

## Chapter 18

18

I feel the air being sucked out of me as I stare at Maximo. She looks at me blankly. I open my mouth to speak, to defend myself. Before any word leaves my lips, Maximo stands up and looks away from me, at the door.

"I am done talking." She says, still refusing to look at me.

I can tell she wants to walk away from me but is held in place by the chain connected to the table, so she just stands there, slightly swaying. Somehow she reminds me of a child, throwing a temper tantrum. Surely she can see I am only trying to help her. Surely she knows that she is here through no fault of mine, but that her own actions have led her here.

Maximo's head suddenly snaps towards me, her eyes shooting daggers at me. She narrows her eyes and I feel sudden anger and hurt, and an overwhelming sense of loneliness overcome me.

I am here because of you. I hear Maximo's voice hiss inside my head and my eyes widen. I thought she would be completely out of it. Looks like her powers are stronger than they estimated, overall. I am suddenly struck wondering whether if she really wanted to, she couldn't just bust out of here. I realize she might still be reading my mind, so I try to focus on only my breathing as I let myself think out one thought.

I did not cause this.

And yet Maximo yanks slightly at the chain.

You would have ended up here one way or the other. I think you overestimate my importance.

Maximo snorts and looks up at the ceiling, and my eyes once again land on her bruised throat. Then, she seems to compose herself as she looks down at me again, as if I am a particularly bothersome fly.

I exchanged my freedom for your life.

I gape at her and she rolls her eyes, apparently very much over this conversation. I don't know how to make sense of my emotions, and I know she can tell as she studies me again with slightly soer eyes.

You were dying. I begged them to take you to a hospital, quickly. I promised I would come with them. Maximo's voice sounds in my head again and I shake my head, trying to clear it and to get rid of whatever feelings Maximo is projecting. I feel the walls closing in.

That was your choice, I think, trying to defend myself.

And you still believe I am evil? Comes the reply, and sadness washes over me, but I'm not certain whose it is.

Do you really believe that? Or is that something you tell yourself to make you feel better?

Maximo stares at me, and I know I've said something right, or wrong, it doesn't really matter. It's worked; it's gotten through. She sinks back down on her chair, and I can tell her eyes are watering.

I get it. I think, feeling a lump form in my throat. Believe me, I get it. If the world is out to get you, it makes it an easier place to live in.

I look down at my hand which is resting on the table. I realize this must look utterly weird to everyone watching, but suddenly all I care about is getting through to the woman in front of me. Makes it easier to convince yourself it doesn't matter what you do because they have already formed an opinion on you and it's just so easy to live their truth.

Maximo blinks rapidly, trying to clear the tears threatening to spill. I can tell she's tired. I am tired.

What is the point? She sounds in my head, and I know she's not asking about what I am trying to say.

I don't know. Do I look like I have it figured out? At that, Maximo chuckles slightly.

Well, you're not the one in chains. A small smile crosses my face and I start pretending to rearrange the papers in front of me, just so it looks like... well, slightly more normal from the perspective of everyone not inside my head.

You keep calling me by my last name.

I narrow my eyes at her. What am I supposed to call you? You won't convince me to call you Scarlett Witch.

At that, Maximo actually lets out a small laugh, and she shakes her head, pushing some of her red mane behind her ear.

I guess...she slowly voices her thoughts to me. I guess I don't really have anyone who calls me by my name anymore.

I bite my lip, looking down at my lap. I don't want to admit it, but I'm in the same boat. The last person who called me Olivia, well, except for Maximo that one time, I let down in the worst way. I notice

Maximo's gaze is on me, undoubtedly feeling or listening to my thoughts.

So what, we're friends now, or what? Ask her sarcastically, looking up at her, trying to build up my walls again before she sneaks around them.

She tilts her head slightly, smiling a small smile, which is contagious, making me bite my cheek to keep me from smiling back.

I wouldn't call us friends.

What would you call us?

Mutually destructive opposites.

Opposites? It is my turn to now tilt my head at her questioningly.

I'm on this side of the table, and you're on that side. You can get up and leave, I can not.

I raise my eyebrow at her, and she juts her chin out at me challengingly.

You know, Wanda, sometimes people pretend you're a bad person so they don't feel guilty about the way they treat you. I think and look into Wanda's eyes, which hold mine for a second before looking down at her hands.

"Humph" She hushes and I can tell she's trying to emotionally distance herself from the situation.

"You know why you're here, don't you?" I speak up, finally, my voice barely audible.

All Wanda does is keep her gaze on her hands, which are fiddling with each other on the table in the middle of us.

"Wanda?" I ask her and she finally looks up at me, wide-eyed.

"I don't know what to do anymore." She confesses, her tired voice cracking and I can hear the fear she feels.

I lean forward, ignoring the slight twinge in my ribs, and place my good hand on her hands, calming them. She looks down at our hands but doesn't remove hers. I can tell how she's battling to keep her emotions in check.

"Pain doesn't go away, no matter how hard you try to push it back, it keeps returning." I whisper. "A few months ago, my niece was killed because of me."

Wanda looks up and it's my turn to stare religiously down at our hands. It feels odd to finally say it out loud to another person. Not even the therapist I've been forced to see by the Bureau has actually heard me say that out loud.

"I was meant to watch over her, and I failed, and now she's gone." I shrug. "Every day I have to fight to keep that ledge away or I'll fall and I don't think I could survive the fall."

"I know." Wanda whispers. "I think I've fallen."

"No, you haven't." I look up at her and squeeze her hands. "You're still here."

"I don't want to be." She croaks, her composure finally breaking and tears falling from her emerald eyes.

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