

**(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)**

**A/N: Poor Nicky~**

**-x-X-x-**

Nick Fury has a migraine. Sitting behind his desk, the Director of SHIELD valiantly resists the urge to let out a long suffering groan, while at the same time allowing himself to at least rub his forehead in a doomed effort to alleviate the pain.

He'd had a week that left him in a state like this before. One single motherfucking week where Fury had had to deal with three separate messes caused by Tony Stark, Thor, and the Hulk all in one seven day period.

And yes, Fury did differentiate between the Hulk and Banner while putting all of the blame on Stark and not just Iron Man. The former had at least tried to keep himself under control and away from major population centers before provoked by General Ross, while the latter was a pain in Fury's ass whether he was in that tin can of a suit or out of it.

... But all of that shit regarding three of the most dangerous men in the world (even if Thor in particular wasn't from around here) had at least taken place over the course of a week. This? This, Fury had barely had twenty-four hours to come to terms with before being forced to act.

The entire goddamn STRIKE Team had been HYDRA. And Secretary Alexander Pierce as well. Fuck. Fury had really considered Pierce a friend. Instead, the man had turned out to be one of HYDRA's many 'heads'. And he hadn't gone peacefully either, which meant he was dead now, along with much of his organization.

That was the sole silver lining in this whole fucking mess. As much as it was giving Fury the migraine to end all migraines, at least he had the satisfaction of a problem handled to go along with it. And it could have been way fucking

worse. SHIELD might have had traitors, but it was only the STRIKE Team as far as they could tell, the rest of the organization was clear.

... If only the same could be said for the rest of the United States Federal Government. SHIELD was only as untouched as it was because it was so insular and isolated from the country that had birthed it. They were international these days, and even beyond that though very few people knew it.

And yet... the corruption had run deep here in the US. Deep enough to make even Fury shiver in disgust and disquiet as he looked over report after report of everything HYDRA that had been uncovered. Bribed Politicians, Secret Experiments, Planned Apocalypses and World Takeovers.

Really, they were lucky that the 'Heads' of the HYDRA didn't tend to play nice with each other from everything they'd managed to expose. If they'd all worked together towards one specific goal instead of working towards half a dozen different 'glorious futures', they would have been a lot more dangerous... or it would have already happened before Fury was even before.

HYDRA was dead now. The cleanup might take a while, but it was over. That was the good thing. The bad thing was HOW it happened. SHIELD wasn't the only party involved in uncovering and handling HYDRA's misdeeds. Frankly, from what Fury knew now, they couldn't have even if they'd been the only ones in the know.

No, the most SHIELD could have done was purge the STRIKE Team and maybe capture Pierce alive. And then they would have had to start waging a shadow war against HYDRA that would have taken years if not decades to settle in their favor... assuming HYDRA didn't just slaughter SHIELD within that time frame.

Instead, HYDRA had been destroyed in less than a day as all over the world, disparate groups seemingly entirely disconnected from one another had gained the necessary information to go after HYDRA wherever it could be found. To extreme success, at that. Everyone from local law enforcement to national government agencies to superhero teams and even supervillain teams had been... incentivized to apprehend and takedown HYDRA all across the planet.

Not at precisely the same time, but close enough for someone like Fury to notice. It was almost like someone trying to give off the impression of it being all uncoordinated... but despite only having one eye, Fury saw better than most. It seemed so uncoordinated that it could only be coordinated.

He-

There's a chime as a female voice comes from his desk.

"Director Fury, She-Hulk of the Avengers and Storm of the X-Men are here to see you."

Right, his next meeting. Huffing, Fury reaches out and presses the button to respond back.

"Bring them in, Agent Johnson."

"Sir."

A moment later and the door opens. Agent Daisy Johnson enters first, escorting She-Hulk and Storm behind her. Whether the latter two recognize that the first woman has powers just as they do or not, Fury can't quite tell.

In the end, they barely pay Daisy any mind... which is precisely why she's been reassigned temporarily to act as Fury's secretary and additional security. Coulson was reluctant to part with her, but at the same time it was his idea to have Fury supported by people with... abilities in this pivotal time.

"Director Fury, thank you for agreeing to meet with us."

Fury grunts.

"I didn't do so out of the kindness of my heart, Ms. Walters. Agent Johnson, that will be all."

“Sir.”

Daisy’s powers allowed her to manipulate any and all vibrations, including sensing them. As such, she’ll be able to hear everything that goes on in the office, even from outside of the large, supposedly soundproofed door. She departs quickly, said door closing behind her and leaving Fury to stare at She-Hulk and Storm.

“I’m told you have time-sensitive information for me about what the hell has been happening these past few days.”

She-Hulk and Storm share a glance at that and immediately Fury picks up on a sort of... discomfort between the two of them. This is not a strong alliance or relationship, whatever they have going on. She-Hulk doesn’t fully trust Storm, but something is binding the two of them together all the same in this moment.

Finally, Storm steps forward and clears her throat.

“What do you know about the death of Jean Grey, Director Fury?”

That... causes Fury to lean back in his chair, one visible eye narrowed in a frown.

“I know the official story is that she died in the act of stopping Magneto and his Brotherhood from trying to coup the US government a while back. And I know the unofficial story is that she lost control of her psychic abilities in the midst of that situation and you X-Men were forced to put her down.”

Storm grimaces at his wording, but Fury isn’t here to sugarcoat bullshit. Frankly, even the unofficial story stunk to high heaven... but he’d never been able to find out more. She-Hulk just frowns and crosses her large green arms over her equally large green chest, her eyes narrowed as she listens intently. He suspects this is information she wasn’t aware of before now.

“There is... more to the unofficial story as well. Jean didn’t just lose control of her telepathy... rather, she was taken control of by a cosmic entity called the

Phoenix Force. From what little the Professor has been able to understand; the Phoenix Force is a power beyond our reckoning... beyond anything in our entire world in fact. But it needs a host for whatever reason and Jean was that host from a very early age.”

Storm takes a deep breath but Fury can tell she’s not done yet so he stays quiet and lets her continue on.

“The Professor did his best to help Jean control it. Unfortunately, the older she grew, the more powerful she became and the more the Phoenix grew in power as well. Until the cracks in her control started to show. In the end, the battle against Magneto and the Brotherhood was... unfortunately, it was the straw that broke the camel’s back. She lost control and... became a threat to the safety of everyone on the planet.”

Well, he didn’t say that at all, actually. Not once did he think Jean Grey was a threat to everyone on the goddamn *planet*. Still, he doesn’t let his shock or worry over that tidbit show right now. Instead he merely compartmentalizes it away and focuses on the here and now. Like for instance...

“And what does Jean Grey and this ‘Phoenix Force’ have to do with these past couple of days? Its apparently all water under the bridge for you and the Brotherhood, given I have reports that your X-Men worked alongside the Brotherhood of Mutants to attack a research facility together.”

Storm blanches, clearly not having expected him to know that. Fury isn’t sure why, knowing things was his entire thing. Or at least, it was supposed to be. After a moment, he huffs and continues.

“... I’m going to let it slide because it was a HYDRA Facility, but I’ve got my eye on you. ALL of you.”

Lips pursing in a thin line, Storm looks like she wants to fight back... but in the end, she just sighs.

“The partnership with the Brotherhood was strategic and most of all temporary. That facility in particular held the lion’s share of HYDRA’s mutant subjects... including Magneto, taken from his federal jail cell many, many months ago.”

Hm, good to know. Fury just nods sharply to show he understands neither condoning nor condemning the ‘strategic partnership’. Silence falls for a moment before She-Hulk steps forward with a growl, uncrossing her arms to smack a fist into a palm.

“Enough with the posturing. The reason Jean Grey’s shit matters is because the X-Men say the Phoenix Force came back during the takedown of HYDRA. It came back and possessed another telepath, Emma Frost. And then it kidnapped Thaddeus Cummings and absconded to parts unknown.”

Storm clears her throat.

“Not just Thaddeus, but also three of our younger X-Men as well. Talon, Mercury, and Shadowcat were all taken by the Phoenix and we can’t figure out where they’ve gone.”

... Of fucking course. Of COURSE it would all come back to that motherfucker. Chad Thaddeus Thundercock Cummings. Fury has to resist the urge to rub his forehead again now that he has company, even as the migraine spikes. He can’t, however, quite keep his response from escaping his lips.

“For fuck’s sake.”

Storm and She-Hulk exchange another glance but Fury is already getting himself back under control. He now has an understanding of why the two superpowered women are working together at least. They both have a connection to Cummings, don’t they?

Otherwise they wouldn’t know to call him ‘Thaddeus’. As well, Storm might have brought up these missing X-Men too, but he heard the way she said Thaddeus. The mutant woman cares about him. And so does She-Hulk.

Fuck him. Fuck his life. Still, he's not about to tell either of them about his own interactions with Cummings. No, best to keep that in his back pocket. Instead, he leans forward and steepled his hands together in front of him as he stares at both women.

"And what, pray tell, do you want me to do about it? SHIELD isn't exactly in the business of handling cosmic-level threats."

She-Hulk snorts in amusement.

"We're not expecting you to handle anything. Obviously, this is something for the Avengers to take care of."

Storm scowls, immediately interjecting.

"And the X-Men. We have more experience with the Phoenix Force than your team, She-Hulk."

Rolling her eyes and her broad shoulders, She-Hulk just scoffs.

"We'll see how things pan out. No, Director, we don't expect SHIELD to handle Emma Frost. We just need you to turn your resources towards finding her. She's managed to hide herself from unconventional search methods like psychic powers and magical locator spells from what I've been told. We're hoping more conventional things like the worldwide invasions of privacy your organization is known for might yield better results."

Fury just snorts derisively at that, not at all offended by the casual insult. Still... after a moment, he nods.

"That's doable. Though we'll only be able to share information with the Avengers. Anything we find will have to be passed along to the X-Men through them given the X-Men's... rather murky legal status."

Storm immediately opens her mouth to protest, but She-Hulk cuts her off with a smirk.

“That’s what I told Storm here as well. And that’ll be more than fine. We’ll keep an eye on the X-Men, Fury, you can count on that much.”

Given the Avengers were a bunch of loose cannons that sometimes made him regret ever coming up with the whole initiative, Fury isn’t so sure. But he keeps his mouth shut and simply nods instead. Looking between them, Storm clearly realizes she’s outnumbered and closes her mouth, keeping her reservations to herself.

There’s another pause before Fury just raises his brow.

“Unfortunately, there’s nothing I can tell you so far. SHIELD has, of course, already investigated Emma Frost’s Office after receiving reports of the entire block nearly shaking itself apart, but beyond that, we don’t know yet where they went after that.”

He leaves it at that, causing She-Hulk to nod.

“Right. Just let us know if you get any updates and we’ll keep looking on our end as well. Thanks, Fury.”

Fury just makes a noise in the back of his throat, watching as she takes her leave with Storm in tow. The mutant woman doesn’t say her goodbyes, but he’s neither surprised nor offended by the snub. He has way too much work to do to care about that sort of thing, especially if there are cosmic powers possessing extremely powerful telepaths running around.

After all, Fury isn’t a fucking idiot. He can put two and two together and get four. First, there was the fact that the last Phoenix ‘host’ had been Jean Grey, an incredibly powerful telepath. Then, this ‘Phoenix Force’ had apparently chosen Emma Frost as its latest host on a day where the entire goddamn world seemed to be unnaturally coordinated in taking down HYDRA.

Needless to say, Fury had his suspicions. Suspicions he wasn’t going to share with anyone without further evidence to support his burgeoning theory. Still, first

was finding where Emma Frost had gone. That much power running around unchecked on his planet gave Fury fucking hives.

So he would-

“Well, that was interesting, wasn't it?”

His pistol is up and pointed at the intruder in an instant, Fury's one eye narrowing into a slit when he sees who it is. Standing there with her hands up in a lazy 'surrender' is none other than Natasha Romanoff, a wicked smirk on her lips.

Natasha Romanoff, the woman that Fury had to hand over to Thaddeus on a silver platter recently after it became clear she was already compromised beyond belief.

... Things just got even messier, didn't they?

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**A/N: Remember to go back and VOTE!**