

Chapter 48

It feels like the van keeps going for hours. It probably does, but there is absolutely no way for me to tell time from inside the steel contraption. A er a while of just lying there, my mind has begun to wander freely on its own, my imagination keeping me busy while my body complains angrily at every jolt I feel and every bump on the road. My mouth is parched, and I need to pee. Having nothing to keep me occupied with, having to pee is all I can think of, and I doubt I've ever been thirstier. I vow to never again take a cold glass of water for granted. Come to think of it, I feel slightly chilly, my skin is covered with cold sweat, so a nice cup of tea would hit just right. All those times I had a teacup in my hands and didn't finish it... most of those can be attributed to Wanda being there.

The cold from the floor of the van creeps through me, chilling me all the way to my bones. I doubt I could ever properly warm up again. If only I had some of Wanda's scarlet to borrow, that would surely feel like fire in my veins, keeping me nice and toasty. I've been fiddling with the rope trying my wrists together, but it's been fastened immaculately and however much I fiddle with it, it doesn't budge even the slightest. All I manage to do is irritate the skin underneath the rope, and now it won't stop burning.

So, all in all, I feel fabulous! I'm cold, clammy, every muscle in my body aches, I am parched and my throat feels like it's covered in sand, I also need to pee so badly the next time the van jolts might be the time I wet myself, and my wrists burn and my shoulders ache, and I cannot see a thing, and I feel incredibly car sick. But I don't like to complain.

Thankfully, my slow and incredibly frustrating torture doesn't last forever. The van eventually slows doesn't and comes to a halt. It feels weird, lying there in stillness without the rocking motions of the van and the slight shaking the engine created. Even the absence of the sounds of the road and the other cars is eerie. I hear two doors slam and the floor shakes slightly. A little while later the doors open and I need to shut my eyes tightly, being blinded by the sudden bright light streaming into the van. A rough pair of hands grab my ankles and pull me out of the van. I try to open my eyes but the buggers just keep watering. Someone holds me upright from both sides, their hands big and strong.

"Let's go, bring her in." I hear a familiar voice say. It's the black-haired man from the park.

"You don't tell us what to do, soldat!" A rough voice growls on my right, his words laced with a thick accent which a place as Russian.

"I just did." The black-haired man replies, his voice calm and smooth compared to the man on my right.

The man grunts and unceremoniously yanks me forward, caring as much for me as for a bag filled with trash his boss has asked him to take out. My arms scream in protest and I keep in a pained grunt, not wanting them to know how much they're hurting me. The blinding light pushing against my closed eyelids so ens slightly and I dare try to open my eyes again.

I'm being led down a corridor of some sort. The walls are a dull grey color and harsh lights are fixed on the ceiling at even distances, their fluorescent light bathing the corridors in a horrible eery shine. The dark-haired man is leading the way, confidently walking down the hall, obviously familiar with his surroundings. There is a man on either side of me holding me up by my arms. They're both so massive in size they easily dwarf the black-haired man, and the way they're holding me up so easily tells me they've definitely been hired for their strength. My feet barely even graze the floor.

I try to keep track of the way they're leading me in, but soon my head is pounding hard again and I've lost track of the number of plain doors we've passed and the numbers of corners we've rounded. It feels like they're leading me deeper and deeper into a maze of corridors that all look the same. Just when I think I must have entered some simulation in which I just keep being dragged around forever and ever, the dark-haired man stops in front of a door next to a big glass window. The two men come to a halt behind him as he unlocks the door. He has to use three different keys, but eventually, he unlocks the door and steps aside to let us in first. The two men step inside with some difficulty due to their size, but when we make it in they toss me forwards and I'm so taken aback I crumple to the ground like I'm a marionette whose strings have been cut. My knees slam painfully down onto the cold cement floor and I'm not able to stop my fall with my hands as they're tied behind my back, so I just keep falling.

"And they told us she could cause some problems. What a joke." I hear one of the men speak in his Russian accent over me and I feel so embarrassed.

I bite the inside of my mouth, refraining from cursing him to hell and back.

"Shluha vokzal'naja." The other one says in Russian, and this time I can't help myself.

"Zhopu porvu margala vikoliu." I curse at them in Russian, still facing the floor.

A sharp pain erupts in my abdomen as I receive a kick from a steel-toed shoe and I'm left gasping for air.

"Watch your tongue, Hooy na ny!" One of the men exclaims and spits on the floor next to me. I see stars from the pain.

"Right. Just wait till we get the other one. That should be more fun." His companion replies and they both chuckle, a sound that makes the hairs rise on the back of my neck and I dread for whoever they're talking about.

"Enough. Let's go." The dark-haired man speaks and the men stop laughing instantly and I hear the sounds of boots as they turn away from me.

"Potselui mou zhopy, soldat." One of the men shoots at the dark-haired man and I turn onto my side and catch them exiting, casting ugly glances at the dark-haired man they keep calling soldat.

He doesn't seem vexed at all, he just calmly waits for them to walk by him before he casts one last empty look at me and closes the door with a loud slam.

I stay down for a few moments, trying to catch my breath and my wits. I'm in what looks like a small cell, illuminated by the same kind of cheap, harsh lighting as the rest of the place. The cell is completely gray, covered in concrete and no windows to be seen except for a huge mirror on the wall next to the door. There's a worn metal ring high up on one wall, probably a place to shackle prisoners, and there's the saddest looking silvery toilet I've ever seen.

I gingerly sit up, my abdomen still reeling from the kick it received. I feel utterly humiliated by the treatment I've just received. My bladder makes its unhappiness known once more and I somehow make it up to standing and wobble over to the toilet. There's not much dignity left in me as I unbutton my jeans with much difficulty as my hands are still tied behind me and somehow shimmy them down. With a satisfied groan, I sit down on the toilet, hoping no one is observing me through the one-way mirror on the wall.

What a fucking day.

I officially decide: I absolutely loathe the year 2014.

Another passage of time passes with nothing to keep me occupied or help me tell time. The fluorescent lights irritate my eyes and I wish they would just leave me in the dark, that would honestly be preferable at this point. I somehow manage to pull my tied-up hands under me and manage to get them out in front of me which at least alleviates the pain in my shoulders, and I manage to untie my legs. A er a few uneventful walks around my cell, I slump down against a wall opposite of the door and resign to waiting, trying to listen out to any sounds outside of my four walls, but everything remains deadily silent.

When I honestly begin assuming that I've been completely forgotten about and left in the cell to rot forever with no means of escaping and having to be stuck in the past, my insides constrict as I hear at first muffled footsteps which grow louder until they come to a stop right outside of the door. I hear a couple of voices and some keys jingle before the door swings open and the two guards from earlier step in, followed by the dark-haired man and a tall, very put-together woman.

I perk up slightly, straightening my back as I wait for someone to speak up first. The silence stretches out as the two guards just stare out straight in front of themselves, clearly on their best behavior, the dark-haired man looking at me with little interest, his black mask now gone, revealing a pale face with some stubble, a face which I have a feeling I've seen before. The woman is the only one who looks like she's got some spark of joy in her as she studies me intently, making me feel like some sort of exotic animal the zoo has just acquired.

"I usually do not appreciate being kidnapped in broad daylight without anyone telling me anything at all, but I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and hope that there's just some massive misunderstanding going on here and that I'm going to be free to go now." I finally have to break the silence, not being able to bear it anymore. My voice sounds hollow in the cold room, my speech slightly slurred and muffled.

The woman and the dark-haired man continue studying me with varying degrees of interest, and the woman even smiles sweetly at me, her eyes staying cold, though.

"The Winter Soldier never fails. You are Olivia, aren't you? Friend of Wanda Maximoff?" She questions me with a silky soft voice, her articulation immaculate, and I don't need to spend any more time with her to know that I hate her guts.

I rake my brain, trying to figure out why the name the Winter Soldier sounds vaguely familiar to me, but I cannot place it, and my brain seems to work at half its usual speed. I blink stupidly and the woman's smile broadens on her bony face.

"Who are you?" I narrow my eyes at her and she tuts.

"Where's the fun in divulging all of my secrets so soon, Olivia? Ask another question."

I hold back the urge to gag hearing her condescending tone of voice as she addresses me like a child, and instead swallow, trying to moisten my parched throat.

"What do you want of me?"

"Another good question, but one that I cannot answer quite so soon, I am afraid." The woman sighs softly and looks to her side at the dark-haired man. He refuses to make eye contact with her, keeping his gaze fixed on a point a few inches above my head instead, his entire body tense and I can instantly tell something isn't right there.

"I will allow one last question, as I'm in a rather good mood today. I've been waiting a long time for you, Olivia." The woman fixes her gaze on me again and I'm struck by a sinking feeling.

She seems to know exactly who I am, and I did not miss her mention of Wanda either. And she's been planning this for a long time. Does that mean she knows of my ability to bend time? I need to choose my next words carefully. What do I want to know? My brain struggles to formulate all of the unknown aspects of my situation -there are so many. Why me? Why now? Why mention Wanda?

"Does this have to do with the mist?" I land on, very intentionally using the word mist instead of any other word. This way, if she doesn't know, I haven't given anything away.

The woman looks as though she's a teacher and I've finally answered right on a very simple question she's asked the class but no one's gotten right yet.

"There we go." She sweetly says, her voice sweet as honey but her words short and harsh. An interesting juxtaposition. "My sweet Olivia, you didn't think you could just steal from Hydra and get away so easily? You may have complicated things slightly, but where others see failure, I see an opportunity for progress, for growth. And what better person than you to bring about this new age I've so carefully constructed?"

I opened my mouth, but close it again, having nothing more for her. She seems pleased. Even the dark-haired man is looking at me with something akin to mild interest now. My head is reeling. Hydra? I've heard of them. But I thought they were gone? Maybe not in 2014, but surely in 2023? And I've not stolen anything from anyone in 2014. Is she referring to the mist when she speaks of me stealing from Hydra? But the mist was on the Ra!

My head feels like it's going to split in half like I'm asking it to conclude the most difficult of equations. I wish I wasn't so weak, I could have gotten out of these restraints. I wish I could have done so much more. I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have gone out alone, I wouldn't have let Wanda! I wouldn't have relented to going back in time in the first place. Why did I agree?

A little, small part of me, hidden somewhere deep inside me knows exactly why I agreed, but I ignore its judgemental voice and push it down and bury it. It's my weakness talking, and I've had enough of being weak.

With some effort I push myself off the cold floor and to standing, leaning back against the wall for support, my sudden outburst of conviction already failing me as quickly as the room is spinning before my eyes.

"I'm not. I'm not staying here." I mumble, staggering forwards in an attempt to escape that I already know is futile, but necessary for my own sanity.

I vaguely see the two guards ready themselves, but before they have the chance to react to me whatsoever, the dark-haired man swiftly and silently moves, his movements only dark blurs to me and something hard strikes me flat in the chest and sends me down way too easily.

I hit the hard floor, a jolt of pain coursing through me and my vision swimming, reducing the world around me to a blur of colors and lights.

"What- what's wrong with me?" I pathetically whimper, more to myself than to anyone else.

"We've had some help from someone whose goals align with ours." I hear the woman's voice from somewhere above me. "Now you rest, Olivia. You're going to need your strength real soon."

And then their steps echo in the cell and the door closes so loudly it makes me jump, and then the silence is my only companion once more. I curl up in a ball on the floor, my body's betrayal of me almost worse than anything else, and I'm so tired I cannot even comprehend what just happened. Instead, I begrudgingly do as the woman told me and let my eyelids close over my teary eyes and hope that whatever rest I can get will be enough to make me strong enough to withstand whatever is about to come my way.

I sink into restless sleep, dreaming about bodiless voices that both fill me with love and tear me apart, and hands slipping from my grasp, and cold faces of strangers who scream at me without opening their mouths.

A/N: Hey my babies, another chapter for ya! Updates updates updates, I'm on a roll! I feel like I should say that we are diverging from the actual events of the MCU at this point, it's just much more interesting to write without having to worry about matching everything perfectly, hope that's all good!

I know, no Wanda this chapter, but be happy for that is all I can say...

I want to hear your theories, what the hell is going on???