

“Shit, okay. Where are you?” I asked, already making my way out of the bar, Steve and Bucky hot on my heels.

“I’m... I’m on my way to pick up our back up plan.” Natasha explained vaguely. “Loki took something else and Fury is hoping they will be able to track it.”

“Well I can track Clint right now.” I explained, walking down the sidewalk, carding my truck casually as I walked by, ignoring the gasps and shouts. “Just say the word and I can get him back, anywhere in the world in under thirty minutes. Unless Loki brought half of Asgard with him there won’t be a damn thing he could do about it.”

“We assumed you could track him but... We don’t know the situation on Clint’s end.” Natasha said, her indecision clear. “We can’t just rush in, not without putting Clint and a few others at risk. Please, head to the helicarrier, it’s where Fury is going to be running this op from. We can brief you there... and come up with some sort of plan.”

“Okay, I understand. How long is your back up plan going to take?” I asked, still walking along the sidewalk, mostly because I hadn’t told my feet to stop yet. “Do you want any help?”

“No, you’ve already helped with this one I think.” She said vaguely before continuing. “Head to the helicarrier, get briefed. I’ll be back soon.”

“Alright Natasha. Is Fury expecting me?”

“...No, but he better not turn you away.” Natasha said, all but admitting she shouldn’t be talking to me.

“Don’t worry, I’ve got the perfect excuse. Just act surprised to see me.” I said, stopping and turning to look at Steve and Bucky. “Call if things go south. Good luck.”

“Thanks.”

We hung up and I looked at the two friends again, both of them looking concerned and tense.

“I can get us most of the way to the helicarrier, assuming that’s where they called you too?”

“Yeah, we have a flight in twenty minutes.”

“Tell them you don’t need it, I can get you to DC.” I assured them. “I just need to make a few steps to grab some stuff and get Ema.”

After they both nodded in agreement I traveled all three of us to the warehouse, stepping off the landing pad.

“EMA!” I called out, heading directly to my storage shed and carding it.

“What!?” My partner called back, running around one of the large UCM’s, dressed in one of her painter’s smocks. “What’s wrong?”

“Loki is here, he kidnapped Clint.” I explained. “We are going to the helicarrier to meet up with Fury for a briefing on what’s going on.”

“Shit, alright, what do you need?”

I shook my head as I walked across the warehouse, carding stuff that I felt could be useful, though I was careful not to overfill the Deck. I ended up with it half full with UCMs, LPMs and a few other things. The last thing I grabbed were five large rectangular black trunks, each of them stacking into one card.

“All four of them, really?” She asked quietly, looking over her shoulder to check on Bucky and Steve, who were both idly looking around the warehouse.

“I’m not messing around Ema.” I said, looking at her. “I’m half tempted to ride the *Void Skipper* down to DC.”

“Yeah, please don’t.” she responded. “That won’t help the situation.”

“Which is why I’m not doing it,” I said simply, looking around one last time before nodding. “Okay you two, I’m all set. Let’s get going.”

Steve and Bucky turned and nodded, meeting me halfway across the warehouse. I had my hands on both of their shoulders when a thought occurred to me.

“Where is Peggy? Does she need a ride?” I asked, looking at Steve, who simply shook his head.

“She is already in DC, she was scheduled to come home tomorrow morning.”

With that cleared up we vanished from the warehouse, popping out at the same landing pad we had used to rescue Bucky, Ema following behind us a moment later. Not long after that we were driving across DC in the super truck. It was the first time I had driven it in a long while, having transitioned almost entirely to traveling and flying to my destinations.

An hour after we left the bar we were standing on the flight deck of the helicarrier, being escorted by a random Shield agent into the ship. Eventually we met up with Fury and Peggy, who apparently had gotten here just before us.

“What are you doing here Maker?” He asked.

“I was hanging out with Steve and Bucky when they got the call.” I explained. “Clint is my friend, no way I’m sitting this one out. You’ve got your sledgehammer whether you want it or not.”

Steve, Peggy and Bucky looked confused, but Fury only scoffed.

“Fine. Follow me.”

Fury led us through the ship, eventually stepping into a secured room, which honestly just looked like a glorified conference room. Agent Hill stepped in moments after we all sat down, handing a stack of documents to Fury before walking straight out. Silently Fury handed out the folders before sitting down and starting to talk, looking at Steve.

“After you crashed into the arctic ocean, off the coast of Greenland, Howard Stark was determined to find you. He managed to devise a way to crudely scan for the energy signature of the the Tesseract, which he knew was on the bomber with you. Not long after your crash he managed to find it, sunk at the bottom of the ocean, with no sign of the bomber in sight.”

“It broke loose of its containment while Red Skull and I fought,” Steve explained. “He picked it up and it... well it blasted him into space. When it fell to the floor it melted through and out of the plane, at least a few minutes before I crashed... And you’re saying we found it? That we have it?”

“Stark was disgusted that he had managed to find it but not you, so he locked it up in storage, where it lay forgotten for a long time.” Fury continued, only half answering Steve’s question. “There were several attempts to research and utilize its energy, most recently, unknowingly guided by the influence of Hydra. They used the fact that we were not only not alone in the universe, but hopelessly outclassed by our distant neighbors to sway the WSC into focusing on weapons.”

By now I was flipping through the folder of information, reading through the data they had on the light blue cube. It still worried me how much it looked like a cosmic cube, but none of the data they had collected seemed to point to any sort of reality changing shenanigans. Steve’s account of it blasting Red Skull into space was also confusing.

“Once Hydra was cleared out of Shield we went through all of our projects with a fine tooth comb, closing dozens of projects that were either too risky, unethical or not in line with Shields beliefs. The Phase 2 weapons program was one of the first on the chopping block,” Fury explained, the screen behind him lighting up with basic schematics of some kind of missile, its specifications blacked out. “However, we continued to study the Tesseract because of its

potential as an unlimited power source. The answer to one of Earth's biggest needs, a clean and sustainable source of energy.”

“I’m assuming something went wrong?”

Fury looked over at me, hitting me with a glare. I simply shrugged, the one eyed man focusing back on the whole group after a long moment.

“We were studying the Tesseract at a joint NASA and Shield facility in Nevada. At approximately twenty three hundred hours the Tesseract began acting up, throwing off energy and generally scaring the shit out of everyone around it. Then a portal opened, and Loki stepped through. He ran roughshod over my men, before...”

Fury trailed off, leaning forward in his seat and folding his hands together. He leaned on the table, holding them to his face for a long moment before continuing.

“He had a weapon with him, some sort of short glaive or spear. One moment he was using it to blast energy beams at us, the next he touched it to Agent Barton's chest. His eyes turned black, then crystal blue. He immediately stopped fighting Loki and began following his orders. Agent Barton, as well as several other agents are now compromised, presumably under the control of Loki.”

The room was quiet for a long moment, everyone stunned by what Fury had just said. After a long moment I finally recovered, slapping my forehead with my palm.

“Holy fucking shit its mind control.” I cursed, continuing at a mumble. “Not sure if I should thank her or be angry for not warning me.”

“What was that Maker?” Steve asked, everyone now focused on me as I stood and flicked out a card, my cabinet of tricks popping out.

I ignored Steve's question as I looked through my expanded and enhanced storage. There was no way this was a coincidence, the Ancient One must have known something was coming. I only had access to this spell for about a week and a half and now I was in a situation where I desperately needed it? There was just no way it was a coincidence.

The Ancient One and I would have to have a conversation when all of this was over.

Eventually I found the anti-mind control cuffs, pulling out five of them and handing them out to everyone. Steve, Peggy, Bucky and Ema immediately put theirs on, which was a touching sign of trust that would have meant a lot if my mind wasn't racing.

"These are Anti-Mind control cuffs. They should protect you from any sort of outside mental influences," I explained. "I have a few dozen more, but give me a room and I'll set up a machine to make as many as you need."

"You just happen to have something capable of stopping mind control sitting in a cabinet?" Fury asked, sounding suspicious and skeptical.

"Yes," I answered simply with a shrug.

Fury looked at me for a long moment before shaking his head and clipping the cuff around his wrist. For a moment the room was quiet until Peggy spoke up.

"What happened after Loki took control of Agent Barton?"

"I attempted to get the Tesseract away while Loki was distracted, but he caught on too quickly," Fury continued, hiding his cuff under his jacket sleeve. "Clint willingly and without prompting pointed out I was lying before shooting me in the chest. Zero hesitation."

"Dammit, that's not good," I said, shaking my head. "If he was a unwilling puppet then we could rely on anyone he mind fucks-"

"Can we not call it that?" Steve asked, wincing as everyone turned to him.

"...We could rely on any one he whammied just being a meat puppet," I continued after a short pause. "Sounds like we are going to be dealing with them at the top of their game though."

"You know an awful lot about mind control," Fury said, once again looking suspicious.

"For fucks sake Fury, stop being such a paranoid ass for half a second. I know you have your lie detector on and you know it works on me," I said, rolling my eyes. "I'm extrapolating from examples from popular media, happy?"

"No. But I'll drop it." He said, the "For now" heavily implied. "After Agent Barton shot me they took the Tesseract and left. I played dead in the hopes Loki would pass over me, which he did. Not long after that Loki's portal triggered some sort of energy meltdown and destroyed the entire facility, killing thirty Shield scientists, agents and NASA specialists. That number is going to go up as we recover more bodies."

"What's the plan then Director?" Steve asked, leaning in.

"I can track Clint anywhere on earth," I said confidently. "If you have a blood sample, some personal effects, maybe a hair sample I could pick him out down to a foot or two. If not I should be able to track his general location, assuming he doesn't ditch his expanded quiver."

"You have a way to track our equipment?" Fury asked, with a tone that suggested he expected I could but was still annoyed by it.

"Yup, everything I make. It's a tablet just like all of my tracking stuff. But I don't watch it and take notes on you Fury. It's an insurance policy, not a way to gather blackmail."

Fury didn't respond, instead he pulled out his phone and sent a single text message, before putting it down on the table.

"A hair and blood sample will be here soon," Fury said. "Can you track the Tesseract as well? In case they aren't together?"

"Does your energy tracker follow it?"

"No, we already checked."

"Damn. Do you still have the machine that Tony's father used to track its energy signature?"

"No. When we had the Tesseract secured and he had given up finding Steve he scrapped the scanner and started being much more secretive with his designs. Tony might have something stored away but it is unlikely we will find them in any reasonable amount of time."

"In that case, probably not, but we can give it a shot," I said, shrugging. "How much data do you have on it? Physical data, on paper. It tends to work better."

"Not much, most of our physical data was on site in Nevada," Fury admitted. "Does it matter if it's newly printed?"

"No. Get me as much as you can and I'll see what I can do, but I'm not hopeful." I explained. "Have some people start working on something to track it specifically. When it's done I can use that to track it but until then..."

"Fine, then I'm green lighting a mission to track Agent Barton down. With any luck Loki and the Tesseract will be with him, if not then the primary objective will be to extract our Agents," Fury said, getting nods from Peggy, Bucky and Steve. "Maker, I would like you to go with them. I want you all gone the minute the tracker is done."

The next twenty minutes were a blur. I set up a UCM, tied to myself, to print out anti mind control cuffs. The machine could make one every twenty minutes, which was not optimal but would have to do. I kept a dozen of the cuffs from my cabinet and gave Fury the rest, after getting him to swear he would give one to Natasha. After that I whipped up a tablet to track Clint.

His pointer was slowly moving around near a small town in Connecticut, where a Shield analyst quickly figured out there was an abandoned cold war era bunker.

"That's where they've got to be, Clint, Loki and the Tesseract." I said. "If the Tesseract is throwing off any sort of radiation they would need somewhere that could block it."

"And a bunker designed to keep radiation out would do just as good a job keeping it in," Peggy finished, looking at the tracker over my shoulder. "Good catch."

"Then the plan is a go. Suit up and get out there." Fury said, nodding to Steve. "Your squad is already prepped and ready, they are just waiting for you three."

We made our way quickly to the flight deck of the helicarrier, Steve and Bucky deploying their armor as they climbed into a quinjet, which was already half full with the eight equipment enhanced soldiers. Bucky started explaining the mission plan and what to look out for while Steve walked further into the jet, stopping by the pilot.

"Take us out," He said simply, the pilot nodding and tapping buttons, the quinjet slowly ramping up. "Push it to the redline, I want us there yesterday."

A few minutes later we were flying through the sky, on our way to crash whatever kind of party Loki was trying to start.