



## xxviii. Fond Memories of Shawarma

Almost a year later, a seventeen-year-old Auralie Shadow woke up screaming. She was shaking, trembling, and tears brewed in her eyes. Her throat felt raw and her heart was beating fast. She had just had one of her worst nightmares yet. She had been holding the tesseract in one hand, the scepter in the other and a towering figure of shadow had been trying to take them from her. No matter how much she tried to shine a light on him, he stayed in shadow. <sup>a</sup>

She couldn't give up the stones, no matter how hard she tried. They were stuck in her hands, and he wouldn't accept that. He made her watch everyone die. Amanda, Phil, then Fury, then Thor, Bruce, Clint, Steve, Tony, Natasha. Her parents. Then Maria. After that, Lucian had appeared in his grasp, begging for her to help him. The shadow morphed into Elory, who's high, cold laughter had haunted her for years. The monster drug her helpless brother over the blood-soaked bodies of her friends, her parents, her sister. Auralie awoke to the sound of Elory snapping her twin's neck. <sup>a</sup>

She had nightmares constantly. Whether they were about New York, Shield, the day her parents died, Elory, or so many other things, she woke up in tears often. Maria was normally there to hold her until the shaking subsided and make her hot chocolate. But Maria was halfway around the world on a mission.

The first time she had a nightmare that was so bad there was no Maria, or even Natasha or Clint to make it better, she had freaked out and laid on her bed sobbing for hours. After that, Maria had worked with her to develop strategies that would make it better. Sometimes she would call Steve, who had similar issues of nightmares and insomnia. They would talk about it until her heart came back to normal and he would say encouraging and kind things that made her feel better. Sometimes she would call Bruce, who would guide her through a variety of breathing techniques. Sometimes she would call Tony, who suffered from PTSD and knew how bad everything could be. He didn't have any ways to make it better, he relied on Pepper and Rhodey to help him, but thanks to them, he was able to manage it. So he just let her talk and told her his own stories. He never coddled her or made her do anything, he just understood.

But Auralie couldn't call them every time she woke up screaming. She couldn't get any sleep by spending all night reading or watching movies or working with her powers as she used to, not with the busy schedule she was always on. It was not healthy. So the most effective alternative method she had found was what she and Maria called the Patronus Method. <sup>a</sup>

The Patronus Method was when she dwelled on a really happy memory, the kind that you would use to make a Patronus, and place herself back in that memory until it was all she could think of. The technique was recommended to them by Shield therapists and mental health websites alike. It was usually enough to get Auralie back to sleep. <sup>a</sup>

For such a horrible nightmare Auralie needed a particularly good memory. One that never failed to make her feel better was just after the battle of New York. Shield had Loki in their custody, but the Avengers had not stuck around to see what happened after that. The seven of them had done just as Tony wanted and went to eat shawarma.

How a shawarma place managed to stay open during the alien invasion, no one would ever know. But Tony had paid for food for all of them and then tipped everyone in the place so much for letting them eat there. The food had been delicious, of course, they had been running off of coffee and adrenaline, so any food was a miracle of epic proportions.

They had sat around a table and eaten in silence. They didn't need to talk, what they had witnessed took a long time to process, and what they had done took a lot out of them. They didn't need to speak because they all hurt inside, and that pain and brokenness bound them all together. It was because they were all so dark that they could together become the light.

Auralie had her Shield friends, but she had never really had lots of people who understood her and that she could rely on. At that moment, as she ate as much food as she could without getting sick and tried to ignore the bruises that had come out on her skin, she realized that she had friends in everyone at the table, and that made her life so much better.

It wasn't love, because Auralie did not allow for love unless it was talking about her sister, but it was like, and like was enough to fight for. If there were people out there she could say she genuinely liked, one she loved, her life was worth so much. And as long as others had people they loved and liked, their lives were worth defending. <sup>a</sup>

Auralie held on to that memory with all her might and she felt her heartbeat calm down to normal. Her tears stopped dripping, her throat hurt less, and the shaking went away. She burrowed under the blankets, eyelids drooping, able to get back to sleep. Fortunately, the Patronus method had worked yet again.

She knew that pushing aside the nightmares wouldn't always work. But Auralie would deal with her fears when they came. When she had friends and Maria by her side because goodness knew she couldn't do this alone. If only Auralie wasn't so scared to let others in.

[Continue reading next part](#)