



vi. Mind Games

Auralie was getting very frustrated with a certain insane robot. Why wouldn't he just die and leave them alone? Pietro and Wanda weren't easy opponents either. Pietro was running around, his speed giving him a huge advantage. He had already knocked Cap over once, and if it wasn't for a bad decision to try and grab Mjolnir, he would have still been running around.

Wanda had melted into the shadows. Auralie was keeping an eye out for when the girl made a reappearance. She was endlessly dangerous, and Auralie could not let down her guard. That would mean losing the battle.

She also fired beams of light at Ultron and his drones, trying to damage them and wear them down. It took a lot to actually destroy them, they were built well, and Auralie had to admit, Ultron knew what he was doing.

Meanwhile, Wanda Maximoff had approached Thor, her slender hands, so graceful and delicate, like those of an artist, glowing red. Except her art was that of nightmares as she moved her hands, her magic infecting Thor's mind and taking her in, dragging him into his darkest fears. The fear that his own power would destroy him. That would most certainly affect his mind.

Thor called, "the girl tried to warp my mind. Be careful, I doubt a mortal could withstand her. Fortunately, I am mighty....."

He trailed off as he found himself in Asgard. Wanda sighed. She didn't like causing this sort of pain, but it was necessary to save the world from having to suffer as her family did. She moved on from Thor, leaving him to struggle to stay afloat in a sea of fears.

She dashed over to Steve Rogers, wincing mentally at the thought of doing this to such a good man. He was already down, struggling to recover from her brother's blow. She forced herself to call upon the magic and delve into Steve's heart and fears. She winced at the painful what-ifs he had about his past lover, Peggy Carter, and the PTSD he suffered from all of the war he had seen, but she still drew on those fears, bringing them to the front of his mind. She couldn't bring herself to touch a few things though, such as his need to protect his team and the world, or his lost best friend. Wanda just couldn't force herself to be so merciless, though her head told her to. Her heart revolted at the very thought.

She raced to Natasha Romanoff, the Russian spy. Wanda felt her heart fill with sympathy as she looked into the woman's head. Natasha's fears were her own past and her own life. What a horrible way to live. The girl had been through so much, and Wanda could relate. But she still used those memories to her advantage, hating that she had to hurt people, to sacrifice her morals, all to achieve a goal that seemed to be more and more impossible.

Then she found herself behind Eclipse. The girl who was only nineteen years old. Wanda's age. And like Wanda, she was powered and fighting a fight most people their age had only heard of. Wanda read the girl's mind, her soul, her heart, and she found herself breaking the most of all for this girl.

Wanda understood everything the woman had been through. She had lost her parents at a young age, watched her life crumble around her. She knew that the pain felt for a twin's betrayal was the same Wanda would feel if she ever lost Pietro. She knew the hate Eclipse felt for Elory was the same Wanda felt for Stark and the people who bombed her country. Wanda knew all the pain, the struggle with powers, the anger, and the fragile hope of making the world better. That desperation and sadness Wanda understood because she felt it too.

And Wanda realized, she realized she didn't need to show the Eclipse her nightmares because the girl lived them and felt them at every moment. You can't show someone something they were already seeing.

Wanda read the girl's mind and saw her worst fear, and Wanda felt her heart breaking for the girl, for Auralie Shadow.

Auralie Shadow

That name had echoed in her head before. When Wanda caught glimpses of other worlds, other realities, other people and places and the future. When her witch powers showed her things, they seemed to be trying to connect her to a woman of that name.

Well, now Wanda had found her and discovered they were both broken inside and showing Auralie a fear would not change anything.

Wanda raised her hands and sent the magic to grasp Auralie's consciousness. Like all the others, Auralie's eyes turned red. She, like Natasha, was to see a memory. But not one of her own.

Wanda walked away from the girl, hoping Auralie would understand why Wanda did what she did. If anyone would understand, it was the youngest Avenger. Wanda crept up behind Clint Barton, not as alert as she was before. So she hardly even noticed, she was so lost in her own thoughts, when Clint stuck an arrow to her head, causing her to stop moving as it shocked her.

Pietro ran by and grabbed her, yelling at Clint, knocking him down, pulling the arrow off and dashing away with his sister, the only one he had in the world, in his arms. They got outside and collapsed to the ground, panting.

"It hurts," Wanda cried, realizing she was in pain.

"What can I do?" Pietro asked, "we can wait it out."

Wanda shook her head, ignoring the pain and the thoughts of the Avengers, "no. I want to finish the mission. I want the big one."

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Auralie found herself young again, and she braced herself to watch her parents die, to watch her brother betray her. She had been expecting it, it wasn't as though she didn't think about it constantly, it was the main reason she woke up in tears so often.

But instead, she was in the city of Sokovia, at least, she thought it was Sokovia, and she was running after two children, who looked to be ten years old, with brown hair. She realized, with a start that she was with Wanda and Pietro, and these were Wanda's memories she was being shown.

Auralie watched as the children ran home to eat dinner with their parents. The boy and his mother and father talked happily, but the girl was filled with dread. Auralie knew that feeling. It was the instinctual feeling that something bad would happen.

When the first shell hit and the apartment began to collapse, and the parents went in, Auralie felt Wanda's heartbreak. She watched as Pietro pulled his sister under, and they cried together, and Auralie knew the feeling well. She watched as the second shell hit and sat in the rubble, and Auralie understood.

Being trapped for two days with only the word Stark as an answer to the question of why was certainly enough to fill anyone with rage. Why did Wanda's parents die? Why did Wanda lose everything? Why did the twins have to suffer?

Wanda never got a real answer. She just had the word Stark, fueling a fire of hate inside her, a hate she never wanted but had to live with anyways. Auralie understood exactly how Wanda felt the way she did, and she was sympathetic to this poor girl. She knew those feelings well.

What Auralie didn't get was why Wanda had chosen to share this with her. Her only guess was that Wanda knew she was doing was wrong and just didn't know anything else. Wanda was crying out desperately, needing someone to show her the way out of the hellhole of her life. She had chosen Auralie because Auralie understood.

And that was a lot to bear.

"Auralie," a voice cried, snapping her out of her own thoughts. Her thoughts cleared and her eyes blinked over and over, spotting a familiar red and gold mask.

"Tony," she said, glad her friend seemed to be functional and safe. Tony was carrying her and flying. Normally Auralie would not be alright with something like that, but Tony was one of her closest friends. She trusted him enough to feel safe when he helped her out.

Clint was helping Natasha to the jet, Steve and Thor were helping each other. Tony sent Auralie down gently, then flew off to deal with Banner.

Before he left he asked, "are you alright?"

"Probably not," Auralie replied, "I'm more confused than ever."

Tony sighed, "you and me both kid."

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