

At War With The World

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Kapitel 1: Natasha: Scars

Natasha remembers.

Of course she does, her memory is remarkable like that, and she couldn't forget even if she tried to because the mementos are right there on her body whenever she looks into the mirror.

The long gash on her right thigh – Volgograd, fifteen stitches, three dead. Her first mission.

The tiny but still very ugly burn on her left calf – Kiev, bed-bound for a month, fourteen dead and two crippled.

The four miniature scars right over her left breast – Moscow, a stray bullet, one dead.

The three claw-like scars on her abdomen – Moscow again, eleven stitches each, seven dead, four crippled, one burned beyond recognition and she has never taken a step into a zoo again.

The long scar on her skull, hidden under red curls – Sarajevo, seventeen stitches, thirteen dead.

The scar tissue on the right side of her ribs and the tiny scar between her eye brows – Budapest, too much time in the infirmary, lost count of the dead around seventy-two and Clint. Actually, she remembers Clint the most when it comes to Budapest. She remembers heat and fear and blood – so much *blood* and most of it is her *own* which is a first – and Clint hovering over her and his voice, telling her to lie the hell down and let him handle this.

The other scars on her body are faint white lines, their origins long since forgotten, and things have been kind of a blur after Budapest because she can't remember every mission from then on like she has before. Maybe because SHIELD has the technology to heal broken bones and open wounds more efficiently than anyone else, maybe because she has never been in that much danger ever again. She doesn't know and she doesn't really care. The missions that mattered are etched into her body and will be there until the day she dies.

Natasha remembers all of them all too well.

But sometimes, when she watches Thor beat Steve in a very heated ping-pong tournament in the Avengers' mansion, for example, or when Stark and Bruce present new and better arrows for Clint who just hugs both of them in return causing them both to turn beet-red and awkward, she forgets. She forgets and she smiles and on these nights, she doesn't dream about fire and tigers and stray bullets and blood.

Kapitel 2: Clint: Frost

He's cold.

He constantly is and he doesn't really like it. In fact, he hates it. Even in the midst of a heated battle, he is so very cold and he feels like he is losing his mind all over again. Maybe he has never regained it in the first place, not after Loki poked him with that scepter or whatever the hell it was, and he is now doomed to freeze to death from the inside or something. Clint shudders from the thought and pulls the blankets up to his chin.

He is lying in his bed in the Avengers mansion, trying to shut off his brain, fighting off the cold in his mind. Is that even possible? He doesn't know but it certainly feels like it.

The others have no idea. At least he thinks they don't because nobody has said anything since he's back from Loki's Legion of Doom but then again, maybe they're just being nice. Clint has to fight back a smile – no, Tony Stark is incapable of being nice. They probably really don't know and it's okay that way. Or is it?

He's lying in his bed and he's *freezing* and even with all the blankets he's got, he still feels like he's on the freakin' North Pole, naked. Clint groans and buries his head in the pillows (he's got three because Natasha likes pillows in bed and he likes Natasha, so that's settled). He wants to sleep. He really wants to and he's not Bruce or Tony who can go without sleep for what feels like weeks and he's not Steve, either, who claims to have slept enough in the last seventy years. Clint *needs* to sleep because he has missed at least three targets on practice today and the only reason Natasha hasn't called him out on it yet is because she's away to Washington with Tony, still pretending to be his assistant. He can't keep doing this, lying awake at night and staring up at the ceiling because he can feel the ice and the frost creeping inside his heart and his mind, he can't keep doing this because the Avengers depend on him and his marksmanship. What kind of a master archer is he if he keeps missing his targets because he lacks sleep?

Clint groans again and screws his eyes shut and shivers under four blankets. He feels like he's eight years old again, alone and miserable and sick and so very weak and why won't his brain just shut up and let him sleep? He has no idea what time it is and in the dark of the night, the freezing blue he can still see seeping from his body is even more terrifying. And cold, so very, very cold.

Maybe it's because he's tired – maybe it's because she's been trained to be silent and efficient in what she does, but Clint doesn't hear her steps on the floor and doesn't notice her presence until he can feel the mattress move. He starts, his hand already on the knife he keeps hidden in the bed sheets, when he hears her say his name.

"Clint." He relaxes instantly. She crawls under one of his blankets, rests her head on two of the three pillows, her beautiful red hair sprawled around her head, and looks at him.

“Back already?” he asks and she flashes him half a smile.

“You know Stark – he insulted everyone at least twice and after that, they were only too happy to let us go.” Clint grins. She studies his face for a moment before looking at his blankets and asks,

“Cold again?” So she has noticed, then.

“Hm.” His grunt is enough of an answer for her. She shuffles closer, hugging him, and presses a quick kiss to his forehead.

It’s almost like Budapest, only this time she holds him while he’s desperately trying to fall asleep. A last, shocking wave of cold washes over him and his whole body shivers violently – and then it’s over. He can feel the warmth of her almost naked body pressed against his and suddenly, he isn’t cold anymore.

With a sigh, Clint closes his eyes, her lips still touching his forehead, and drifts away.

Kapitel 3: Steve: Help

Steve wonders.

Since he woke up in the future – and it really is, he's not dreaming this, he's been asleep for 70 years and everyone he knew is gone – he's always wondering. He wonders what happened while he was trapped in the ice, frozen and conserved like a piece of meat, wonders what has changed and how and why and he doesn't understand any of it. He's always thought he was pretty smart but after waking up, every child seems to grasp basic concepts faster than he does.

He has tried asking Tony – and boy, did that go wrong, you don't ask Tony Stark about technology if you don't want to be called at least six different names and feel even more stupid than you did before – and also Bruce – who has been very nice and understanding but Steve still doesn't get how a cell phone works – but none of it really helped. Steve wonders if he's simply gotten stupid in the past 70 years and what does he know, maybe being trapped in an iceberg does that to your brain and it's not actually his fault he is so extremely dumb now, or if mankind has gotten smarter since the 1940s.

Maybe it has, maybe he's not stupid after all.

But then, he watches Thor and Tony have a glorious drinking contest (which Thor wins, feeling not even the slightest bit drunk, and Bruce and Clint catch all of it on video while Natasha laughs so hard that she almost hits her head on the shelf behind her) and decides that no, mankind is just the same it has been back in the present day. Past. Whatever.

Steve sighs and flops into one of the big arm chairs in the living room. It's 4 AM and even Tony is asleep and Steve has been wandering around the mansion for the last hour, trying to find something to occupy himself with. Normally, he goes boxing when he's the only one awake in the middle of the night but all of his punching bags are in no state to train with right now and he hasn't got new ones yet. Maybe he'll ask Tony tomorrow when they're due and if there's something else he can do in the meantime because the gym is actually the only soundproof room they've got and he can't really train in there right now, can he?

That's why he's sulking in the living room, staring at the dark flat screen TV on the wall and occasionally glaring at the remote he still hasn't figured out how to use. He knows Tony has set aside an entire list of movies and documentaries for him to catch up on history and culture but the last time he has tried to figure out something on his own, he broke the coffee machine and he doesn't really want to relive that experience, thank you very much. Steve leans back and sighs again. Maybe he should try to sleep – but no, the serum did something to his body and he's feeling well-rested and fine even though he's had only about three or four hours of sleep tonight and he knows he'd only toss and turn around in his bed until the sun rises.

Slowly but surely, he's getting frustrated.

He smirks as he imagines what the others would say. Captain America, Living Legend, Hero of the People, frustrated? Impossible!

Except it *is* possible and he's bored and restless and *frustrated*. He wonders if maybe, he can go outside and jog for a bit, do a few laps, anything to not just sit here and sulk, when suddenly, a gentle voice asks,

"Can I help you with anything, Master Steve?" The first time it happened, Steve had decided he'd lost his mind alright and was hearing voices but now, he's almost gotten used to Jarvis. The AI is very polite (which makes him wonder how Tony has even managed to program it because everyone knows Stark couldn't be polite if his life depended on it) and nice (which Tony also rarely is) and Steve actually likes it.

"I don't think so," Steve sighs. He stands up and decides that yes, going for a jog would be nice, when it hits him.

"Actually," he says and smiles a bit. "There is one thing. Do you mind helping me with the TV?"

"Not at all, sir," the AI says and his smile widens. Maybe the future isn't so bad, after all.