



xxix. A Choice Never Made

"Well, I can't say that your betrayal was unexpected, but still," Auralie said with more bravado than she had. In truth, her stomach lurched, her heart pounded, and she was trying very hard to keep her knees from shaking.

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"No, I didn't..... I have no idea how she found us," Lucian cried, panic evident in his face, "I swear Auralie, I didn't betray you. I wouldn't do that again."

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"Save your lies, the proof is right here," Auralie yelled, her voice increasing in volume, "hell, I thought we could be a family again. I thought that maybe we could make it right. But no, you're still the same as I remember."

"Auralie, no please, you can't..... I'm not lying!" The man yelled, his face becoming flushed from the heat and his voice rising.

Neither twin noticed Elory watching with cold detachment as the twins she created to be her puppets fought. She did not intervene, though it would be so easy for her to kill one or both. She was interested to see how this would play out. It would either go in her favor or be easily righted to suit her plans.

Auralie laughed bitterly, her eyes filled with pain, sadness, and hate, everything she had worked so hard to overcome, all rushing back to her.

"Ali....." he said so ly, "Ali, please! You're my sister. My twin."

"I'm not," she shook her head, "I may be your blood, but we are not family. My family is the Avengers. My family is Maria. They are the ones who helped me through the tough times, the ones who have supported me."

"All family's have issues...." he tried again to reach her, to see if there was anything le of that bond twins had.

Auralie nodded, "true. But they still care for each other. My true family split apart three years ago, in a big fight. In an airport. But we still cared about each other and when the time came, we realized we had to forgive and work together. None of them would ever leave me for dead. Which, if you recall, you did do. Actually, you were willing to kill me."

Lucian's eyes were wide and pleading, "I was a stupid kid!"

"You aren't a kid now, haven't been for several years. And you still are the same, still willing to betray me," Auralie took a threatening step towards him, shadows curling around her hands. Similar to her defensive position, this was her offensive position. She didn't take it on, but when she did, she meant business.

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"But I didn't."

"Oh, stop lying. I thought you might have wanted to make amends. I wished for it. But you aren't all that I have. You can't break me anymore. I have friends, I have family all of my own, and you can't ruin that."

If this interaction had come five years ago, she wouldn't have been able to take it. But the more she had seen, the more she had learned, the stronger she had become. In the four years since meeting Wanda Maximo, she had rediscovered all the joys of life. Auralie was not letting them be stolen from her again.

There was for once, no mercy in her eyes.

Auralie cared a lot. That was evident. She cared endlessly about her friends, her team. She cared infinitely for her sister. She would always be willing to save the world, even if she didn't think she could save herself. She, of course, loved Wanda with every fiber of her being.

She had loved Lucian too, had held on to that idea, even after his betrayal. She couldn't bear to release the memories, let herself heal because she couldn't bear the thought of letting her brother go. She had always harbored a thought that in another life, the Shadow twins would have never been separated.

Now it was time to face the truth. Her brother did not care. The universe where the twins were together was dead.

That didn't hurt like she thought it would. If she had stuck with Lucian, maybe she wouldn't be who she was today. And while she had her issues with herself, she was lucky. She had found the Avengers, and Maria, and Wanda. That was better than Lucian.

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So no, there was no mercy in the eyes of the Eclipse as she launched her shadows at her brother.

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This was for the thirteen-year-old she had been, and the girl who had clawed her life back together after. Auralie could see herself there, that little girl. She was covered in layers of dust and rubble. But she had survived. Lucian would not.

Lucian barely had time to let out a scream as the shadows swirled around him, entrapping him, surrounding him. They did their work, exactly as Auralie was telling them to, and dropped him to the ground.

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Trying to grasp for air, but finding none in time, Lucian choked out a final word, "sorry,"

Auralie then realized what she had done. She had killed her brother. Her hands shot up over her mouth as she choked back a sob. He had deserved it, she told herself, he had earned his due.

Elory burst out laughing, a high and cold sound.

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Auralie felt like she was going to be sick. Elory chuckled, "oh my dear girl, he wasn't lying to you. You foolish child. Do you think I couldn't find you on my own? Your brother was going to betray me. I was coming to kill him, but you did the job for me."

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Auralie sank to her knees.

"Of course, you can't take all the credit. This world of mine..... it does wonders for inflaming anger to irrational points. But you set the spark that lighted the fuse, so for that, I thank you," the dark sorceress said casually as if talking about the weather.

"No," Auralie sputtered, tears starting to roll down her face. Her brother hadn't chosen to betray her again. This wasn't because of his choice. He wasn't the bad guy here. And she had killed him.

How could she have done that? She didn't know. She had prided herself on her instincts, but she couldn't even tell who was right and who was wrong.

Auralie wanted to wake up from this nightmare, to wake up and be safe and young again. Her parents downstairs in the kitchen, her brother in the room across from hers. But they were dead, and it was all because of her. This was not a dream, this was real life.

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"And now, child, the only thing left in my way is you. Let's fix that, shall we," Elory said.

Auralie met the sorceresses eyes and knew that the inevitable had come.

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A/N: So, Auralie screwed up big time in this chapter. Sorry about that.

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