



## xxi. Undeserved Hate

"Hey," Steve called, standing in the door of Wanda's room. She was sitting on her bed, Auralie sprawled beside her. This was a familiar sight, the two spending time together, but now they were not laughing, their faces were riddled with pain.

"It's my fault," Wanda looked down, not meeting his eyes. Steve came over and turned on the news, which was completely hating on Wanda. Auralie's blood boiled. The politicians never realized how hard it was, to have to make choices, to have to sacrifice. Everyone expected superheroes to be perfect, then punished them when they weren't. Auralie was sick of it.

"That's not true," Steve replied.

Wanda looked up and said sarcastically, "turn the TV back on, they're being very specific."

"It's not your fault Wanda. We should have helped you instead of standing there gaping," Auralie slipped her hand into the other girl's and intertwined their fingers.

"It's on all of us," Steve agreed.

Auralie met Wanda's eyes, "but we'll get through it. Together."

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Soon they were seated before General Ross, who had wanted to meet with them. Even though it was on short notice and at a bad time. Still, they couldn't refuse. Auralie sat beside Wanda, and the rest of the team who had gone to Lagos was there. So were Rhodes, Tony, and Vision. Clint was at home, so they would fill him in later.

"New York," Ross said, as he showed them a presentation of all the destruction they were accused of calling. Auralie watched, her face blank, as she saw the Hulk attacking the Chitauri and causing a lot of damage in the process. Which wasn't really fair, they were trying to save the world.

"Washington DC," Ross flipped the slide to show the helicarriers crashing down. Auralie bristled. They were trying to keep Hydra from killing millions. It wasn't as though being a superhero was an exact science.

Ross added, "Sokovia." Auralie looked at Wanda and saw the girl had tensed up as she watched the buildings fall. It was taking all of Auralie's willpower not to scream. How could they accuse Wanda and the rest of the team of causing the fall of the city? The Avengers were the ones who evacuated the city. Wanda had not only lost her home, but also the only person she had loved and now they thought they could blame her. What kind of world was this?

He finished up, "Lagos." Wanda looked down and Auralie took her hand.

"That's enough," Steve declared, looking at the two girls. Ross shut it down.

"Why are we being attacked for this? The destruction was an accident and we're trying to fix it," Auralie said, her voice shaky, but getting stronger as she kept talking, "we saved so many lives in New York, DC, and Sokovia. We tried to do the same in Lagos. We failed, but I don't think we deserve to have control ripped from our hands."

"The Avengers are dangerous," Ross said, "Ms. Shadow, enhanced individuals like yourself and Ms. Maximoff are a threat to the public if not properly handled."

"Most of us didn't ask to be this way. You shouldn't get to treat us like we're monsters just because we're different. Because let me tell you something, it isn't the first time I've had to deal with people who hate me because I don't fit their definition of normal, and I won't stand for it," Auralie was close to yelling now, "and didn't the government try to NUKIE the city of New York, and they're blaming us for knocking over some buildings?"

"Ms. Shadow, please, control your temper," Ross snapped.

"I have the right to stand against injustice. You're trying to force us into giving up control and submit to your agenda and giving us practically no time to think about it. I think I should get to be mad," Auralie cried, standing up, still holding Wanda's hand. She realized how tightly she was squeezing it, and quickly released her friend's hand.

"Ali," Natasha warned before turning to Ross, "what if we come to an agreement you don't like?"

"Then you retire," he replied curtly. Natasha had to smirk at that. The idea of people like her and Steve and Auralie doing anything other than being Avengers or superheroes or even vigilantes was a little far-fetched.

"So unfair," Auralie muttered bitterly, taking her seat. She didn't speak out again, but her scowl just became more intense. It was clear that she was about to blow. Wanda took her friend's hand once more. Their lives were yet again thrown into disaster. Wanda hoped all these people that she had come to appreciate having in her life would make it through. Especially Auralie.

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Sam and Rhodey were arguing, Steve was reading the Sokovia Accords, Wanda and Vision were sitting on one of the couches, being quiet, Auralie was standing beside Wanda, not being quiet. Nat was looking at Tony with concern.

"Tony, you're being uncharacteristically non-hyperverbal," Natasha said.

"Oh, sorry, just lost in thought," he said, getting up and going over to the garbage disposal system. He looked down and sighed, "who keeps putting coffee grounds in the garbage disposal. What am I, running a bed and breakfast for slobs?"

He brought up the image of a picture of a boy, "oh, that's Charles Spencer by the way. Great Kid. Gets good grades, excepted to college. But before he went on to school, he wanted to see the world, put a few miles on his soul. Only instead of going to London or Paris like I would have done, he decided to spend his summer building houses for people in need. Guess where. Sokovia."

The room was silent.

Tony continued, "I guess he wanted to make a difference in the world. We'll never know though because we dropped a building on him while we were kicking ass."

"We need this," Tony finished.

"I know we've made mistakes. But we weren't the ones who put those lives in danger, we tried to save them. This is just absolving Loki and Ultron and Hydra and Crossbones of the blame," Auralie argued.

"The safest hands are still our own," Steve said, nodding to Auralie. The light manipulator nodded back, but fear danced in her brain. The team seemed to be unraveling over this, and though Auralie knew exactly what she believed, it pained her to fight with Natasha and Tony, who had been her friends for so long. She didn't want to fight them, but she also wasn't going to stand for this.

Tony stamped his foot down, "if we don't do this now, it's going to be done to us!"

"You're saying they'll come for me," Wanda summed up, her face unreadable.

"We would protect you," Vision tried to reassure her.

"She doesn't need protection, she's not a child, Wanda is a strong woman who can look out for herself," Auralie retorted, "but we will stand behind her and make sure she stays free and help her if she needs us. Or, I will, even if no one else will."

Wanda blushed and muttered her thanks. Auralie's scowl lessened as she looked at the witch.

Then she saw Wanda looking at his phone. He had sunk down onto the couch. Then, a moment later, he got back up and left. Sam and Auralie exchanged looks and followed their friend out.

Steve had his head in his hands. Wordlessly, he passed Auralie the phone. Sam placed a hand on Steve's shoulder.

Auralie read the text. Peggy Carter, one of the only people Steve had loved from his past, one of the most important people to the supersoldier, was gone.

"Oh Steve," Auralie said. Her poor friend. Steve would already be having hard days ahead, with the accords and the government, but this would just be pure horrible for him. He looked up, tears running down his face and Auralie wrapped her arms around him, hugging him. He didn't deserve this. None of her friends deserved all the pain they had gotten.

That was why it would be so hard for Auralie to fight them. Because she knew it would hurt them, and she didn't want them to have to deal with any more pain.

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