That's what the look was. Pity. Rage coursed through me as I launched my glass at the wall. "I don't need your pity!"

That's all anyone ever saw when they knew my story. Everyone except Bucky. "Fuck!" I screamed, my hands fisting in my hair as I turned away from Loki. The tears fell as my fist connected with the wall, over and over. I felt my skin crack but it did nothing to stop me.

Loki's arms appeared as he grabbed me from behind, holding my hands against my chest. He held me as I sobbed, finally letting the pain out. "It's not pity Winter. It's admiration."

"I don't want that either." I managed to croak out.

"Why not?"

"Because that means I care what you think, and I can't do that anymore."

I sagged against him and he held me as I sobbed. I sobbed for the life I should've had, for the firsts I should've had, the love I should feel. Everything had been taken from me, and I would allow myself one moment of weakness before I took my revenge. Before I ruined the lives that ruined mine.

Bucky knew exactly where to find Zemo. Sokovia. This time he went alone, this was personal and nothing to do with the Avengers. Walking up to the memorial for the lives that had been lost in the battle against Ultron, he saw him. Zemo stood wearing his long coat, fur lining the hood.

As Bucky approached him, Zemo didn't take his eyes off the names of his wife and children. "I thought you'd be here soon."

Bucky kept a straight face, his gun in his hand at his side. "You knew I wouldn't let you walk away."

Zemo turned and took a few steps towards him. "And what of Winter?"

"Why do you care?"

It was a good question, for all Winter's faults, there was something about her. She made you care without even trying. "Her mind is a fascinating thing. She will stop at nothing to enact her revenge. You may be the only one able to stop her."

"Why would you want me to?" Bucky kept a straight face, remembering what Zemo had done to him in the past. Why would someone so full of hate, want to help?

"My revenge means I'll spend the rest of my life locked away. She's been locked away enough." His eyes met Bucky's, hoping that he would listen to him. Winter's hate for Bucky was well known but even Zemo could see it was a mask. It was an outlet for all the pain she was in. The thing about masks is that at some point they have to be taken off.

Bucky said nothing, raising his arm, his gun in line with Zemo's face. Zemo gave him a nod in understanding, this was what he deserved. The pair stared at each other, no words needed. Then Bucky squeezed the trigger, the gun clicked but nothing happened.

Opening his palm, Bucky let the shells fall to the floor. The gun was never loaded.

"You protected her." He would let Zemo live, locked away for the rest of his life. His need for revenge quelled by the fact Zemo stopped Winter being arrested.

Now he just had to fight to find his girl.

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