

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

A/N: Fury and Natasha have a chat~

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After a beat, Fury lets out a slow breath and carefully lowers the gun. Natasha was dangerous, obviously, but frankly if she wanted to kill him, she wouldn't have revealed herself like this. Funny as it was, he can take some cold comfort in the knowledge that a woman like her would always stab him in the back, never the front.

By approaching him like this, therefore, her purpose here wasn't directly antagonistic. Of course, there was also the fact that Fury wasn't even sure a gun of his pistol's caliber would be capable of taking her down anymore anyways. Natasha Romanoff had been in the hands of a power booster for months now, after all.

His eye flicks to the door, half-expecting Agent Johnson to make the situation even more complicated by rushing in half-cocked. He wouldn't be able to blame her if she did, hearing an unknown's voice in the room along with the sound of him pulling a gun... well, it would make sense.

Fortunately though, Daisy stays where she is and doesn't stick her foot in it. Either she's able to recognize the nuance of the situation or she's already been disabled. Fury has to assume it's the first one given Natasha shouldn't have had the time to remove Daisy when She-Hulk and Storm just left a minute ago.

Sitting back down rather heavily in his chair, Fury is honestly starting to feel age catching up with him for the first time in his life. He's nearing fifty at this point... maybe it's time to start seriously considering his successor. Coulson would be his preference, obviously.

"Romanoff. Why are you here?"

Smirking, Natasha lowers her hands and walks forward until she's standing right in front of his desk.

"To set the record straight, why else? Though I noticed you didn't mention Emma and Thaddeus' status as SHIELD Contractors to Big Green or Dark & Stormy while they were here. So it would seem that you have your own suspicions as to the veracity of their claims, don't you?"

Fury's lips thin out at that. So she'd been listening in the entire time. Good to know. Still... she's not wrong. Doesn't mean he has to let her know that though.

"Even if I did believe them, I wouldn't have told them about the arrangement SHIELD has with your... benefactor, Romanoff. It's not relevant to the situation. And if they're right and Ms. Frost has gone off the deep end and kidnapped Mister Cummings, then the situation dictates that she, at the very least, is very much in breach of her contract."

Natasha continues smirking, though her eyes narrow almost imperceptibly, becoming ever so slightly... flinty.

"That is not the situation. They are, of course, very wrong."

Fury just sits back in his chair and laces his fingers in front of him, raising his brow as if to say 'elaborate'. Natasha huffs ruefully, rolling her eyes right back at him.

"You don't need to do all of the little tactics with me, Fury. I'm already here to clear the air."

"Then clear it."

"No one has been kidnapped. Thaddeus went with Emma willingly, as did all of the others who went along with them."

"And where did they go?"

“That, I’m afraid, is classified.”

“Then unclassify it.”

Shrugging, Natasha shakes her head.

“I can’t. Above my paygrade. Even I don’t know where they are right now, Director.”

That... Fury narrows his eye and frowns. Even she didn’t know? Then...

“I’ve been in contact with Thaddeus though. He and Emma have explained the situation to me and tasked me with making sure you aren’t manipulated into becoming their enemy.”

Manipulated. Him. That rankled something fierce. Fury scoffs, but Natasha is dead serious.

“You have enough on your plate, Fury. HYDRA might have been defeated, but there’s still a whole lot of cleanup left to do. And it’s not just here in America as you well know by this point. It’s global. Seems like a job for SHIELD, doesn’t it? So do you really have time to waste on wild goose chases?”

Fury’s jaw clenches.

“HYDRA... that was their doing, wasn’t it?”

Natasha pauses and Fury knows immediately that he’s on the right track. Of course, he also knows that Natasha Romanoff of all people would never in a million years ‘accidentally’ give away a tell like that. Meaning that they intend for him to know. They want him to know... or at least, she does.

“I can neither confirm nor deny anything to do with that, Fury. Here is what I am authorized to tell you. Thaddeus and Emma were involved in something that needed some heavy lifting on the psychic side of things. As a result of this, the

Phoenix Force was drawn to Emma Frost. However, she is in complete control... there is no danger, not to the Earth or its population.”

Ah, so that’s why they wanted him to know. So that he would connect the dots and understand that the ‘something requiring heavy lifting’ was heroic and benevolent in nature, rather than malicious or malevolent.

Hm, it certainly helped to clear up a few things Fury still hadn’t been sure about from the past few days. The quasi-coordination between so many disparate organizations in the worldwide takedown of HYDRA... well, if a pair of powerful telepaths were nudging things along, that explained a lot, didn’t it?

Of course, that was still far from... comforting. That much power in the hands of any man or woman was too much damn power. Especially bolstered by this so-called cosmic entity, the ‘Phoenix Force’. And Natasha wanted him to believe Emma Frost had it all under control?

“Exactly how is Frost controlling the Phoenix Force if Jean Grey went crazy and had to be put down over it? You expect me to believe that we aren’t inches away from another catastrophe like that one?”

Natasha nods, dead serious.

“I do... because you haven’t been given all the facts. The tragedy of Jean Grey is not a story that someone like Storm can tell you in full... because she doesn’t fully understand what happened. Only one man knows what happened... because of what he did to cause it.”

Fury isn’t an idiot. He puts together what she’s handing him quickly enough.

“You’re talking about Charles Xavier.”

“I am.”

“And exactly what ‘crime’ do you and your benefactors aim to pin on the Professor?”

“Overcautiousness. To the point of, as you put it, catastrophe.”

Scowling, Fury gestures impatiently for Natasha to get on with it already. She smirks at him in response.

“Put bluntly, when Professor Xavier came across Jean Grey as a young girl, he was frightened by her psychic powers. This is because the Phoenix Force had been inhabiting her already by that point... and because Jean Grey is naturally stronger than Charles Xavier even without the Phoenix Force’s presence.”

Oh? Fury is already starting to connect dots, but he stays quiet and lets Natasha continue weaving her web.

“Out of fear of what a girl Jean’s age might do, accidentally or on purpose, with such power, Charles Xavier put mental blocks in her mind, unknowingly suppressing the Phoenix Force and cutting it off from its host at the same time. Jean grew up, learning to use what power he left to her, but never knowing what lurked within. Until the incident with Magneto and the Brotherhood caused those deteriorated mental blocks to finally fully dissolve and unleashed the Phoenix Force in full. Jean wasn’t ready for it. Nobody was ready for it. And everything went to shit.”

... Believable. What little of the Professor that Fury knew left the SHIELD Director able to easily believe Xavier would make a mistake like that. The man was an idealist and an activist, but he was also careful and cautious to the point of stagnation at times.

To be fair, better stagnant than a terrorist like Magneto and his ilk had become. At least the X-Men were by and large heroes.

Still, while it was easy enough to believe Natasha’s story about why Jean Grey snapped and had to be put down, it’s not so easy to believe the unspoken part.

“And what exactly makes Emma Frost different from Jean Grey? If the Phoenix Force decided to simply... possess her a couple days ago because she

accidentally set off a beacon with her power, how is that any different? And don't try to tell me that it was all smooth sailing, I have an entire block of buildings that may no longer be structurally sound, centered around Emma Frost's Office."

Natasha winces, but again Fury is confident that she's doing it on purpose. Still...

"The transition wasn't exactly seamless, of course. However, Emma does have one thing Jean Grey didn't. Months upon months of steadily increasing power thanks to Thaddeus Cummings. It didn't happen all at once for her. It didn't suddenly overtake her in a single moment. The Phoenix Force is no walk in the park, but from what I've been told, Emma and Thaddeus can control it together... so long as nobody shows up to attack them under the misguided belief that they're 'saving' Thaddeus."

The funny thing is... Fury actually believes that. Based on everything he knows anyways. Thaddeus Cummings was a dangerous man. Powerful beyond belief, and with the capacity to become more powerful day after day, sexual encounter after sexual encounter.

But the time for treating him as a threat and trying to deal with him in some decisive, altogether final way, was long past at this point and Fury knew it. Admittedly, he didn't regret leaving the young man to grow this powerful... at least not yet.

Still, given Frost had been Thaddeus' patron for this entire time, it stood to reason that she would be stronger as well. And if the timeline of events was correct and nothing was being directly obfuscated in that regard, then the power couple had been psychically strong enough to do a lot of damage to the world even before the Phoenix Force showed up to make a mess of things.

That they'd used their powers to help deal with HYDRA spoke... well enough of them, Fury supposed. And if not 'well', then it at least spoke to them caring more for the world than some.

All of this was to say...

“And what would you and your benefactors have me do, Romanoff?”

Smirking again, Natasha shakes her head.

“I already told you. There’s nothing we want done except for SHIELD to do its job. Focus on HYDRA and the cleanup efforts there. You don’t need to stonewall the Avengers or the X-Men, simply... don’t prioritize hunting down your own contractors over dealing with the damage caused by an international terrorist organization aiming to take over the world.”

Fury huffs. That was all well and good but...

“And in the meantime I just ignore the danger that Ms. Frost and Mister Cummings represent, is that it?”

“You don’t have to ignore anything, Director. There are a lot of dangerous people in the world. Not all of them are threats or enemies. Certainly not my... benefactors, as you called them. And besides, you already have me as their ‘SHIELD Liaison’. If you have any questions, feel free to ask and I’ll get you some answers.”

That draws a truly derisive snort from Fury.

“We both know you’re not mine, Romanoff. Frankly, I question if you ever were.”

Those words actually have an effect on Natasha. Her smirk drops completely and she stares at Fury for a moment.

“... I was loyal. When Barton flipped me, when we tried to kill Dreykov and end the Red Room, I was loyal. We failed, of course. Dreykov survived. The Red Room survived.”

What? Fury stiffens up but Natasha just continues on.

“They fooled us. They fooled you and all of SHIELD. Maybe because they had some sort of deal with HYDRA and so HYDRA blinded you to the truth. I don’t know, all I know is that you didn’t know... or you’d already be dead right now.”

He believed that. He really did.

“We dealt with the Red Room permanently though. Me and my ‘benefactors’. There will never be another generation of Black Widows. Every girl, every woman... they’ve all been avenged.”

Tilting her head to the side, Natasha hums.

“But yes. I was loyal to SHIELD for a time until I met Thaddeus and got to know him. Even if you didn’t deserve my loyalty, I was loyal. Now... I have someone who DOES deserve my loyalty.”

Then, like a switch being flipped, Natasha smirks again.

“Still, if you really don’t feel like you can trust me, feel free to assign another SHIELD Agent to... liaise with my benefactors.”

Fury narrows his one eye at that.

“And let them be compromised too?”

But Natasha just shrugs.

“Trust has to start somewhere, Director. I imagine you’ll be keeping a close eye on all of your agents going forward, especially after the STRIKE Team all turned out to be traitors. In the end, you can feel free to treat whoever you assign as a... canary in the coal mine, so to speak. And in the meantime, well, you’d be a fool to pass up the opportunity that my benefactors represent, wouldn’t you? After all, if you weren’t going to use Thaddeus Cummings, why make him a contractor in the first place?”

That... Fury's mind goes to the secret files detailing Agent Melinda May's test results. Just one 'encounter' with Thaddeus had left her with abilities far beyond what she used to have. She was already a dangerous, deadly, capable agent. But now... well, there was a reason that Coulson was willing to let Fury have Agent Johnson temporarily, and it was because Agent May could pick up the slack.

Although... just how strong would Agent Johnson be if she could go a round or two with Mister Cummings? It's like being tempted by the Devil himself, Fury can't help but think as he grits his teeth. And yet...

"Agent Johnson, come in here please."

The door to his office opens a moment later and Daisy Johnson walks in, thoroughly unsurprised by Natasha's presence as her eyes move between the two of them curiously.

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A/N: Remember to go back and VOTE!