

## Chapter 72

"Who are you? What do you want from me?" Wanda coldly asks.

"I - no." I stutter, horrified. Wanda's lips are thin as she watches me, both of us awkwardly sprawled out on the floor where we fell.

I open my mouth to say something, but I'm speechless. How do I explain to her who I am? Who I am to her? What we've been through? She would think me absolutely insane. So instead, I slouch there, completely silent, staring at the woman I love while she's staring at a complete stranger. Wanda tilts her head, waiting for an answer that doesn't come. The way there is nothing familiar in her gaze tears at me, and yet I can't look away from her, the pain etching itself deep in me.

"What? You don't know how to speak?" Wanda taunts, a mean gleam in her eye.

I shake my head, blinking rapidly, trying to make sense of the situation. Wanda doesn't remember me, and I need to figure out what else they've wiped her of, of what else she doesn't remember. She can clearly use her magic- at least a small fraction of it, for a short amount of time. Hydra must be feeling confident that I won't be able to convince Wanda to escape with me. Which is what I need to do. The quicker, the better.

"Wanda, I know you don't trust me and tha-

"I don't know you. Why would I trust you?" She corrects me pointedly and I sigh, impatiently, trying to not allow myself to feel hurt. Wanda waits for my reaction, looking slightly uncertain. I remind myself of how strange this whole situation is for her.

"Right, yes, well, that's too bad, because you do know me." I tell her calmly, and her eyebrows shoot up slightly as she's taken aback by my change of tone. "My name is Olivia and we've... well, we've been friends for a while."

Wanda looks rather unimpressed by my merger attempt at encapsulating what it is we are to each other. I might not be able to explain it, I realize, because I don't even know what we are. We are friends. But we've kissed. We're friends who've kissed and told each other "I love you". Right, what does that make us?

I wish I could just shake her by the shoulders and tell her to get a grip, to remember me, but I don't quite feel like being subjected to her magic again so soon. I hush again, irritated by my lack of action.

"Alright, there's no time for this. Wanda, you know me. I wouldn't hurt you. Hydra has captured us and we need to leave. Like, now."

"Hydra?" Wanda lets out a little laugh, which sounds about as fake as they come. "You wouldn't hurt me? That's funny. No, Olivia do not know you. All I know is what I saw in your head. So, I know one thing. I know you are a liar. You would hurt me."

Her words twist in my gut, and it's because she's not wrong. She's exactly right. I did hurt her. I quickly look away, blinking rapidly to get rid of the moisture gathering in my eyes. I cannot start crying. I need to get her out of here, I need to get her someplace safe, and then I will get her back.

"Oh my god, I forgot how irritating you can be." I plaster on a fake annoyed look, rolling my eyes. I hope she doesn't pick up on the way my voice pitifully trembles. She hushes.

I exhale shakily and stand up. Wanda quickly follows suit, although she looks rather unsteady like she's running on an empty tank. I pause, ready to catch her should she faint and fall again, but she stays upright, only closing her eyes for a brief moment to steady herself.

"You alright?" I ask her and she shoots me a dirty look. Fine. I roll my eyes again and walk right past her to the door of the cell.

"What are you doing?" I hear her question me, her accent slightly thicker, betraying how tired she is. I ignore her, trying the door to see whether some unfortunate guard might've messed up and forgotten to lock it. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

I whirl around, facing Wanda who is standing with her arms crossed, her eyebrows raised questioningly.

"If we are indeed captured like you say we are, why would the door be unlocked?" She smirks, like I'm the stupidest person she's ever met.

"Doesn't hurt to check, does it? It'd be quite silly if we sat here like waiting ducks while the door is unlocked, wouldn't it?" I sarcastically sneer back at her and her smile drops.

"You're annoying." She sighs and looks around, looking like this is the most mundane and boring conversation ever.

"Ouch, you really got me there." I turn away from her, feeling a lot more annoyed now than I did a minute ago. I had completely forgotten what Wanda is like when you don't know her. To be honest, I don't prefer this version of her. I miss my Wanda. My Wanda could be snarky, and annoying, but she was never mean. But I have to let that go, for now. There are more pressing matters at hand. For one, getting us out of this place.

"Okay, Wanda, I'm gonna need you to use your scarlet and unlock this door." I patiently explain, turning back to face her.

Wanda tilts her head, a small smirk on her face again and I brace myself for her answer, which I can already tell from her face is not one I'm going to like.

"No." She simply says.

"No?" I echo and her smile widens. This is apparently fun for her.

"Wanda, I don't think you realize the danger we're in."

"The only danger I know is you."

"Are you joking?" I let out an impatient, nervous laugh. "Wanda, please. Please just trust me on this one."

"Look," Wanda begins, taking a few steps towards me, her face completely having lost any trace of amusement. She reminds me of herself from years ago, when I accidentally met her on the battlefield in Sokovia. "I don't know who you think you are, and why you think you know me. I don't know you, and I don't trust you. I don't."

Wanda pauses, a meter or so away from me, now looking slightly uncertain. I can tell her mind is racing.

"I don't know what's happened to me, or why my scarlet is weak. I-I don't know why I... why I can't remember, but-"

"Wanda, Hydra did this to you." I so ly interrupt her and her eyes snap back to me. I feel like now is my moment. I have to convince her that I'm at least not trying to hurt her. I take a step forward, tentatively. Wanda doesn't react, but I can tell her body still tenses up slightly as I invade her personal space. I look her straight in the eyes, trying to show her I mean no harm.

"I promise you, I would never hurt you. Not on purpose. Wanda made me do that to you. Deep down you're still there, and you know I'm telling you the truth. I am so, so sorry, Wanda. I love you, and I'll do anything to keep you safe, I don't care if you don't believe me because I know I would. And right now, that's what I'm trying to do." Wanda frowns slightly, biting her lip, her eyes studying my face, listening intently to my words. When I've stopped talking, her frown deepens slightly.

"You... you love me, love me?" She asks me, her voice small, eyes round.

"Yeah, I do." I exhale with a little laugh, making Wanda look, if possible, even more torn. "Just look in my head. I know you can, and I know you can tell I'm not lying."

Wanda's deep green eyes look like shimmering pools of forest lakes, wherein the murky water itself isn't even certain of what secrets they hold underneath the surface. I know, though, and so I hold her eyes with mine, hoping she can somehow read me like I can read her, that she can see I'm not afraid of drowning, that I've learned how to stay afloat with her. The faint little lines between her eyebrows deepen slightly as she's debating whether or not to trust me, whether or not this is some kind of trap I'm laying out for her.

Without breaking eye contact, my right hand searches out for her left hand, my fingers bump into hers, and she quickly looks away from me, down at our hands. I don't. She allows me to take hold of her hand. I give it a small squeeze and she looks back up at me, her pupils dilated, questioning, and frightened. I know exactly how she feels, and I try to keep steady, like a landmark you can always trust to guide you home. Just like she was for me.

Being so close to her and still being so far from her makes me feel inexplicably heavy. My chest feels like her magic is still around it, constricting my breathing. I hold onto her hand, the only part of her I dare touch. I feel my eyes well up again, and all I want to do is to close the final, small, and still vast distance between us, but I can't do that to her. Wanda just watches me, her round eyes so familiar to me and yet the swirling emotions in them unfamiliar. She must've found something to be true within me though, because she blinks rapidly a couple of times, her tongue nervously wetting the side of her mouth, and then she gives me the smallest of nods, the heads of her eyebrows pulling up slightly in a silent question for me to answer.

"Just look." I whisper, closing my eyes, in total trust, allowing her full control.

I wait for a moment and nothing happens. I know she's still uncertain. Uncertain of me, of herself, and of her scarlet. But as I've always known, all she needs is time. It's all she's ever needed, and it's all she's never been given. So I wait for her. Patience. My chest rises and falls with each slow inhale and exhale. Her hand still in mine. She doesn't hold onto my hand, but my fingers are strong enough for the both of us. Then, like she's giving me a little warning, her fingers close around mine and a hesitant warmth spreads through me, seeking to inhabit every cold inch of me.

The warmth spreads with more confidence as Wanda truly finds me. And it's just as it's always been. Right. I know she feels it too, although she doesn't understand it. There's a pressure in my head, but it's not terribly unwelcome. She's being careful, despite it all. And I trust her to not look too deep, to not wander down any halls she doesn't need to.

The warmth disappears, retreating and ebbing away until I know she's fully gone. It opens my eyes slowly. It takes me a second to realize she's breathing slightly raggedly, quicker, and that her eyes are filled with tears. I blink twice, unsure of what to do in face of this change.

Wanda's lower lip quivers and she looks up at the ceiling, the harsh light from above reflecting in her teary eyes. I notice her hand is shaking slightly in mine.

"What's wrong?" I hold onto her hand tightly, but not too tight.

"I don't understand." She speaks, her voice raspy and low as she squeezes her eyes shut, her entire face scrunched up and all I want to do is kiss her all over until she laughs.

"But you looked, right?" I ask carefully, treading with care.

"I looked." She nods, still not looking at me.

"Then what's wrong, Wanda?" I ask and sudden bravery washes over me and my free hand cups her face and my thumb wipes a runaway tear off her cheek. Wanda's eyes open and she looks at me with utter confusion.

"I looked, Olivia, but I don't- I don't." She shakes her head, new tears welling from her eyes. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be." I give her a sad smile and I let go of her hand, bringing my other hand up to her face and I wipe away her tears, which she lets me, her eyes hanging onto me like there's some answer I could give her to make this all okay.

"I saw it but I don't remember any of it." Her voice is barely above a whisper and it shatters my heart to see her like this.

"I know you don't. It's okay, it'll come to you." I hold her head still between my palms looking at her beautiful, tear-streaked face. She bites her lip in a bid to stop the tears.

"I don't remember you." She says in an exhale, squeezing her eyes shut as if she's afraid to see my reaction.

I'm glad she doesn't, because it's proving to be too hard to be her anchor. I'm struggling to stay afloat for the both of us. I grimace, trying to keep myself from not crying. I want to just take her place, let it be me who can't remember, let it be me in this pain and not her. She doesn't deserve any of this. And I caused her this pain. I know I should speak, to tell her that it's okay that she doesn't remember me. But it isn't. It makes me so sad I could just lie down and never get up. And it makes me so mad I wish I could burn the world to the ground. But I can't do anything. And so I just stand there, idiotically brushing Wanda's tears away like that yes anyone any good.

"I'm so sorry, Olivia." Wanda whispers, opening her eyes again.

"It's okay, Wanda." I lie and let my hands fall from her face. "It's okay."

I take a step away from her, turning to face the door, pretending like I need to check on it again. I don't. I just can't seem to face her. I wish she wasn't there, watching me, so I could just let myself be weak for once. I'm so weak in my knees, it feels like I've just spent the day in the gym, running myself empty. This is the familiar sadness I've learned to live with once before, but I don't know if I can learn to do that again. Time after time it feels like I just need to keep pushing, keep fighting, but it always ends in weakness.

"Olivia?" Wanda's careful voice finds me in my loneliness.

"I'm fine." I lie, my voice thick. I know we can both see through the lie, but we both seem to ignore it, for which I'm grateful.

"I, uh." I clear my voice and turn around to face Wanda with a small, plastered smile on my face which I hope is enough. As soon as Wanda lays eyes on me, I know it isn't. It might be that I was never a good actor, or it might be due to the fact that she can read my mind, but Wanda's expression instantly changes to that of concern. It would be comforting, were it not that I know she's not really concerned. Because how could she really care for someone she has no recollection of ever meeting? Of ever knowing?

"I just need a minute." I smile weakly and she nods, watching me scurry to the corner furthest away from her, where I sit down, drawing my knees up to my chest.

I stare straight out ahead, wrapping my arms around my knees. I feel her eyes on me, but I can't bear to look at her right now. I knew something like this would happen as soon as I realized what Hydra was doing to her, but it could never prepare me for the actual, physical hurt.

Wanda hesitates slightly, before awkwardly walking up to me and sitting down next to me, making certain to keep a comfortable distance between us. That distance she puts there is worse than anything. I turn my head away from her, leaning it on my knees, and I let the tears I've been fighting go. They run down my face as I silently cry, dripping down onto my pants and clinging onto strands of my hair. Wanda stays silent.

A/N: This was slightly shorter, but I think we needed this space, this moment, and I wanted to put it out there as quickly as possible. Again, I am sorry and I will indeed pay for everyone's therapy bills this month.