



xii. Lost

A/N: I know you all probably hate me after that last chapter. Sorry about that. But don't worry, it will all be fixed eventually. Like I said before, anything that happens from here on out is all from my wackjob of a brain. But, good news, this story now has 1k votes and I have 150 followers. Thank you all.

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Auralie was covered by a blanket, sitting on the quinjet, which was taking them back to the compound. Okoye had a lot to deal with, and they didn't want to be of any more intrusion. They were also tired, heartbroken, and they needed a safe place to formulate the next stage of the plan.

Rhodes was flying, and he hadn't spoken a word since they had left, he was too in shock. Thor was also wrapped in a blanket and sitting in the back, Bruce and Rocket sat by his side because he was grieving for everything. Steve and Auralie were taking things the hardest - Steve had fallen into an uneasy sleep, Auralie couldn't even close her eyes. Natasha looked at both of them, worried about what effect this would have on her friends.

"You should sleep," Natasha said, sitting down next to Auralie, who hadn't spoken since Steve had carried her as she sobbed, "I don't know when you'll next get the chance."

"I can't," Auralie choked out, tears beginning to run again, her eyes red from crying and her throat hoarse, "every time I close my eyes, all I see is her turning to..... turning to dust in my arms."

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Natasha placed a gentle hand on Auralie's shoulder, "oh Ali...."

"This is why I feared trust. This is why I feared loving other people. Because in the end they die and it's like your heart being ripped out. Better just to not have one at all," Auralie said bitterly.

"No it's not," Natasha said softly, "Auralie, in the Red Room they tried to make us heartless. I'm thankful every day that they failed and that I can still care. That's what makes us good people. You know that."

"I just can't take it, Nat! She's gone, and Sam's gone, and Bucky's gone, and Steve's sad and I don't know about Tony or Maria but they could be dead too! This is exactly what I feared and now it's come true and I'd give anything to make it stop!"

"Ali....."

"You know what the worst part is? Do you?"

"No," Natasha breathed.

Auralie looked down at her hands, which were folded in her lap. She couldn't move them, she couldn't do anything. She felt broken. She was broken. Auralie sighed, "the worst part is, I was never supposed to be alone. I had a twin. We were supposed to be a team. Then he was gone. I found Wanda. My soulmate. Now she's gone. I'm alone, the one thing I don't think I was supposed to be. And you know what..... I got used to being alone, that first time I lost everything. This time I wasn't ready. Do you know what my heart feels like right now Natasha?"

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Natasha shook her head, "No."

Auralie took a breath, "it feels like there's nothing there but broken pieces that keep stabbing me, trying to kill me but failing. Because I have to survive and endure this pain. Dying is easy, it's living that's hard. Dying is just everything going dark, it's empty. Life is full of pain and grief. I'm not sure I can take it."

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"You can," Natasha replied, "you've come a long way from the thirteen-year-old broken thing that I met so long ago."

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"Really," Auralie scoffed, "because that's exactly how I feel. Just like I did then. Only worse."

"Ali," Natasha pleaded, trying desperately to break through to the young woman.

Auralie wiped at her tears, "I hope their ghosts are together. Wanda's and Pietro's. I hope they're happy. If anyone deserves it..... I can't do this Nat. I just can't. I just want to shut down, to not feel this anymore."

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"Stay with me," Natasha replied, "stay here and help. We aren't giving up until we fix this..... or we're all dead. We'll find Tony, wherever he is, we'll find him and together we can fix all of this. Believe in that Ali, and believe we'll get Wanda back."

"How is that possible? Thanos has the stones and the only one more powerful than him is dead." Auralie pointed out, sounding utterly miserable.

Natasha closed her eyes, "I'm not sure. But we'll make it work. We're the Avengers, we save the world."

"I think it's too late for that," Auralie said.

Natasha nodded, "maybe. We'll just have to see." At that moment, Steve called out in his nightmares, crying. Natasha got up and went to shake him awake. She wasn't sure what to do to help her team. All she could think of was defeating Thanos and getting their people back. So that's what they would have to do.

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They arrived at the compound. Natasha led Auralie in and over to the couch, where she collapsed in misery. Steve went over to the window, where he sat, looking out over the grounds and trying to wipe away his tears. Rhodes led the others to rooms where they could get some sleep. None of them really knew what to do. They had lost.

Rhodes and Natasha had tried using several different phones to call Tony. No answer. They were all worried sick. Though Natasha and Steve had some issues with the billionaire, they didn't want anything to happen to him. He was a good man at heart.

"We could try one of the communications devices on his other suits. They're connected to Friday and all of his gear. If anything could get us a line to Tony, it's that," Rhodey suggested.

Natasha nodded, "good idea. Go grab one of his helmets."

Rhodey did, and soon the two Avengers that were still standing and planning were trying to activate the communications system. Before they found a way to send a message, however, they found one waiting for them.

"Ali, Steve, Bruce, Thor, all of you get over here," Natasha called, "Tony's alive, and he needs our help."

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