Bedside Vigil (The Cups of Comfort Remix)

by navaan

Summary

Wanda keeps watch over her brother after Age of Ultron. She doesn’t have to do it alone.

- Inspired by Gaze Upon the Glass (a war poem remix) by Squeaky

Waiting was the worst part.

When their parents had died there had been no hospital beds, no waiting around for news, no waiting for death to occur. One instant Wanda had been sitting at the table kicking her feet back and forth, grinning at Pietro who was making a face at the food - and the next, the world exploded in fire, rubble and noise. Everything was noise and sudden silence. Her ears were ringing, there was a huge hole in the floor, dust and dirt in her lungs, and mother and father were gone, swallowed whole by destruction.

Pietro, dust in his hair, blood and dirt on his face, was moving his mouth, but nothing reached her, nothing got past the ringing in her ears. That was the moment that remained frozen in her memory - how the words had fallen away into fire and dirt and death and nothing, nobody had been able to reach her until her brother’s arms closed around her and she started to understand.

She had been a happy little girl of 10 and death had never touched her before.

Then all that had been over in the blink of an eye and nobody had cared.
Back then, it had been her and Pietro brought to a hospital hours later, after the name on the side of an unexploded warhead had burned into their overwhelmed minds. They had held each other, clung to each other in their grief, in the scary knowledge that they were alive and alone.

This time, she was curled up in an uncomfortable, plastic chair and the best she could do was stroke her brother's hand, cold and pale as it was. He had never been able to sit still, even long before the two of them had walked right into the hands of Hydra and offered themselves up for the power to get back at the person who had taken everything from them. The name on the warhead had become a life goal.

Stark.

The man who was just now standing on the other side of the the glass walls of the med room, talking to Dr. Cho. It was still hard for her to look at him, not because of who he was and what had happened back when her family had been violently torn apart, her happy childhood ended, but because Wanda had to look at him and realize what their revenge had cost all of them, what they had brought on the world.

Hawkeye came by and set a glass of water on the small bedside table. He did not elaborate if it was for her or Pietro or just a reassuring gesture, but he kindly patted her shoulder. "A tough one, your brother," he said. "He'll come back, you'll see. They are doing what can be done."

"I know." Some of it, she had done herself when her burst of energy, when her power had taken the bullets from her brother's body. He had made it here in critical condition but alive. The doctor said we were lucky he made it this far.

Captain America stepped in some time after Hawkeye had left, covered in soot and grime and blood, his uniform’s colors muted and grey. He, like the other Avengers, was still helping with the clean-up in Sokovia. He held out a paper cup with hot, black coffee, and the smell of it was welcome. "I'm bringing in all the dirt," he muttered, “sorry.”

"It won't bother him." She felt the warmth seep into her fingers from the cup as soon as she touched it and took a sip of the bitter liquid. It was a small comfort, a small reminder of life. She had no tears left to cry, no anger. The other half of her, her brother, her twin, pulled away from her more with every shallow breath forced into him by machines. "He doesn't mind."

“Ask,” he said, and it was striking how he was both Captain America, the super soldier she had been prepared to destroy, strong and full of conviction, and a man with worried eyes who was trying to be nice to her, "if there's anything you need."

Her throat constricted and she stared into her coffee. "I will."

She had seen into his mind. She had gone there to look for the right fantasy to catch him in. Her powers weren't an exact science and she had tried to grab for the thing he missed the most from his old life and just for the barest hint of a moment, she had found people he had lost, the woman he was losing all over again now, hospital beds and the smell of antiseptic… The life of Steve Rogers had not been without loss.

Even looking at him now, she realized with a jolt that Steve Rogers was a man, a good man, a brave man, who had been given something to make him the super soldier he was now, but a man who had loved and lost.

"Thank you," she said. "You are a good man, Steve. Offering comfort to me, after..."

"This isn't on you. Ultron destroyed Sokovia. You did not put your brother there." Perhaps he was
relieving another memory or thinking of someone else he had lost, because his eyes were sad and his voice soft. "You never wanted Pietro to get hurt or for any of it to happen."

She nearly choked on her next breath, feeling sobs start up and trying to keep them in. She curled into herself more, hugging her arms around herself as if that would keep the pain from bleeding out into the world. "I made the problem. I made it." She hadn't yet admitted it to any of them, not out loud, not like this.

"You did not want this," Steve said calmly. "And you helped set it right. Both of you did. That counts. It does. Don't forget it. You didn't run. You stood with us and you will again. Both of you."

One broken sob escaped her and although she had thought there wouldn't be any more tears her cheeks were suddenly wet. Nothing was right again. Pietro was still dying. Sokovia was still destroyed. Because two hurt children had been out for revenge.

For half an hour Steve stood by her chair and let her know she wasn't alone. Then his friend Falcon came to call him away. Wanda pulled up her chair closer to her brother's bed and drew up her knees. Watching Pietro's chest rise and fall, observing fluids run through the many tubes, listening to the sounds of the machines that were keeping him alive, she finally drifted off.

When she woke up, someone had put a scratchy blanket around her and she was warm, but her back hurt and her right leg had fallen asleep and she had trouble moving it.

"You should go back to sleep."

She was surprised to find Stark there by her side and sitting in another of the uncomfortable chairs, typing something on his phone. For so many years she had wanted nothing but revenge, had let her anger build and grow until it had come crashing down with the terrifying power for destruction of a tsunami. Now Tony Stark was right here and the only thing she felt was emptiness and exhaustion and… calm. She wasn't alone.

He shoved a cup of water into her hands and she sipped it, like she was the sick person everyone was worried about.

"Why are you still here?"

"My turn," he said and looked up over the rims of his silly glasses. "It's what you do when you're on a team. I'm not an expert on that, though."

She remembered her little 10 year old self in the hospital, clinging to her brother, and felt his absence keenly. But she wasn't alone. "Team," she said and tried it out. Captain America had implied as much. It was preposterous. "I put the idea in your head," she said slowly, forming every English word carefully and waiting for a reaction. "I set all of this off. I made the problem… I wanted you to be the one who brought about the end of the Avengers. Your own. I started this."

Stark sighed, finally let his phone sink and lean forward, elbows on his sighs. He looked as tired and worn as she felt. Then he pulled his glasses off, let them fall in his lap, leaned back, the corners of his lips drawn down in a frown. Then he straightened himself to look her right in the face and said: “No. You did not.”

“But I did…”

“The idea was there already; you gave me a reason to act on it.” She tried to protest and he waved his hand up and down to keep her from speaking. “You were not the beginning of this. Neither was I, I suppose, but some days it’s easier to forget that than others. You did a thing and the thing
had terrible consequences you didn't foresee. Story of my entire life. The question is, do you want to try and make up for it?"

“Do I learn from my mistakes?”

“No. Well, yes, you probably do. But that’s not what I’m saying. Try. The mistakes will keep coming, but try. You can’t take back what you did. But it’s about what you do now.”

It was the strangest conversation she’d had so far with any of the Avengers, stranger perhaps than the one she’d had with the new Ultron-born lifeform, Vision.

Mirroring Tony, she sagged back in her chair. “How can you not blame me?”

“Ah, more than enough blame to go around, don’t worry. Doesn’t get us anywhere though. I lost my parents,” Tony said. “Sudden. Car crash. Left me without anyone to focus my hate on. There was only me. Alive and not sure how that happened. I’ve been pretty well acquainted with the feeling.”

*Orphans,* Pietro had said warningly. *They take us for their experiments because we are orphans. Nobody will miss us if we don’t come back from this.* They had both not cared about Hydra. Only about the chance it provided them.

*Nobody would miss us,* she had whispered. *But we will survive and be strong. We survived too much already to give up.*

She hoped that was still true. The alternative was too hard to face right now.

“Orphans,” she whispered, “do a lot of crazy things to deal with their pain, huh?”

“Nothing left to lose.” Awkwardly, Stark clapped a hand on her shoulder and then stood up. “Want some of the dirty water they pretend is coffee? God knows I’m desperate enough by now to drink it.”

She shrugged.

“I’ll get you some.”

The machines continued beeping. Pietro remained still and pale on the bed. She didn’t know what would happen next - to him, to her, to the world. Whatever happened, she would remember what she had done. She would live with the consequences of what she had wrought.

*Not right now,* she thought and the tears started to flow again. All the power in the world didn’t help her feel anything but small and helpless. *Pietro, don’t leave me behind. I need my brother.*

She was still crying when Stark returned and set the cup of coffee down on the shaky table. He didn’t say anything, offered no words of comfort.

Sometime later she fell asleep and woke up to find Natasha had taken Stark’s place in the chair. Her face was pale, but her uniform and hair were perfectly clean. Wanda didn’t know how she did it. “I can keep watch, if you want a break,” she offered.

Wanda shook her head.

This was her task.

Pietro looked terribly pale. The dark rings beneath his eyes were a terrible sight to behold.
Nurses came and went. Natasha stayed.

Needing something to do, she fiddled with the water, preparing a cup for her brother as if he would need it.

When Dr. Cho opened the door, she stood up, tried to search her eyes.

Back in the Hydra lab she remembered Pietro holding her hand, hugging her. *Whatever happens now, we’re doing it together. We’ll be strong together.*

Whatever happened now.

She’d be strong. She’d be better.

For both of them.

*He'll come back. I know it,* she thought and it was like all the Avengers voices were sounding in her head at the thought.

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