

# Marvel Manifestor

## Chapter 91 - 91 – Ross Makes His Move

BOOM—BOOM—BOOM!

Meteor after meteor slammed into the ground, each impact fiercer than the last. Explosions roared through Chinatown, shaking the earth itself. The streets were left cratered and broken, dozens of pits gouged into the ground, each over three meters wide.

The Hulk's massive body had long since vanished beneath the blinding firestorms and raging shockwaves. The ground trembled, the air screamed, and the searing heat made the world feel like it was boiling over.

When the smoke and dust finally settled, the scene was one of utter ruin.

In the center of a massive crater lay a thin, naked man—his skin pale, his body weak, his eyes closed. Bruce Banner.

He was unconscious, the Hulk gone.

Lucas strode toward him, with Tony arriving just a heartbeat later. Around them, both S.H.I.E.L.D. agents and military soldiers were closing in fast. Their intentions were obvious—they all wanted Bruce Banner... or rather, the Hulk.

"He can't fall into any of their hands," Lucas said coldly. "Not S.H.I.E.L.D.'s."

"Agreed," Tony replied. "And especially not the military. Those warmongers only see weapons, not people."

The two men exchanged a knowing glance.

"Wake him up first," Lucas said.

Tony nodded, popped open a small compartment on his gauntlet, and pulled out a compact electric stimulator. Without hesitation, he pressed it to Bruce's chest.

Zzzzap!

A flash of electricity jolted through Bruce's body. He spasmed violently and gasped awake with a pained yell.

"Ahhh—!"

Every nerve felt like it was on fire.

"Dr. Banner," Tony said dryly, "now's not the time to enjoy the sensation. Take a look around, Superstar."

Bruce blinked, dazed, then slowly looked around at the wreckage.

"Where's... Abomination?" he asked.

What he saw was ruin—collapsed buildings, burning wrecks, streets torn apart. But no sign of his monstrous counterpart.

Tony pointed toward a smoking pile of rubble. "That yellow-skinned freak's probably buried over there somewhere. Maybe just pieces of him."

Bruce let out a long breath, relief washing over his face. "Good. Good... as long as he's gone."

"Bad news, Doc," Tony said, glancing toward the approaching soldiers. "You see that crowd? They're all here for you."

Bruce followed his gaze—and froze. A wall of soldiers and black-suited agents was marching straight toward them, led by none other than General Ross. His expression was a storm of fury and greed.

"I... I have to go," Bruce stammered. "If they capture me, it's over. They'll never stop. They'll just make more monsters. I have to disappear—now."

Lucas nodded once. "Then go, Doctor. Don't look back."

Bruce didn't need to be told twice. He turned and bolted down the ruined street, vanishing into the smoke and debris.

"Stop him! Don't let him get away! After him!"

Ross's voice boomed like a cannon as he pointed furiously. Soldiers rushed forward—

—but their path was suddenly blocked as a gleaming blade struck the ground before them with a metallic clang.

"Take one more step," Lucas said evenly, "and you die."

His tone was calm. Deadly calm.

"You dare interfere with a military operation?!" Ross barked, his face flushing red. "That man is U.S. property! You're obstructing government business! You're committing treason against the United States of America!"

The words rolled off Lucas like rain on steel. Ross could throw his "authority" around all he wanted—it meant nothing here.

Before Lucas could respond, Tony stepped up beside him. Moments later, Gwen and Peter swung down from above, and Skye came running up to join them. Together, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Lucas.

"General Ross," Tony said with a half-smile, "we're old acquaintances, so let's skip the speeches. Everything that happened here has been recorded. I'll be sending it straight to the Pentagon. Every inch of damage to Chinatown—every casualty—lands squarely on you. You might want to start drafting your resignation letter."

Ross's jaw locked. Tony's words hit hard because they were true. The Pentagon would crucify him for this disaster—and S.H.I.E.L.D.'s presence only made it worse.

The agents behind him were also itching to move, but Coulson raised a hand to stop them. He already understood—Tony and Lucas had let Banner go on purpose. And trying to stop them now would only make things worse.

Ross, however, wasn't ready to give up. His ambition burned hotter than his common sense. Lucas's power fascinated him—if he couldn't get Banner, then maybe this man would do.

"Lucas," he said, straightening his uniform, "I'm placing you under arrest for obstructing a military operation."

He snapped his fingers. "Men—take him!"

Several soldiers raised their rifles, stepping forward cautiously.

"I dare you," Gwen hissed, stepping in front of Lucas like a lioness guarding her cub.

Skye joined her, both hands raised. Vibrations rippled through the air, the ground trembling under her feet. The faint hum built like an engine charging up—a warning of the earthquake she was about to unleash.

Ross, unfazed, gave a mocking chuckle. "You two really think you can stand against trained soldiers? Think carefully, boy. You wouldn't want to endanger your family, would you?"

That word—family—snapped something in Lucas.

The air around him dropped a few degrees as emerald energy surged outward. Wind whipped into a vortex, howling through the ruins. His eyes glowed an unearthly green.

Gwen's teeth clenched so hard they nearly cracked. Ross's words had hit her too—he was talking about her family, the Stacys. The fury in her chest burned hotter than fear.

Skye's expression hardened as she extended her arms toward the soldiers. The tremor in the air intensified, her power flaring despite the pain. She didn't care if it shattered her arms again—she wanted Ross gone.

"Ross," Lucas said, his voice low but cutting through the wind like thunder. "You die here. Not even Jesus can save you."

The green storm thickened around him, blades of wind slicing through the debris. The sky itself seemed to darken in response to his rage.

Across the field, Natasha watched quietly. She didn't move to stop him. She had already warned Ross once. If he still chose to court death, then death was exactly what he'd get.

Coulson tensed, instinctively stepping forward—but Natasha caught his arm.

"Don't," she said softly. "The Director already knows. Ross brought this on himself."

Coulson hesitated, then nodded grimly and backed away.

Tony, meanwhile, was smirking inside his helmet. He had zero sympathy for Ross. If the man got himself killed, that was his own fault—and Tony had enough influence in the military to make sure Lucas wouldn't face consequences for it.

So instead of stopping him, Tony simply folded his arms and muttered,

"Well, this should be entertaining."

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## **Chapter 92 - 92 – The Mysterious Squad**

When Lucas suddenly lost control, General Ross instantly realized something was wrong.

Yet, surrounded by dozens of armed soldiers and S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, he still felt untouchable.

He was convinced that Lucas wouldn't dare attack a U.S. general—not unless he wanted to be hunted down by the entire military-industrial complex.

After all, killing an American general was no small matter. No matter how powerful Lucas was, he couldn't withstand the wrath of jets and tanks.

"Atmospheric Burst!"

Lucas's furious shout shattered Ross's arrogant fantasy.

He didn't hesitate—he struck.

"No! You can't—! I'm a general of the United States! I represent the government itself! This is treason!"

Ross's words were drowned out by the deafening roar of wind.

A massive emerald tornado erupted from Lucas's hands, swallowing the soldiers in front of him. Within the swirling vortex, green energy flared and twisted, tearing everything apart. The air filled with screams and the sounds of rending metal and flesh.

Ross stared in horror.

He never imagined Lucas would truly dare to strike, much less so mercilessly.

The blood drained from his face. His entire body trembled with primal terror—gone was the calm, commanding general. All that remained was a pathetic clown standing before a force of nature.

"Wind Rend!"

Lucas pointed at him. In an instant, razor-sharp green claws materialized before Ross, shredding the air and raking across his body.

"NO! Stop! Please—!"

A desperate voice cried out.

Betty Ross, tears streaming down her face, sprinted toward them. She threw herself in front of Lucas, kneeling on the broken ground.

"Please! I beg you—spare my father! I swear he'll never come after you or your family again! I'll do anything! If you want a life, take mine! Just... please don't kill him!"

Her cries were raw and broken. She had already lost the man she loved—now her only remaining family was about to die before her eyes. It was unbearable.

Lucas's expression didn't soften. Ross had dared to threaten his family—he saw no reason to care about Ross's. He didn't even glance at Betty.

But beside him, Gwen and Skye exchanged troubled looks.

Their hearts couldn't bear it.

Both of them were kind by nature. Even though they knew Ross deserved punishment, watching Betty's anguish tore at them.

"Lucas," Gwen whispered, "please... don't kill him. Give him a lesson he'll never forget—but let him live."

"Yeah," Skye added softly. "He's not worth staining your hands with his blood."

Lucas exhaled sharply. Seeing the two of them plead, he finally waved his hand. The storm of blades stopped abruptly.

Even so, Ross's chest was torn open, his body covered in blood. He lay half-dead on the ground, barely clinging to life.

"I'll spare him—for their sake," Lucas said, his voice cold and devoid of mercy.

"But if he ever dares touch my family again... next time, there won't even be ashes left."

Betty nodded frantically, sobbing. "He won't! I promise, he won't ever come after you again!"

She rushed to her father's side, checking his pulse. Seeing that he was still breathing, she pulled out her phone, her trembling fingers dialing for an ambulance.

Natasha, who had been silent all this time, finally sighed. "Enough. Agents—get Ross to a hospital. Don't waste the girl's tears."

Lucas turned away, his expression unchanged.

"You went soft again," Tony said with a grin, clapping him on the shoulder. "But hey—I'm with you. Never argue with a beautiful woman. Especially when she's your woman."

He gave a dramatic shrug. "Still, I'll give you this—Betty's gorgeous. Shame about her father. Ross has been throwing his weight around the military for years; arrogance and paranoia like that don't die easy. Guess this will teach him some humility."

Lucas shot Tony a glare. "Oh please. Talking about arrogance? You practically invented it, Tony Stark."

Tony's helmet retracted, revealing a wounded expression. "Excuse me? I'm the least arrogant man in New York! I'm a philanthropist—generous, approachable, kind-hearted! I've been named Charity Ambassador three years in a row!"

Lucas snorted. "Right. Maybe you meant 'average man's best friend.'"

"You little punk," Tony muttered. "You're impossible to like."

Lucas just shrugged, ignoring him, and walked over to Coulson.

"Clean-up's on you," he said casually. "I'm out. Bye-bye~~"

Without waiting for a response, he turned and walked away.

Coulson sighed helplessly.

It was always like this. Lucas caused a scene, blew up half a district, and S.H.I.E.L.D. had to sweep up the mess—and the Director always approved it. It was exhausting.

Tony flew back to his mansion, while Lucas strolled through the city with Gwen and Skye, chatting as if nothing had happened. When they got tired, they slipped into the Chocobo Dimension to rest—or simply teleported home.

Peter, meanwhile, trudged back to his house in Queens, covered in dust and disappointment.

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Later that night, back at the apartment, Lucas placed a new item inside his Trophy Display Case: a small vial of green blood—the Hulk's blood.

Now his collection held four trophies:

Sand from Flint Marko, the Sandman.

A gauntlet piece from Iron Monger, Obadiah Stane.

A vampire's fang.

And the freshly acquired vial of Hulk's blood.

The so-called Demon Hunter System insisted he collect these "trophies," claiming they were marks of honor and symbols of power.

"What a load of crap," Lucas muttered. "Dante collects trophies because he enjoys it. His power doesn't need validation."

But every time he protested, the system threatened to "unbound" from him, and Lucas had no choice but to comply. Still, deep down, he swore—

One day, when I'm strong enough, I'll make that damn system regret it.

After washing up, the three of them collapsed into bed, exhaustion finally catching up.

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Meanwhile, in a dimly lit room not far from Lucas's apartment, a different kind of preparation was underway.

A dozen heavily armed operatives moved with silent precision, checking their weapons and gear.

"This is our target," said the squad captain, tossing several dossiers onto the table. "The order is clear: capture him alive."

Each soldier picked up a file and studied it carefully.

In the corner, a man sat silently on a sofa—a buzz-cut soldier with a cold, emotionless face. His most striking feature was his arm—entirely metallic, gleaming under the light.

"Read your intel and get ready," the captain ordered. "We move out at 0300 sharp."

One of the men nodded toward the silent figure on the sofa. "Captain, is he coming too?"

"He's our secret weapon," the captain replied. "He won't act unless absolutely necessary."

He shot a brief glance at the metal-armed man, then looked away quickly. Everyone knew what he was—a weapon in human form.

No mercy. No emotion.

Just an order-following machine.

And when unleashed, nothing could stop him.

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## Chapter 93 - 93 – The Winter Soldier

It was 3 a.m.—the hour when most people slept the deepest, and when the shadows worked most freely.

A heavily armed strike team arrived at their destination: an ordinary-looking apartment building.

Their target—Lucas's apartment.

"The target is inside. Move in."

At the captain's command, the squad immediately divided into groups. A sniper took position on the rooftop opposite the building, rifle trained on the windows, ready to provide overwatch.

Team A would infiltrate through the ventilation system, while Team B prepared to storm the main entrance.

"Go, go, go!"

With practiced precision, the two groups launched into motion.

Inside the apartment, Moguli—the fluffy white moogle—had already stirred from sleep.

Its beady eyes glowed faintly as it stared at the door, as if sensing something.

"Ku-poh~~"

With a thoughtful hum, it waved its tiny staff. A swirl of seven-colored energy rippled through the air before fading almost instantly—vanishing as if it had never been.

Meanwhile, on the rooftop, the infiltration team had begun cutting through the ventilation ducts.

But within moments, their diamond-edged saws began to dull—and still, the ducts remained unscathed. Not a single scratch.

"Captain, the vents are made of something crazy tough! The cutter's useless—it won't even leave a mark!"

The captain, listening from below, cursed under his breath. "Useless idiots. Forget stealth—front assault! Prepare to breach!"

At his signal, one operative moved to pick the lock, while another tried to hack the building's network to disable all surveillance feeds.

Minutes dragged on. Ten, fifteen...

The captain's patience snapped. "What the hell's taking so long?!"

"The lock's weird," the locksmith grunted. "Looks simple, but the mechanism's insanely complex. I need more time."

"And the network's a fortress," the hacker added. "Layered encryption—whoever lives here knows their tech."

"Shit. Enough! Plant explosives—we're going in hard. Sniper, cover the approach. Team B, place charges on the rooftop vent!"

"Roger that!"

"Affirmative!"

Within seconds, plastic explosives were set on both the front door and the vent openings.

"Three... two... one—detonate!"

BOOM!

Twin explosions rocked the night. Smoke and dust burst outward—

But when it cleared... both the door and vents were completely untouched.

"What the hell?!"

The captain's eyes widened. "That's impossible! Even the CIA doesn't have this kind of security!"

"Damn it!" he roared. "Get the Winter Soldier. It's his turn."

Without a word, the metal-armed man stepped forward.

His left arm gleamed coldly in the dim light—built from an alloy strong enough to punch through tank armor.

He drew back his fist and slammed it against the door.

BOOM!

But instead of shattering, a shimmering seven-colored barrier flared to life, absorbing the blow with a dull thud.

He struck again and again, metal clashing against the unseen shield—yet the barrier remained perfectly intact.

Outside, the noise from the explosions and pounding had already drawn attention. Lights flickered on in neighboring apartments, and the distant wail of sirens grew louder.

A patrol car rounded the corner—someone had reported the disturbance.

"Damn it! Cops incoming!" the sniper warned.

"Abort mission! Pull out!"

The captain didn't hesitate. The team scattered into the shadows just moments before the NYPD arrived on scene.

The two groups passed like ghosts—one fading away as the other rolled up to investigate.

And inside the apartment?

Lucas slept soundly, snoring like a log—completely oblivious to the chaos outside.

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The special ops team retreated to their safehouse, frustration heavy in the air.

"Captain," one of them said, handing over a satellite phone, "the building's not normal. Even the Winter Soldier couldn't break through. Command's calling. What do we tell them?"

"I'll handle it."

The captain stepped aside and answered the encrypted call.

"Report."

The voice on the other end was cold, deep, and commanding.

"The mission failed, sir," the captain said carefully.

"Explain."

He swallowed. "The target's apartment is... fortified. Unbreakable doors, impossible network security. Even the Winter Soldier was ineffective."

Silence lingered for a few seconds. Then the voice spoke again.

"Then draw him out. I don't care how. We must capture him alive. He's a key piece in our grand design—failure is not an option."

"Yes, sir. I understand."

The captain's voice lowered, respectful and solemn. "Hail Hydra."

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The next morning, Lucas finally learned about the attack—when Skye showed him the surveillance footage.

"HAHAHAHA! Oh—oh my god—ahahahah!!!"

Lucas laughed so hard he nearly fell off the couch. "A whole professional strike team, and they spent the night... lighting fireworks at my door!"

Gwen and Skye both facepalmed.

"That's your takeaway?!" Skye snapped. "They attacked your apartment, Lucas!"

Lucas waved it off. "What's there to worry about? With Moguli on watch, who could possibly get in? Thanos himself would take one look and turn around."

Gwen frowned. "Aren't you at least curious who sent them? Armed commandos don't just break into random apartments!"

Lucas's smile faded slightly. "If I had to guess—Ross. The old bastard must've sent them. Gave him a scare last night, and he still hasn't learned his lesson."

He pulled out his phone and made a rare call.

"Now this is a surprise," Nick Fury's dry voice came through. "The famous Mr. Norman calling me? Did Tony put you up to this, or are you finally bored of peace and quiet?"

"Cut the sarcasm, Black Egg," Lucas said flatly.

The nickname had spread throughout S.H.I.E.L.D. like wildfire—though no one dared say it to Fury's face. The Director's temper had grown so foul that agents now swore his office was haunted by pure resentment.

Lucas rolled his eyes. "My apartment was attacked last night. A squad of armed operatives. Don't tell me your people didn't notice."

"Motherfu—what?!" Fury's tone shifted immediately. "No one reported this!"

"Check your surveillance team," Lucas said. "Either they're deaf or dead asleep. Skye's sending you the footage now. Maybe rotate your babysitters—they're useless."

As soon as he finished, Skye tapped send—

and the video of the failed Hydra assault began uploading straight to Fury's terminal.

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## Chapter 94 - 94 – Hydra Resurfaces

"I've received the footage," Nick Fury said, eyes fixed on the screen as he reviewed the recording Skye had sent. "By the way, that girl—Skye—you really ought to let her join S.H.I.E.L.D. Someone with her kind of talent belongs in my organization, not wasting her potential playing sidekick to you."

He sounded half-admiring, half-irritated. For days, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s top cybersecurity experts had been tearing their hair out, unable to figure out how Skye had slipped a backdoor into their own internal network. To Fury, she was a rare gem—a top-tier hacker the world could count on one hand. Seeing her follow Lucas around like a pet hacker drove him mad.

Lucas snorted. "Cut the recruitment pitch. You and I both know who Skye really is—and she's safer with me than with you. You should be more worried about cleaning up your own house."

He wasn't going to hand Skye over to S.H.I.E.L.D. No chance. Fury already knew her background—he'd dug up every last detail once Skye's Inhuman abilities had awakened.

Fury sighed. "Believe it or not, I agree with you—at least for now. Her identity stays classified. The Inhumans are... complicated, and there are far more of them than we thought. It's not the right time to make contact."

He spoke wearily, but Lucas could hear the undercurrent of frustration. Fury had been quietly pouring resources into investigating the Inhumans, even tracing Skye's biological parents.

Lucas shrugged. "Suit yourself. Just saying—you guys at S.H.I.E.L.D. might want to do some spring cleaning."

Fury's tone hardened. "Don't worry about my agency, Mr. Norman. You've got theories—fine. Who do you think sent those soldiers last night?"

"I'm betting on Ross," Lucas replied immediately. "That old bastard's never been one to take a beating lying down. I nearly killed him yesterday—of course he'd want payback."

But Fury quickly shut that down. "Impossible. Ross is still in intensive care, under twenty-four-hour surveillance. There's no way it was his doing."

Lucas's voice turned dry. "Twenty-four-hour surveillance, huh? Like the way your agents have been 'watching' me? Remind me, how'd that go last night?"

The sarcasm hit Fury like a slap.

"You little punk—" he growled, rubbing his temple. "Listen to me, kid. I'll find out who those commandos were. Just don't go off half-cocked. If you start breaking things again, even I won't be able to clean up your mess."

"Relax," Lucas said casually. "They come after me, they pay the price. Otherwise, we're fine. Peace on Earth, right?"

"Peace my ass!" Fury exploded. "Do you have any idea how much trouble you're in already? The military's labeled you a potential threat. If I hadn't been running interference, they'd have slapped you with an arrest order by now!"

Fury slumped back in his chair, muttering curses under his breath. Between Tony Stark and Lucas Norman, he was developing stress wrinkles faster than classified files.

Tony was a spoiled genius with no off-switch; Lucas, on the other hand, was pure chaos in human form—a walking retaliation engine. The two of them together were his personal nightmare.

Still... Fury admitted one thing to himself: neither man was truly evil. One was too reckless, the other too lazy. But lazy troublemakers were still better than zealots bent on destruction.

Lucas chuckled. "Like I said—if they don't mess with me, we'll all get along just fine."

"God damn it!" Fury snapped and hung up before his blood pressure could climb any higher.

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"How'd it go?" Gwen asked when Lucas put his phone down.

"Not Ross," Lucas said with a frown. "Weird. I haven't pissed off anyone else recently. Who the hell would it be?"

He racked his brain, but came up empty. Everyone who'd crossed him before was already six feet under—or worse.

Skye, still analyzing the video frame by frame, suddenly froze. Her eyes widened. "Lucas! Look at this!"

Both Lucas and Gwen leaned closer.

"That metal arm..." Lucas muttered. Then his eyes went wide. "No way—that's the Winter Soldier!"

Gwen and Skye jumped at his sudden outburst. Gwen smacked him on the shoulder. "God, don't yell like that! What's wrong with you?"

Ignoring her, Lucas's expression darkened. "That means either I—or this building—has caught Hydra's attention."

The name alone was enough to make the room fall silent.

Gwen frowned. "Hydra? You mean that Nazi science cult from the Captain America stories?"

"Exactly," Lucas said. "Which is why I want you to call your dad. Tell him to bring your mom and brother here for a few days. Safer that way."

She hesitated but nodded, seeing he was serious.

As soon as she stepped away, Lucas redialed Fury's number.

"I know who sent those men," he said when the line clicked.

"Already?!" Fury was incredulous. "I just dispatched a team to look into it!"

Lucas didn't waste time. "You saw the guy with the metal arm in the footage, right? That's not just anyone. He's a brainwashed super-soldier—same serum as Captain America. They call him the Winter Soldier. He works for Hydra."

The name hit Fury like a punch. His mind flashed back through classified reports, ancient files—then his face hardened.

"Don't tell me you're saying—"

"You guessed it," Lucas cut in. "Hydra. The Winter Soldier was one of theirs. The squad last night? Hydra operatives."

He spoke evenly, but the suppressed anger in his tone was unmistakable.

"Bullshit!" Fury barked. "Hydra was wiped out after World War II. Rogers took out the Red Skull himself. We purged every last trace of them!"

Lucas raised an eyebrow. "You really think Hydra just disappeared? Their motto ring any bells?"

Fury fell silent. Lucas said it for him.

> "Cut off one head, and two shall take its place."

"Exactly," Lucas said coolly. "You think an organization that literally tells you they'll regrow isn't going to regrow? Hydra didn't die—they moved in. If you ask me, your so-called S.H.I.E.L.D. 'integration program' after the war was the dumbest idea anyone's ever had. Either pure idiocy... or inside sabotage."

Fury's expression tightened. He didn't want to admit it, but the possibility was gnawing at him.

Could Hydra have been growing inside his own agency all this time?

He let out a low, bitter laugh. "Here I thought I was the one protecting the world. Turns out I couldn't even see the snake coiled under my own desk."

Lucas shrugged. "Better start looking before it bites you. And try not to let Hydra lead you by the nose next time."

He ended the call without another word, leaving Fury fuming in silence.

He'd done it on purpose—teased the Black Egg just enough to keep him guessing.

After all, even if Lucas told him the truth—that S.H.I.E.L.D. was already Hydra's shell—Fury wouldn't believe it.

And honestly? Lucas couldn't care less. Watching Fury squirm was entertainment enough.

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## Chapter 95 - 95 – The Abduction

That evening, George and his family moved into Lucas's apartment. The NYPD captain had finally learned the truth about who his daughter and her boyfriend really were.

Lucas's powers he could just about stomach—he'd seen enough weirdness in New York to believe anything—but finding out his daughter was the masked "Ghost Spider" nearly gave the poor man a heart attack.

It took both Lucas and Gwen a long time to calm him down. Ironically, the one who took it best was Mrs. Stacy. Helen had simply sighed, told Gwen and Lucas to be careful and not get hurt, then went right back to making dinner like nothing had happened.

As for the two younger Stacy kids? They were completely ignored. Between shoveling snacks and fighting over the TV remote, they were hardly a priority.

Once the family settled into the apartment, Lucas finally relaxed. As long as they stayed inside, no one could touch them—Moguri's wards and enchantments saw to that.

When Lucas explained the Hydra situation, George surprised him by staying perfectly composed. Years on the force had trained him to keep his cool.

"So these people are after you," George said, crossing his arms. "Until this blows over, you're staying home. Don't take risks. We're comfortable now—we don't need you out there picking fights."

Ever since Gwen had convinced him to invest in Stark Industries stock, George had gone from middle class to small-time rich. If Helen didn't like their current place so much, he'd already have bought a house in the suburbs.

Lucas grinned. "Relax, Dad. You've seen what I can do. If I really wanted to, I could level half of Manhattan before breakfast."

He wasn't exaggerating. One full-scale Zodiac Meteor and Manhattan would be a crater.

George just sighed. "Yeah, well... try not to test that theory."

The next few days passed quietly. No signs of Hydra, no suspicious activity. Lucas began to think maybe they'd given up.

George pulled every string he could through the NYPD, but the department's reach only went so far. Anything tied to military or intelligence was above his clearance level, and he came up empty-handed.

Then, one lazy afternoon at the agency, Lucas, Gwen, and Skye were sprawled on the couch binge-watching dramas while Moguri lay between them, basking under two pairs of gentle hands.

The door suddenly swung open. A man in a black suit and sunglasses stepped inside, flashing a badge.

"Apologies for the intrusion," he said flatly. "Mr. Lucas Norman, the Director would like to see you."

All three froze. Normally, if S.H.I.E.L.D. wanted something, it was Natasha or Coulson who came knocking—not some unfamiliar rookie.

"Where are Natasha and Coulson?" Lucas asked, taking the badge from him. He checked it carefully—it was a genuine S.H.I.E.L.D. credential. Coulson had once taught him how to spot fakes.

"They're both tied up at headquarters," the agent replied smoothly. "The Director sent us instead. The car's waiting outside. We're heading straight to the airfield."

"Right..." Lucas said. "Give me a sec. I'll make a call."

He dialed Natasha—no answer. Then Coulson—same. Finally, Fury. Still nothing.

The agent didn't even flinch. "They're underground right now, sir. No signal."

Lucas frowned but didn't push. He turned to Gwen and Skye. "I'll check it out. Don't wait up for me—and keep an eye on my folks."

With that, he followed the agent outside and climbed into the waiting car. Sure enough, they were headed toward one of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s restricted airfields.

"So what's the Director doing underground?" Lucas asked casually.

The two men in front didn't respond—or even glance at him.

Lucas smiled faintly. "All right, enough pretending. You're not Fury's men. Let me guess... Hydra?"

The moment the name left his lips, both "agents" stiffened. They reached for their guns—too slow.

Lucas grabbed the front passenger's wrist, slammed it against the door, and sent the gun clattering away. One punch later, the man slumped unconscious.

The driver jammed a breathing mask over his face and slammed a button on the console.

Hissss—

Thick white gas filled the cabin. The car screeched to a halt.

Lucas coughed, eyes stinging. His head spun. The anesthetic was strong—too strong. He could barely keep his eyes open.

He tried to channel energy, but his limbs felt like lead. Then—sharp pain in his neck—and everything went dark.

The door yanked open. A squad of heavily armed men dragged him out—the same special ops team from before.

But as they hoisted him up, Lucas's hand shot out like a viper, seizing one soldier by the throat.

Crack!

The man dropped instantly.

Lucas could barely see. His vision was nothing but blinding white, his consciousness slipping, but instinct kept him fighting.

Another faint whoosh!—a dart embedded itself in his side. Lucas ripped it free and hurled it blindly. It struck home—right through an attacker's eye.

Then came more darts—five, six, seven, all slamming into him in rapid succession.

The tranquilizer overload finally took him down.

"Jesus—he took eight doses meant for an elephant," the squad leader muttered, kicking Lucas's limp form. "What the hell is this guy?"

He gave him another spiteful kick. "If the boss didn't need him alive, I'd have put a bullet in his skull already. Lost two men because of this freak."

After venting his anger, he waved to his men. "Tie him up. Clean the site. We're moving."

They bound Lucas in reinforced restraints, tossed him into another vehicle's trunk, and sped off into the night.

"His physiology's off the charts," the leader said once they were airborne in a transport plane. "Keep the sedative running nonstop—if it wears off, we're dead."

An operative hooked a drip into Lucas's arm, the anesthetic flowing steadily as ordered.

When Lucas finally came to, he was lying on cold concrete. The room was dim, damp, and stank of mildew—a cell, or a prison of sorts.

He tried to sit up, but the chains on his wrists and ankles clanked in protest.

It was freezing. Water dripped somewhere in the darkness.

Wherever he was, Hydra had him now.

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## **Chapter 96 - 96 – Baron Strucker**

Through his groggy vision, Lucas squinted at the heavy steel door in front of him. It had only a pitifully small inspection slot, just big enough for a pair of eyes to peer through. Across the room stood a narrow window barred with iron—no glass, only the naked metal grid. The icy wind howled through it, carrying flecks of snow that melted against the cold stone walls.

He sat on the creaking iron bed, head pounding as fragments of memory surfaced. The last thing he recalled was being shot full of tranquilizers. His veins still burned faintly.

Looking down, Lucas noticed two tiny puncture marks on his arm. Blood extraction. They were analyzing him—trying to figure out what he was, to see whether his power came from mutation.

"System, get your ass out here," he muttered.

[Ding~]

"They didn't find anything in my blood, right?"

[Ding~] "Of course not, Host. Your blood composition is identical to a normal human's. There's nothing unusual to detect."

"Good. Dismissed."

The system fell silent.

Lucas stood and walked to the window, taking deep breaths of the frigid air. Outside stretched a blinding white expanse of snow. He was inside a fortress-like structure, with high walls, guard towers, and soldiers patrolling below—every one of them armed to the teeth. Tanks with sleek, high-tech armor lined the courtyard like sleeping beasts.

So this is Hydra's nest, huh?

Suddenly, the viewing slot on the door slid open. A pair of eyes peered inside. Then came the sound of locks turning, and the door swung wide.

A squad of fully armed soldiers stood outside.

Lucas barely turned his head before—thwip thwip thwip!—a volley of tranquilizer darts hit him squarely in the chest.

"I—"

He didn't even get the rest out before collapsing.

When consciousness returned again, he was strapped to a chair in what looked like a laboratory. Every limb was secured with reinforced restraints threaded with metal wire and some kind of composite material—far stronger than nylon.

Across from him sat a man in a crisp military uniform, sipping coffee as if they were having a polite afternoon chat. A single monocle gleamed over one eye.

"Welcome, Mr. Lucas Norman."

The man's tone was calm, cultured—even courteous.

"Is this how you greet all your guests?" Lucas said dryly, testing the restraints. They barely budged.

"My apologies," the man said with a faint smile. "But you must understand—we could not risk bringing in someone of your... abilities unprepared. My men had no choice but to be cautious."

He rose, still holding the white porcelain cup gracefully.

Lucas narrowed his eyes. "Since when did Hydra start hiring gentlemen? Why don't you show some sincerity and untie me first?"

The man smiled again, but said nothing. Lucas studied him carefully. There was something familiar about that face, that air of European nobility... Then it clicked.

"Forgive me, Mr. Norman," the man said smoothly. "Your potential makes you dangerous. I can't release you. But I promise to keep our conversation brief—if you cooperate."

"Fine," Lucas said casually. "Ask away."

"Excellent. Thank you for your cooperation."

The man placed his cup on the counter and clasped his hands behind his back, stepping closer.

"Mr. Norman, your powers intrigue us. We've tested your blood—it's indistinguishable from that of an ordinary human. You're not a mutant, nor the result of any genetic engineering. So tell me—where does your power come from?"

He reached over and rolled up Lucas's sleeve. The puncture marks from the earlier blood draw were gone, his skin flawless.

"Fascinating," the man murmured. "Rapid regeneration, too. It seems my researchers missed that detail."

He picked up a scalpel from the table, the blade glinting coldly under the fluorescent light.

"Hey—careful with that thing," Lucas said, his tone half-joking but his eyes sharp. "You make a wrong move, and I'll plant you in the nearest wall like modern art."

And it wasn't an idle threat. The restraints were strong, yes—but one swing of the Divine Armament, and they wouldn't last a second.

The man merely smiled, idly twirling the scalpel in his hand. "Relax, Mr. Norman. As long as you cooperate, this little knife remains nothing more than a toy."

"Now then," he continued politely, "tell me the truth. How did you gain your power?"

Lucas thought for a moment. "I learned it," he said matter-of-factly. "What, did you think I was born with it?"

"Oh? Learned? And where, pray tell, did you study? Who was your teacher?"

"My teacher's name is Hydaelyn," Lucas said without missing a beat—the same story he'd once used to fool the Ancient One. "She taught me magic."

"And where is this Hydaelyn now?"

"No idea." Lucas shrugged.

The man's brow furrowed. "I see. So Mr. Norman doesn't wish to cooperate. In that case, I may need to... encourage your memory."

"Hold up." Lucas smirked. "You've been grilling me long enough. Mind if I ask you a couple of questions?"

The man paused, then nodded. "Go ahead."

"First, who the hell are you? And second, where is this place?"

He inclined his head slightly, every movement precise, aristocratic. "Forgive my manners. My name is Wolfgang von Strucker—you may call me Baron Strucker. And this, Mr. Norman, is Strucker Castle in Bavaria."

Lucas's eyebrows shot up. "Ah, so that's who you are—Baron Strucker himself. One of Hydra's big bosses. Well, well... what an honor."

So this was that Strucker—the same guy who got flattened by Captain America in Age of Ultron and later vaporized by Ultron himself. A short-lived villain if there ever was one.

"It seems you've heard of me," Strucker said, intrigued. "Few outside Hydra know that name."

"Of course," Lucas said lightly. "There aren't many who can stand alongside the Red Skull in infamy. You're quite the celebrity, Baron."

Strucker chuckled softly. "Flattery will get you nowhere, Mr. Norman. Now, my turn again."

He stepped closer, the scalpel's tip gleaming inches from Lucas's face.

"I require your power," he said, his voice now edged with steel. "You have two choices—join Hydra... or become my next experiment."

His sharp eyes glinted with fanaticism.

"Ohh... careful now, Baron," Lucas drawled. "That's a very ungentlemanly proposal. You might end up regretting it."

Strucker's smile faded. "My patience is limited. I'll give you one day to decide. I'd rather not resort to violence."

He dropped the scalpel into a tray and wiped his hands with a cloth.

"Take him back to his cell. Keep him restrained."

Two soldiers grabbed Lucas's chair and rolled him out of the lab.

Lucas didn't resist. He just smiled faintly to himself.

One day, huh?

You'll be lucky if you get one hour, Baron.

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## Chapter 97 - 97 – Wanda

Back in the same freezing cell, Lucas waited until the two guards left before summoning the Divine Armament.

Shhkh—shhkh!

In two effortless slashes, the glowing blade sliced through the reinforced restraints like tofu.

"Phew... they really went overboard with this stuff," he muttered, rubbing the marks on his wrists. "My hands were about to lose circulation. These Hydra clowns sure don't play nice."

He rolled his shoulders, stretched, and sat back down on the squeaky bed, letting out a slow breath.

"So this is Bavaria... which means this castle is the same Hydra base the Avengers stormed in Age of Ultron."

Then it hit him.

"Wait a sec—holy crap!" Lucas shot upright. "This is where Wanda and Pietro first fought the Avengers!"

He rushed to the barred window, heart racing. Wanda Maximoff—the Scarlet Witch—and her brother Pietro, the speedster. In this timeline, they were both orphans taken in by Baron Strucker. Well, "taken in" was a nice way to say "kidnapped and experimented on."

Just as Lucas was thinking this through, the familiar chime echoed in his mind.

[Ding~ New system mission: "Rescue the Scarlet Witch." Please locate and free Wanda Maximoff from captivity. Reward: Unknown.]

"Dammit, System! You can't just pop up like that, I almost died of a heart attack!"

His pulse was racing. So the system had confirmed it—Wanda was here. But...

"Hey, System," Lucas said suspiciously, "why does the mission only mention Wanda? What about Pietro?"

[Ding~ Please explore and discover for yourself.]

"...You're getting sassier by the day."

He ignored the snarky system and began to plan. A mission was a mission—and he wasn't about to turn down a chance to meet the future Scarlet Witch herself.

He waited patiently until midnight, when exhaustion dulled even the most vigilant guards. Then his eyes snapped open.

With a whisper of air, Lucas summoned the power of the Wind Element. The cell door creaked open soundlessly, and he slipped out like a phantom.

He didn't just look for guards—he looked for cameras. People could be knocked out, but cameras were another problem.

To his relief, the prison wing didn't have any.

"No cameras in a high-security dungeon? You deserve to get robbed," he whispered, shaking his head.

A breeze swirled around him, carrying him silently down the corridor.

"I wonder where Wanda and Pietro are being held... am I gonna have to turn this whole castle upside down?"

He murmured as he moved, using subtle air currents to sense movements and vibrations. The faintest shift in airflow told him where guards were stationed, allowing him to slip through the castle like a ghost.

But soon—he hit trouble. Cameras. Dozens of them.

Lucas frowned. "That many cameras means something important's in there..."

Grinning, he decided to take a peek.

He clung to the castle's outer wall like a gecko, climbing swiftly to the roof. Just as he reached the top—

A massive camera swiveled, its lens pointing right at his face.

"Crap!"

He twisted away instantly, flattening himself against the shadows. If that camera had spotted him, alarms would be blaring by now.

Ten tense minutes passed. Nothing. No alarms, no soldiers rushing in. Lucas finally relaxed.

Peering down, he noticed that the courtyard below was crawling with guards—far more than elsewhere. Whatever was inside that section had to be important.

He carefully sliced open a pane of glass with a razor-thin wind blade, slipped a hand through, and quietly eased the window open. One graceful leap later, he was inside.

Darkness. No lights, no sounds. Just pitch-black silence.

Lucas squinted, letting his eyes adjust to the faint reflection of moonlight off the snow outside. He stepped forward slowly, hands feeling for obstacles—

And brushed against something soft.

And warm.

Curiosity took over. He ran his hand along the surface—it was smooth, supple...  
alive.

"Who's there?!"

A trembling but sharp female voice cut through the darkness.

Before Lucas could respond, a flash of scarlet filled the room. A surge of red energy shot toward him like a cannon blast.

Lucas's reflexes kicked in instantly. He raised a hand, summoning a wind barrier that deflected the crimson wave in a burst of rippling air.

And then he saw them—two glowing red eyes in the dark, fixed squarely on him.

Scarlet energy. Crimson eyes.

Lucas froze. Wanda.

"Whoa, easy! Easy! I'm not the enemy—I was captured too!" he said quickly, raising both hands.

The situation was... awkward. Because the "soft, warm thing" he'd been groping a few seconds earlier? Yeah. That had been Wanda Maximoff herself.

And now she looked very ready to vaporize him.

Lucas wanted to die of embarrassment. Sure, he hadn't meant to, but the memory of that perfect, soft, faintly perfumed handful wasn't helping.

He coughed twice to cover the moment. "Ahem—sorry, sorry, total accident."

The faint floral scent still clung to his hand, and it made his mind blur for a second before he shook it off.

Wanda hesitated. The red glow around her fingers faded, and her eyes softened.

"You... you were captured too?" she asked quietly.

Lucas nodded earnestly. "Yeah. I was living in New York, and they drugged and kidnapped me."

Wanda bit her lip. "But... you used magic just now. How do you know magic?"

"Learned it," Lucas said casually, then frowned. "Wait—you can use magic too?"

That was surprising. In the movies, her powers didn't come from magic at all—they came from the Mind Stone, inside Loki's scepter. But this version of Wanda? Clearly different.

Which raised a serious question—if Loki hadn't gotten the scepter yet in this timeline, how had Wanda's powers awakened?

As if reading his mind, Wanda said softly, "They told me I was born with it. That it was... dormant. They said it's some kind of magic energy."

She sounded uncertain, repeating what she'd overheard from Hydra scientists.

Lucas nodded slowly. That made sense. This wasn't the movie world—things were... different here. Like Gwen being the Ghost-Spider. The lines between timelines had blurred long ago.

"So," he asked gently, "how did they capture you? Are you here alone?"

Wanda's voice trembled. "I'm alone. My foster parents were Gypsies. I've never met my real ones. A few weeks ago, men came after us. They killed my foster parents... that's when my powers awakened. After that, they brought me here."

Tears welled in her eyes, her voice breaking as she spoke.

Lucas felt a pang in his chest. Whatever else Hydra was—they were monsters.

And tonight, he was going to make them pay.

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## **Chapter 98 - 98 – Escape from the Castle**

But Lucas was completely confused by what he'd just heard.

According to Wanda's story, her origin matched the earliest version of her backstory—the one where she was Magneto's biological daughter.

There were actually two versions of Wanda's origin.

In the original version, both Wanda and Pietro were Magneto's children. After Magneto used his powers to annihilate the men who killed his daughter Anya, his wife, Magda, fled in terror. She escaped to Wundagore Mountain, where she gave birth to twins—Wanda and Pietro.

Magda left them in the care of a genetically altered cow-woman named Bova and disappeared without a trace.

That very night, the dark god Chthon attempted to descend upon Earth, clashing with the High Evolutionary and the sorcerers of Kamar-Taj. A fragment of Chthon's chaotic power seeped into the newborn twins—though no one realized it at the time.

Eventually, Bova entrusted the twins to a pair of Romani travelers, who raised them as their own. Years later, when Wanda and Pietro witnessed their foster father stealing, they ran away from home.

That was the first origin.

The second version told a different story—Wanda was born into a family of Romani mystics and was later abducted by the High Evolutionary for experimentation, which awakened her powers. In that version, she had no connection to Magneto whatsoever.

So if Wanda's account matched the first one... what did that mean for this world's timeline?

"You said you're alone? No brothers or sisters?" Lucas asked, frowning. According to every version he knew, Pietro—her twin brother—should've been there.

"No," Wanda said softly. "My foster parents only had me."

That threw Lucas off completely. No Pietro? That didn't fit any version. Where had he gone?

"Why do you ask?" Wanda tilted her head. "You make it sound like I should have a brother. Do I? Have we met before?"

Lucas froze for a second, then shook his head quickly. "No, no, I was just guessing. Forget it. By the way, I'm Lucas Norman—just call me Lucas. And you?"

"I'm Wanda. Wanda Maximoff."

Lucas nodded. "Wanda Maximoff, huh? Perfect. So, how about we get out of here? Together."

Under the faint silver glow reflected by the snow, he finally saw her clearly. This Wanda was younger than the one he remembered from the movies—softer, more fragile. Maybe it was because of the constant fear and isolation she'd endured in this castle.

"You think we can escape?" she asked hesitantly. "There are so many soldiers... and tanks outside."

"You've never tried before?"

"I have," she admitted quietly. "I always wanted to. But my powers... they don't listen to me. I can't use them on command. They just... happen."

Lucas nodded in understanding. So her powers were still unstable, triggered only by danger. She was basically like early-stage Skye—powerful but untrained.

"No problem," he said with a grin. "We'll get out first. I'll teach you magic later."

Wanda hesitated for a moment, then nodded firmly. "Okay. I'll go with you."

Lucas blinked in mild surprise. "You're not worried I might be a bad guy? What if I just sold you off after we escaped?"

"I know you're not," Wanda said simply. "I can feel it."

Her eyes glowed faintly red again. Chaos energy rippled around her like flickering flame, and the scarlet aura began to drift toward Lucas—gentle, harmless.

He realized then that the energy was responding to her emotions. It sensed that he meant no harm and was showing her that instinctively.

She wasn't controlling it at all—it was protecting her on its own. That also explained why Hydra hadn't dared to experiment on her further. The moment anyone showed hostile intent, the chaotic energy would lash out automatically, just like it had when Lucas first touched her.

"Alright then," Lucas said quietly. "Let's get you out of here."

He led her carefully down the staircase. The rooftop route was no longer an option—Wanda wouldn't be able to climb it.

When they reached the first floor, they spotted several guards nearby. Fortunately, it was late, and the soldiers were huddled together, smoking to stay awake. They didn't notice the two figures moving in the shadows.

Lucas gestured for Wanda to stay put, then crept forward silently.

A small, razor-thin wind blade shimmered in his hand. When the timing was right, he flicked his wrist—

Shhhk!

The faint sound of slicing air cut through the silence. In a blink, the blade swept across the soldiers' throats. They collapsed without a sound, blood spilling across the floor.

After confirming it was clear, Lucas motioned for Wanda to follow. She clutched tightly at the hem of his jacket, afraid of losing him in the dark.

Together, they slipped past the cameras and out of the prison wing. Everything was going smoothly—until one tiny mistake ruined everything.

As they reached a corner, two patrolling soldiers appeared from the opposite side.

Lucas quickly pulled Wanda into a shadowed nook, conjured another wind blade, and aimed carefully.

He struck.

But just as the invisible blade sliced through the air, one of the soldiers stumbled over something and fell forward. The attack only hit the other one—clean through the throat.

The fallen guard froze for half a heartbeat before slamming his hand down on the alarm trigger.

WEEEEOOOO—WEEEEOOOO—!

The blaring sirens shattered the silence of the night.

"Damn it!" Lucas cursed, grabbing Wanda's hand and sprinting toward the front gates.

But when they burst into the courtyard, their path was already blocked. Dozens of armed soldiers surrounded them, rifles raised. Tanks loomed behind the troops, and the massive iron gates were sealed shut.

From the crowd, a familiar voice spoke with mock disappointment.

"Mr. Norman, I'm rather surprised," Baron Strucker said as he stepped forward, his single monocle gleaming coldly under the searchlights. "Sneaking around my castle without permission, attempting to steal my property... I see you've made your choice. What a pity. But don't worry—I'll make sure your body serves science well."

Lucas smirked. "Ah, don't take it personally, Baron. People have been calling me rebellious since I was a kid. I've never been good at taking orders. The more someone tells me not to do something, the more I want to do it."

He shrugged casually, utterly unbothered by the wall of guns and steel around them.

Strucker sighed. "So be it, Mr. Norman. In the name of research, life or death makes no difference to me. Blame your curiosity—"

He raised his hand.

"—and that troublesome rebellious streak of yours."

"Fire!"

The order fell, and instantly the night erupted in thunder.

Bullets rained down like a metallic storm, engulfing Lucas and Wanda in a sea of muzzle flashes and gunfire.

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## Chapter 99 - 99 – Leveled to the Ground

Lucas immediately raised his hand, summoning a raging gust that solidified into a barrier of wind.

Bullets hammered into it like a torrential storm.

BOOM!

Suddenly, an electromagnetic shell slammed into the shield. The wind wall shattered instantly, the explosion catching Lucas completely off guard.

"Damn it!"

There was no time to rebuild the barrier. Lucas grabbed Wanda, wrapping her tightly in his arms to shield her as a surge of green energy erupted from his body, forming a thin protective layer.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A hail of bullets crashed into them. Lucas crouched low, clutching Wanda against his chest, using his body as her shield.

Thanks to his extraordinary regenerative ability, every bullet that tore into his flesh was squeezed out a moment later, the wounds closing almost as soon as they formed.

But the relentless rain of fire left him in agony—fresh wounds opening before the old ones could heal, his body trembling under the constant impact.

It was the first time since gaining his powers that Lucas had been injured so badly—and he couldn't even fight back. His healing was fast, yes, but Wanda didn't have the same advantage.

Wanda, however, didn't know that. She could only see him bleeding—bleeding for her—his body riddled with bullets as he shielded her from death.

Her heart clenched painfully. Her vision turned crimson.

The chaos energy inside her erupted.

"AHHHHHH!!!"

Her scream tore through the night. Red energy exploded outward like a hurricane, devouring everything in its path. Buildings, soldiers, tanks—everything disintegrated into dust and sand, scattered into nothingness.

In an instant, the entire area within a hundred meters of Lucas and Wanda had become a barren wasteland—clean, empty, and silent. Not a single trace of life or structure remained.

Wanda's eyes blazed like twin fires of crimson chaos. When she turned them toward Baron Strucker and the remaining soldiers, the air itself seemed to twist.

But Strucker's eyes were alight with something far different—ecstatic awe. The sheer, raw power Wanda displayed went beyond anything he had ever imagined. To him, this wasn't destruction—it was divinity.

"A miracle... from the heavens..." he muttered, trembling. Then, louder: "Prepare the high-voltage nets! I want her alive!"

More soldiers swarmed in. At least ten electromagnetic tanks surrounded the clearing—thanks to Wanda's earlier explosion, the ground was now wide open for their approach.

The front line carried high-voltage capture nets—each capable of releasing a shock strong enough to drop an elephant, laced with anesthetic gas for good measure. Behind them, soldiers swapped their rifles for tranquilizer guns.

There was no way out.

But Wanda's burst of power had drained her completely. She collapsed against Lucas's chest, unconscious.

Lucas's wounds, on the other hand, were already gone. Within seconds, his body had completely regenerated. He gently laid Wanda down, then turned to face Baron Strucker, his eyes cold as ice.

"You know," he said softly, his tone like the wind before a blizzard, "letting Wanda and me walk away would've been your smartest choice. But you overestimated yourself... and underestimated me."

He took a step forward, his voice dropping to a deadly whisper.

"This castle—along with everyone in it—no longer deserves to exist."

As he moved toward the corner of the clearing, every soldier raised their weapon in unison, aiming at him.

They all knew now what Lucas was capable of. He'd just survived a storm of bullets without so much as a scar—what kind of monster was he?

He laid Wanda carefully inside an empty oil drum, out of harm's way. Then he turned back toward the soldiers and Strucker.

"Strucker," he said, his tone calm and final, "you wanted to see my true power, didn't you? Well, today you will. I just hope you don't regret it."

Lucas raised his arms, and the wind began to howl.

Green energy swirled wildly around him, coalescing, thickening, feeding on itself.

Strucker's face twisted. "Fire! Shoot him now!"

But it was far too late.

BOOOOM!!!

The winds roared to life, merging into a massive cyclone that reached into the sky. Within the raging vortex, a pair of golden, vertical pupils snapped open—vast, ancient, and full of fury.

"ROOOAAR!!!"

The very air trembled at the sound. The tornado shattered outward, and from its heart emerged a colossal, winged being—Garuda, the storm incarnate.

Strucker's jaw fell open. "A—A god...! A divine miracle!"

Overcome with zeal, he dropped to his knees, bowing toward the titanic figure in ecstasy.

Garuda looked down at him, eyes glacial and pitiless. One hand lifted lazily.

A single flick—

And a massive wind blade shot forth, slicing through the air.

BOOM!

Baron Strucker exploded like a balloon, reduced to a fine mist of blood. Not even bones remained.

"ROAR!!!"

Garuda let out another deafening cry. Countless blades of wind erupted from its body, raining in every direction.

The ground split apart. The sky screamed under the pressure. Everything below was shredded into dust—the tanks, the soldiers, the fortress walls—all obliterated in an instant.

The scene was apocalyptic.

Within seconds, there was nothing left alive.

The once-grand Hydra fortress collapsed into rubble, the earth torn open with deep, jagged chasms that stretched like the scars of divine judgment.

Then the green energy began to fade. Garuda dissolved into countless emerald motes, drifting away into the wind.

Lucas descended from the sky, landing silently amidst the ruins. He didn't even glance at the devastation around him.

Only a small circle—five meters wide—remained untouched.

Wanda, still unconscious, lay safe within it.

Lucas walked over, picked her up gently, and turned toward the horizon.

"I told you," he said quietly, looking back at the ruin behind him. "This castle didn't deserve to exist. And I keep my word."

Above, the clouds twisted open into a swirling vortex.

A burning meteor streaked down from the heavens.

KRAKOOM!!!

The meteor slammed into the ruins with earth-shattering force. The shockwave leveled the entire mountain, flattening everything for miles.

By the time dawn broke, the Hydra fortress was nothing more than a crater.

At the nearest town, people were abuzz with panic and curiosity.

They'd all seen the fireball streak across the sky the night before, and now reporters were flooding in, eager for "first-hand footage" of the so-called meteor strike.

And in a small café in that very town, the real culprit—Lucas—was quietly eating breakfast.

He finished quickly under the suspicious gaze of the innkeeper and went upstairs to check on Wanda.

She lay on the bed, still unconscious, her brow furrowed as if trapped in a nightmare. Scarlet energy flickered faintly around her, pulsing with the chaos that refused to rest.

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Lucas quickly used his own magic to suppress the chaotic energy around Wanda.

If her Chaos Energy were to spiral out of control now, this small town would be erased from the map in seconds.

What he didn't know was that back in New York, chaos had already erupted—because of his disappearance.

---

Not long after Lucas had left, Natasha returned to the agency.

Seeing her come back alone, Gwen and Skye immediately asked,

"Natasha, where's Lucas? Why didn't he come back with you?"

That question caught Natasha completely off guard.

"Lucas? How would I know where he is? You two are with him all the time—shouldn't you be the ones telling me where he went?"

Natasha looked utterly confused. What was wrong with these two girls today?

Gwen frowned. "That's weird... A S.H.I.E.L.D. agent came earlier. He said Director Fury was looking for him, and Lucas left with him. You didn't see him?"

That made Natasha's face freeze.

"Wait—what did you say? A S.H.I.E.L.D. agent took him?"

She immediately sensed something was wrong.

"Yeah," Gwen said. "The guy told us you and Coulson were both busy at a secret base, so he came to pick Lucas up personally."

As she spoke, both Gwen and Skye realized something wasn't right.

Skye quickly pulled up the surveillance footage from earlier.

"There—this is the guy. Lucas checked his ID. It looked legitimate, so he went with him."

The footage was crystal clear—both the man's face and his credentials were visible.

Natasha's expression darkened. The ID was real.

"...This is bad."

She immediately called Fury.

"Director, Lucas was taken by someone posing as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent. We've lost contact. I've sent Skye's footage to your terminal."

---

At S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters, Nick Fury broke into a cold sweat as he replayed the message.

Natasha hadn't said much, but the implications were enormous.

He hadn't sent anyone to contact Lucas.

And no regular agent could have known Lucas's location—not unless there was a mole inside S.H.I.E.L.D.

He replayed the footage multiple times. The credentials were authentic—issued by S.H.I.E.L.D. itself.

And then Fury remembered something Lucas had once told him:

> "Director, you might want to clean house at S.H.I.E.L.D."

At the time, Fury hadn't thought much of it.

Now, the meaning hit him like a punch.

"Hill," Fury barked, "get Barton and Coulson to my office—now. And lock down the building. No one in or out."

The alarm blared through the headquarters.

Moments later, Coulson and Clint Barton arrived, both visibly tense.

"Director, what's going on? The whole building's sealed."

Fury's one good eye was ice-cold. "Lucas has been taken—by someone inside posing as one of us."

Both men froze. The gravity of the situation sank in.

Lucas being abducted was bad enough—but the fact that someone inside S.H.I.E.L.D. had orchestrated it was far worse.

"This is the surveillance footage. Find out who that man is. I want everything—now."

"Yes, sir!"

Coulson hurried out, while Fury turned to Barton.

"Clint, keep eyes on everyone in the building. I want to know what's happening at all times."

Barton gave a sharp nod and disappeared down the hall.

Fury hesitated for a moment, then pulled out his encrypted phone and called Natasha.

"Natasha—your priority is to protect Lucas's family until he returns. No exceptions."

"Understood, Director."

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Back in New York, Natasha immediately looked to Gwen.

"Gwen, go to the school. Pick up your brothers, and tell your dad to stay at the precinct until I get there."

Gwen nodded and ran out, calling George on the way.

"Skye," Natasha continued, "you stay here. Wait for news from Lucas—and protect Helen."

Lucas had once said, "There's no place safer than my apartment."

Everyone believed him—Gwen and Skye because they knew what was hidden there, and Natasha because she'd seen Lucas's power firsthand.

That image of Garuda—the giant creature he had summoned—was still burned into her memory.

No one dared tell Helen that Lucas was missing.

They didn't want her to worry.

Meanwhile, at the NYPD, George Stacy had already begun combing through the city's traffic and surveillance feeds.

When Natasha arrived, he showed her what he'd found.

"At the exact time Lucas left his apartment, every camera from Manhattan Avenue to the city outskirts went offline simultaneously."

He pointed to the map.

"And they're not even on the same network. That means someone deliberately jammed or destroyed them."

Natasha's eyes narrowed. That road led straight toward one of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s secret airfields.

"Come on," she said grimly. "This is bigger than it looks."

Back at Lucas's apartment, they met Gwen and her two brothers.

The kids, thrilled to have a day off school, immediately ran off to play video games—utterly unaware of the storm brewing outside.

Natasha reported everything to Fury, who by now was convinced—there was no denying it—Hydra had infiltrated S.H.I.E.L.D. again.

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At headquarters, Coulson had already finished running the facial recognition.

He entered Fury's office with the results.

"Director, the man in the footage was a Level 3 field agent—completely ordinary. No special clearance, no field record of interest."

Fury's expression hardened. "Too ordinary. That's exactly the problem."

He immediately called Maria Hill.

"From now on, all S.H.I.E.L.D. operations are frozen. Nothing moves until the mole is rooted out. Understood?"

The order rippled through the organization.

And it didn't take long for it to reach Alexander Pierce—the hidden head of Hydra within S.H.I.E.L.D.

Pierce's face darkened as soon as he heard.

He called Fury, putting on his usual calm, fatherly tone.

"Nick, what's going on? Why the lockdown?"

Fury didn't suspect him. "Security breach. One of our assets—Lucas Norman—was taken by someone posing as an agent."

At the mention of that name, Pierce's blood ran cold.

The moment he hung up, he contacted his Hydra subordinates.

"Abandon non-essential operatives," he ordered. "Cut your losses and clean it up. The less attention we draw, the better."

Within hours, both Barton and Coulson submitted detailed lists to Fury.

As expected, they were filled with Hydra agents.

Most were low-ranking, expendable pawns—but one stood out: a Level 7 operative.

"Interrogate him," Fury ordered coldly. "No matter what it takes, find out who's behind this."

As for the others—don't leave anyone standing."

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