11

I was really starting to believe that someone as prepared and lethal as Natasha is, was absolute shit at keeping locks that actually work. I'm almost a hundred percent sure I left the chain up before going to bed after a severely head spinning dinner with Martina who mostly took every chance she got to take a jab at me and still, amidst all of her torturous wit she still refused to disclose how exactly she came to be Nat's... key holder? Guardian?

At this point, i'm not even sure what she is. I was another snarky comment away from tossing her out the window, if only she didn't remind me so much of Lara. If Lara was relentlessly annoying, and carried knives in her pockets everywhere she went.

So with only a handful of hours of slumber, I wake to a prodding sensation harshly digging into my shoulder. I mere brushed it off as a dream, until I feel a hard material hastily land on my back, jolting me awake to once again find Martina standing by the foot of my bed, holding yet another book. Y'know, aside from the one she so generously threw at me. She's got a mischievous glint in her eyes as I nearly roll off the bed, tossing onto my back in an annoyed grumble.

"How the fuck do you keep getting inside?" I groan, trying to rub the sleep out of my eyes as she tosses another book at my head. Thankfully, this time I catch it.

"Get up. You have a visitor." She hums, swiftly grabbing another book from the shelf behind her as I scramble to get on my feet.

"I will punch you in the face if you throw another one at my-" I don't really know what I was expecting, because I barely get halfway through my sentence until another book is hurled my way. I'm really not in the mood to choke out a child but the universe seems to be testing my patience today.

"I'm up! What was that for?" I dodge the projectile by a hair, sending it crashing into the nightstand as Martina releases an airy chuckle.

"Good measure." She shrugs, casually exiting the room as I pick up after the mess she'd made. Once I had finished, I made my way out to the living room expecting to find Martina amidst another one of her stupid misled situations but she's nowhere to be found.

Natasha, however, was sitting on the couch with a smile.

"She's a sweetheart, isn't she?" Natasha hums lightly as I find myself cemented in place, barely able to comprehend her presence. Have I gone crazy? Was she actually real or is this some isolation fuelled fever dream that is eerily believable?

"Oh god, did she break you? I told her to ease up." Natasha promptly rises to her feet, approaching me and doing something so out of character that i'm almost a hundred percent sure she was a hallucination.

She pulls me into her arms.

It takes me a while to even hug her back, feeling like I was thrown into some sort of fugue daydream as she lightly rocks us in place. When I finally get the nerve to wrap my arms around her, I almost crumble. All of my guilt, my constant longing for atonement bleeds through my skin as I hold onto Natasha, fingers scrambling against her leather jacket as I bury my face in the crook of her neck until she pulls away and holds me at arm's length.

"It's good to see you." She breathes out, a small smile tugging at her lips as my heart lodges in my throat.

"How— why are you here? Is everything okay?" I stammer, my words barely making it out with the whirlwind of thoughts engulfing me.

"I wanted to see you." Natasha hums, stepping away.

"Martina told you about last night." I deduce, slipping out more like a statement than a question.

"No."

"Nat."

"Okay maybe, but I was planning to see you anyway. I just needed to find the right time." She says with nonchalance, plopping back down on the couch as I hesitantly follow suit.

"She is a nightmare." I hang my head back, sitting so close to her our shoulders touch as she releases a small chuckle.

"She grows on you." Nat hums softly, turning to look at me.

"Where did you even find that kid? Where are her parents?" I voice my week old questions, thinking out loud with my eyes glued to the ceiling.

"They died a few years back. I knew her mom personally, she's a very competent kid. Fiesty too." Nat wiggles her brows, a ghost of a smile on her lips.

"Did she tell you that she stabbed me in the arm last night? I swear I was so close to throwing her off the roof— that little shit." I groan, but my expression gives away just how much I enjoyed that conversation.

It was light, and familiar and Natasha felt real. I wasn't staring at the haunted walls of my memories— I wasn't scrambling to drown the fragments of my mind in senseless music and television. I didn't feel like drowning, not when she's sitting there looking at me like I was any other person she'd fight for. Not even a ghost of a tainted gaze in her eyes. God, it was so bittersweet. The way hope glimmered in her eyes in a light that never seemed to dim when she'd look back at me.

"That sounds like her." Natasha says amidst a smile, hunching over to rest her elbows upon the top of her knees. I watch her carefully from where I sat, noting the way her eyes went over every inch of the room with a looming tenderness she was always so reluctant to display.

The difference was so subtle and yet so invitingly evident, you could see it in the way her shoulders relaxed or the way she seemed genuinely refreshed to be there. Back at the compound, Natasha was always so cold and stern, with a semi-permanent furrow plastered onto her brows like she was constantly delved into deep thought. But here, she looked more herself than I could imagine, despite not knowing much I knew enough to spot the difference.

"How long can you stay?" With hesitance, the question slips from my lips. I wasn't sure I wanted to know the answer— but I needed to know how much hope I could hold in her presence.

"Until dinner. I'll have to go out for a bit to buy some groceries since judging from the bin and the dishes; you've been running on soup and crackers for most of the week." She says this as she's getting up, heading right for the kitchen with footsteps so casual it was almost like she memorized every floorboard.

"So what do you like?" She asks, already having disappeared from view.

"Anything but soup and crackers." I call out from my seat, hearing the sound of her rummaging through the cupboards, probably taking a mental note on what was left.

"How specific." Nat emerges from the kitchen, approaching the door right before halting to turn to me.

"Behave." She smiles and I roll my eyes, waving her off as she eventually walks out.

I felt like a child readying for a trip, or a visit from her favorite friend. My step had a bounce to it, and my chest felt light. I wasn't alone and dwindling away into madness. Even if there was a part of me that felt utterly pathetic to be so excited for a mere visit, insecurities came a far second to just being able to sit and talk to someone who isn't a prepubescent kid.

I take the time to hop into the shower, I even found myself humming a little as I list out all the questions I had for Nat. Most prominently, the ones about Wanda. I was trying to figure out a way to be subtle about my lingering inquiries without having it on display, in bright flashing lights, that I actually gave a fuck. So with a towel around my body, I make my way to the bedroom only to be halted by a resounding knock from the front door. I would have made my way there no problem, only I realized that nobody that knew where I was actually *needed* to knock.

Martina sure as hell didn't.

I swiftly grab one of the knives from the kitchen counter on my way to the door, my footsteps as light as a feather when my free hand lingers on the knob, taking a deep breath as every possible outcome flashes in my mind like a catastrophic slideshow. I was almost a hundred percent sure I was about to be ambushed, and in a fucking towel. How much more chaotic could this get? I definitely should have thrown some clothes on before getting here.

Three more knocks pull me out of my intensive thoughts, finally tearing me out of my head as I take a deep breath and accept my fate. I knew the consequences would eventually catch up to me and the last thing I really needed was to go on the run butt naked, but hey, I've been in worse situations. So with a deep breath, I wrap my fingers tightly around the base of the knife, readying to strike as I swing the door open.

It was *definitely* an ambush, just not the kind I expected.

"Wanda?" I utter in complete surprise as the red headed witch stood before me, donning a grey denim jacket and black shirt. She had sunglasses perched upon her pale nose, a cap gathered atop her hair but her autumn strands were slipping from her garments despite her effort at a disguise.

I could recognize her in a crowd of a thousand, and I don't really know what that means yet.

"You... I knew it." She breathes, removing her glasses to reveal her familiar green eyes. She looks at me like I'm a ghost, or something her head conjured up— like she wasn't sure I was completely real.

"What are you— how did you get here? How did you find me?" I pull the towel closer to my chest, suddenly feeling a thousand times more exposed under her gaze than what I thought would be at least a hundred agents.

"I followed Natasha." She explains softly, almost nervously.

We stood there for what felt like the longest moments of my life, the thickly awkward silence encompassing us both as I finally give in, stepping aside and motioning for her to enter. Even if I were to shut the door, I would be of unrest leaving her out after what she had done for me at the party. To an extent, she's earned some of my respect and well— gratitude. Wanda looks to me for confirmation, uncertainty riddled in her emerald eyes as she sheepishly makes her way in.

"Just... wait for me here, I'll go throw on some clothes." I clear my throat, awkwardly treading down the hall and disappearing into the bedroom with blanketed hurry. Speaking to her with casual words, without screaming or sharp jabs— it felt foreign on my tongue.

The moment the door shuts, my back hits the surface with a muffled thud. Wanda was actually in my living room, she actually went out of her way to find me. Her voice on Natasha's phone call comes flooding back, the desperation and panic in her tone that's now reflected in her eyes. The world beneath my feet felt like it had come to a standstill, completely flipped upside down because I expected Nat, but never in my wildest dreams did I ever think Wanda Maximo would once again be just a few feet away from me.

I throw on the first garments I get my hands on, which happened to be one of Natasha's old shirts and a pair of sweats that were somewhat a size too big. Knowing I couldn't hide in there forever, I hold my breath as I walk back outside, my heart lodged in my throat as I find Wanda squeezed into the corner of the couch. She looked smaller than she was, arms pressed to her side ever so tightly as she fiddled restlessly with her rings. Her eyes find mine once more, her movements still and so do mine as I sink into place, right at the turn that connected the living room to the corridor behind me.

"Hey." She breathes out, brows twitching into a slight furrow as we both try to navigate a way to exist in the same space once again after the whirlwind of chaos that ensued the last time we had seen each other.

"Hi." I mumble, just as conflicted. I could practically see the gears turning behind her eyes, both of us struggling to fill the silence that was hell bent on devouring us both.

"Why did you come?" I finally break the unbearable stillness, the words leaving a scorching trail in my throat as she scrambles to reply.

"I was worried. I didn't buy Nat's story for a second but she wouldn't let me talk to you. She just kept... telling me it was better this way." She sighs, rushing through her words with a ghost of lingering distress.

"And she's right, it is. You shouldn't be here. I don't know if you fucked your memory up but I hurt you the last time we were together, I hurt you even when you helped me. How could you be here?" Frustration bleeds through my tone, harsher than I had intended for it to come out. Old habits die hard, it seems.

"Because I know you didn't mean it. I know Natasha wouldn't have saved you if you did, and I know you're hurting and I'm sorry I didn't remember you but I do now and I'm sorry for that too." She exclaims with utmost desperation, saying it all in one rushed, stammered breath as my entire body tenses at her words.

She remembers.

"I'm sorry. I know it was you at the facility, I just... for the longest time I buried that memory and all it came with. I hated who I was then, I still do now but I- I remember you. I remember everything." She deflates, defeat washing over her tired features.

For a fleeting moment, she looks exactly like the girl I met. The one who sat with me to the early hours of the morning, the girl with the voice who soothed me when the world crushed my chest— who stopped my heart in the middle of a murky, bleak corridor. For a moment, it was so incredibly difficult to hate her.

"You should go." Is all I come up with. Fearing what may further come of our encounter if she remained longer.

Overwhelmed was an understatement, it couldn't begin to explain the emotions thundering through me at her revelation. I know it was what I wanted when we met again, I knew part of the reason I was so bitter was that I felt erased and maybe deep down I'd question what we could have been if she knew, if she'd just remember and now there she was, looking at me years after we first met with the same warm, fearful eyes.

And I don't know how to feel.

"No." She offers weakly.

"Wanda." I warn, my voice turning icy and stern as I will for her to comply.

She needed to leave, I needed to keep the distance because if she kept looking at me like that— I wouldn't know how to act. I'd feel like a desperate, naive girl, pining for a friend in a land of death.

"No." She was adamant, firm in spite of her shaky stance.

"Please." I plead, but my words go over her head as she takes two big strides and pulls me into her. Her arms wrap around my neck ever so tightly, like she was hanging on for dear life as I stood in place, shocked and frozen.

"I don't want to fight you anymore." She says in a broken whisper, breath hitting my neck with every word.

My first instincts kick in and I thrash in her embrace, desperately trying to push her away, to break this nonsensical act of affection that I found utterly pathetic. Did she think that a measly hug would suffice for all my troubles, all my demons, all the years I spent lost and confused? I was uneasy, uncomfortable— and though i'd never admit it, I was truly and utterly terrified.

"Please. Please. Let me be here for you. It's okay to need people." She pleads, but it only fuels my fears. I have never needed anyone, I could never need anyone.

She was much stronger than I had anticipated, but I was too lost in my panic to notice if she had been using her magic to keep her arms around me or she was just naturally strong gripped. Her voice echoes in my head like a tempting whisper, sparking a line of thought I had fought so hard to keep doused. Like a spark in a dark room, a lone thought in a sea of my mind, I almost wanted to admit that I liked being held.

It was new, firm and warm. She smelled of strawberries and city smoke, her hair of lavender and breath of mint. Her arms were tight around my shoulders, keeping me secured, even small— like nothing could hurt me in her arms and before I could even properly notice, I had stopped fighting.

I just stood there and... I let her hold me.

It was nothing I could have ever prepared for. It wasn't a million sparks and fireworks, it wasn't the rush of running and danger, it wasn't thunder coursing through my veins and spilling onto my fingertips- it was everything but. It was a lot like the feeling of coming to bed after an exhausting day, or a cup of coffee on a cold night, it was finally feeling like I've taken my first real breath since I've been alive. Wanda was warmth, encompassed into one person, being held by her was exactly what I've imagined rest to be and it doesn't knock the wind out of my chest, not even for a second, not the way I did with Estelle.

She was a hundred lifetimes of familiarity and more.

"Let me be here, let me stay. Even for today." Her muffled voice vibrates through us, mumbling against the crook of my neck as I close my eyes. Maybe I could bask in this a little more, before the world tears in and convinces me otherwise.

"Okay." I give in, melting into her even more as the world blurs around us.

Time didn't exist for a moment, when we were there, entangled in each other. I don't know how long we stayed that way, I think both of us were afraid to let go. The vulnerability, for once, wasn't striking fear in my bones because in my head, we were alone. My feet weren't aching to run, and I wasn't pushing her away and drowning us in hostility. For just a moment, neither of us was afraid of being so close.

Then the door swings open and our bubble shatters to the ground, fragments sitting by our feet as we jump away. Martina stood by the door, frozen with wide eyes because apparently, knocking really didn't exist in her vocabulary. I don't think I've ever wanted to punch a kid in the face so much until that moment, that painfully awkward moment of Wanda and I standing there like we had been caught doing something illegal.

Or worse.

"Nat is going to kill you." Martina stifles a laugh, looking to me with a mischievous smile as she steps inside, with zero disregard for the moment she so clearly shattered.

"I'm going to kill *you*" I groan, both Wanda and I watching as the little girl plops down onto the couch, casually settling her feet up on the coffee table as she breathes out in amusement.

"So... you two, huh?" Martina clicks her tongue, nodding suggestively between us as Wanda clears her throat and I shoot Martina a glare. I wonder if it's too late to toss her out the window.

"I'm Wanda M-" Wanda awkwardly begins, going to extend a hand out when Martina waves her off.

"Oh I *know* who you are. Nat talks about you sometimes. What I don't understand is what you're doing with this loser." Martina snorts, her eyes glimmered with amusement as she nods to me, striking a smile on Wanda's lips as well.

Wanda looked genuinely amused, happy as she glances my way. There was not a hint of clouded complication, but only satisfaction in her eyes. The only problem was, it was not one I could so easily return without worry or doubt.

"Loser? Says the kid who has no friends her age. Fuck off." I scoff, stepping around Wanda and settling on the armchair furthest from the little girl while Wanda takes the other end of the couch.

"She's out of your league." Martina sings mockingly, only fuelling the already awkward tension as I roll my eyes.

"Who says I'm playing? We're just..." I look to Wanda in a panic, uncertain of what exactly we were after that... moment we shared.

Would friends suffice? Colleagues? I mean, surely things don't just change in a split second moment of vulnerability. I was up against the wall trying to avoid the shame that came with making a mistake.

"We're old friends." Wanda chimes in, a small smile on her lips as she turns to Martina. I didn't expect her to say such a thing, and despite the twinge of reluctance in my chest, I keep to myself and put on a small smile.

"I like you." Wanda happily states.

"Who doesn't?"

As much as I appreciated the moment Wanda and I shared, I soon learned that Martina's presence was a blessing in disguise because I have absolutely no idea what I'd possibly say if we were left alone. Martina was talkative enough to keep the impending silence at bay, even when most of time time the jokes were at my expense. Much to both of their amusement, of course.

Martina would constantly pester Wanda about her magic, the giddy child in her shining through when Wanda would make the books on the coffee table float, or make the flowers in the potted plants by Nat's windowsill bloom with different colors. She'd stare in awe, eyes glimmering with wonder as Wanda happily accommodates all of her requests and questions, one of which was to ask if Wanda could toss me off the roof. It was refreshing to see how they got along so easily, how genuinely happy Wanda looked. Her smile would crinkle her nose, eyes shining with sincere enjoyment at the little girl's antics and snarky quips.

"So you're telling me you two have actually fought?" Martina clarifies amidst one of Wanda's stories.

"Yeah, all the time. She can be kind of rude." Wanda hums playfully, nose scrunging up as she glances my way with a smile.

"And you were idiotic." I fire back in my own defense, crossing my arms over my chest as Martina looks between us in thought.

"Wanda would body you. No doubt." She declares, like she had come to a rather serious conclusion.

"Okay that's just biased. You're like— entranced by her powers or something." I wave her off, sinking into my seat as Wanda watches the interaction with amusement.

"Just think about it. You won't even get one step in and she'd send you flying a five blocks away. It's just facts." Martina explains confidently.

"She's right." Wanda nods, biting back a grin as she releases a small, airy chuckle.

"Yeah i'm regretting letting you stay." I groan, lightly hanging my head back as the sound of jingling keys seep through the door's cracks.

Natasha's back.

All three of us exchange looks, Wanda and I set on the edge of our seats, not daring to take a single breath while Martina only takes her feet off of the coffee table in a quick huff. Martina quickly looks between Wanda and I, shaking her head with a small smile.

"You're about to regret that a whole lot more." Martina whispers amidst a stifled chuckle right as the door swings open.

Natasha promptly walks in, arms filled to the brim with paper bags that blocked her view of us as she kicks the door shut. All our eyes were glued onto her, each of us teetering on the edge of dread and anxiety as Natasha heads right into the kitchen, actively missing the elephant in the room which happened to come in the form of a certain red headed witch.

"I got a little bit of everything since you gave me so much to work with. Don't worry though, no soup and cra—" Natasha's words slowly fade into nothingness when she walks back out to the living room, setting her eyes on a very guilty looking Wanda who only offered a sheepish smile in return.

"I'm going to give all three of you exactly a minute to explain this." Natasha says flatly, her voice in a chilling calmness as we exchange frantic looks once again.

"I have nothing to do with this!" Martina quickly gets up, hands raised in the air as she slowly backs away until she reaches Natasha's side— who was still burning a stare through both Wanda and I.

"I followed you here." Wanda breaks the dreadful silence, face scrunged into worry as Natasha turns to me.

"And you?" She raises a brow.

"I didn't want to leave her outside." I softly reply, shrinking in place under her intimidating glare.

"Do you have any idea how dangerous and irresponsible this is?" Natasha chastises angrily, her eyes primarily fixated on Wanda who looked much like a child being scolded.

"I asked you so many times to let me to talk to her! I won't tell anyone, I swear." Wanda's quick to defend, a tinge of hope in her voice as I stay still as a rock in my place.

"It's not about you telling anyone, don't you get it? If this gets out, it'd fall on me but now that you're involved, you'll suffer the consequences too. I was trying to protect you." A visibly upset Natasha says, conflict sweeping her features as Wanda deflates in defeat.

"I was just really worried. I'm sorry." Wanda mumbles softly, eyes dropping to her lap as her fingers find her rings once more. I was starting to feel worse, to feel the guilt on my chest become heavier knowing I had pulled another innocent person into my mess.

"It's okay, she won't come back." I speak up, my words instantly snapping Wanda's head my way, almost in surprise as I will myself not to meet her eyes.

"This is the last time you're going to be here, Wanda." Natasha backs me up, turning a stern gaze to the red headed witch who sulked in place.

"Then at least let me stay until tonight." Wanda finally replies after a few moments of stillness, all eyes including Martina's shifting to Nat in anticipation.

With conflict and furrowed thought, Natasha deflates, nodding begrudgingly before walking off and disappearing into the kitchen. Martina glances between Wanda and I, her finger waving in the air as if to tell us we were in trouble before running off to the kitchen to join Natasha and leaving me alone with Wanda, which is somehow even scarier than being on Natasha's bad side.

"So..." Wanda clears her throat, actively avoiding my gaze as I do the same.

"Old friends?" I hum, raising a brow as I finally will myself to look her way. As unfamiliar as it is to me, I manage a more neutral— less hostile tone through our conversations.

"We are... technically. We're at a truce now, aren't we?" She questions, the corners of her lips twitching into a ghost of a smile as I huff. It appears thst i've been backed into a corner again.

"We'll see. You know Nat's right, right? You being here means when this blows up and it will you'll get the worst of it too." Wanda deflates at my words, the playfulness dying down as the consequences of her presence dawn on us both. As much as a part of me respected her defiance, an even bigger part found it irrational— maybe even stupid.

"I know. I thought about it but... I felt so uneasy leaving things the way they were. I should have said something the moment you were cuffed, maybe it would have helped." She shares softly. I knew that look in her eyes, i've seen it in mine a million times. She blamed herself.

"Whatever happened that night was my fault and mine alone. I should have never done what I did, I should have had control, I never should have hurt y— any of you." I sink into my spot, regret washing over me as Wanda's eyes stay glued my way.

"Maybe everyone was wrong that night, I know Tony was." Wanda replies, but her words don't ease me. They merely return me to the feeling, show me how blinded she is.

"He wasn't." I whisper bitterly.

"Lexa."

"He wasn't. I proved him right that night, hurting all of those people, slipping back into old habits— I was exactly who he said I am." I quickly counter, stern enough to back her into silence as her eyes fall away from mine. She was looking at me, analyzing me with cautioun like she was trying to defuse a bomb at her lap as I keep my eyes away, she was naive to think so highly of me.

"You were never who he said you were." She whispers right as Natasha walks back inside, Martina following closely behind while she sets a couple of takeout containers on the coffee table before us.

"I didn't know you'd be coming but luckily, Marty eats for three so you can have some of hers." Natasha says to Wanda, moving to sit right next to the red headed witch who then donned a small, grateful smile.

"Why was I not involved in this decision, who said I was okay with this? I thought this was a democracy!" Martina dramatically exclaims, begrudgingly plopping down on the couch and immediately swiping a container from the table with a small pout on her lips.

Casual conversation flowed so easily when we all began eating; it was almost like we weren't hiding out, that I wasn't royally fucked and possibly a fugitive. For a while it fit, for a while, I could breathe. We'd laugh at Martina's sly quips, Nat and Wanda would tell stories about what dumb thing happened at the compound while I sat in exile (Most of it was about Steve.) and I wasn't burdened with the uneasiness of being around Wanda. We weren't absolutely perfect, but in a way we did come to find middle ground where we weren't itching to go at each other's throats. Plus, she remembers now and that definitely changes things, even a little.

Time flew by for the first time in a while that afternoon and after hours' worth of conversation and listening to Nat's records- much to Martina's protests of course, the setting sun began to paint the skies outside. With all of us plastered in the bedroom, Natasha right next to me fiddling with her phone, Wanda sifting through the books and Martina passed out on the chair in the corner, it had been the most peace I'd found in the last few months.

"I need to run out and take care of something; I'll be back in a few hours. There better be no other people here when I return or I swear I'm turning you in myself." Natasha swiftly rises from her spot, glancing mainly at me before swiping her keys from the nightstand.

"No one else, I promise." I raise my arms in surrender, biting back a smile as Natasha bids Wanda and I a quick goodbye before disappearing out the door.

"Have you read any of these?" Wanda hums after a few minutes, still sifting through the books on the shelf as I prop myself up on my elbows for a better view.

"So far, just the two poetry books. The others are mostly self-help and as much as I need it, I'm definitely not interested." I casually reply.

"But you're interested in... poetry?" Wanda swiftly shoots a glance my way, brows raised and a ghost of a smile on her lips as I plop back down on the bed.

"It's better than those pretentious books that claim to 'change your life'. At least poetry actually has substance." I defend my choices without missing a beat, practically feeling Wanda's smile from across the room.

"That sounds so unlike you." Wanda chuckles softly. Taking a book in her hand before settling on Natasha's previous spot on the bed, right next to me.

"What do you mean?" I turn to look at Wanda, subtly scuffling farther away from her as she flips the book open.

"You just don't strike me as the type to like poetry, that's all." She shrugs, eyes glued onto the pages before her as I promptly shift to sit up, pressing my back against the headboard as I faintly peer over her shoulder to see what she was invested in.

"What do you think I read?" I ask defensively, glancing between her face and the book.

"I don't know? A hundred ways to kill someone?" I could see her fighting off a smile, her bottom lip slightly rolling in as I release an airy scoff.

"Yeah, you are unbearable." I huff, pulling away.

Silence falls upon us once more as Wanda delves into the book on her lap, quietly reading as I set a record on the player and let the gentle music fill the space. Throughout all of this, Martina was still soundly asleep in her place- oblivious to everything around her in ignorant bliss. When she wasn't yapping and taking jabs at me, she was actually kind of adorable in strange, this kid looks like she could definitely murder you way. She was curled up on the small chair, the way Lara used to do on the little couch we had back in Hungary when I'd be watching TV and she'd be too tired from school to actually get up and go to bed. I didn't realize I was staring until I notice Wanda's eyes have shifted from her book and was now, looking at me.

"What was she like?" Wanda asks softly, almost cautiously as I tear my eyes away from Martina.

"Who?" I hum.

"Lara. What was she like?" She reiterates gently.

"Why do you want to know?" I ask a little too quickly, a little too sharply that I instantly reel. I scold myself mentally, turning away from Wanda who barely seemed fazed by my hostility.

"I'm just curious. I'll tell you about Pietro, if you'd like." She offers kindly, gently, unlike me.

"She was... sweet, incredibly smart— too smart for her own good." I begin cautiously, despite my reluctance because I could feel her sincerity. I could see why she'd want to hear something so similar to what she's been through.

"She was creative and kind and she taught me a lot about sacrifice and patience. She's not... I know the girl you met at the facility sounds nothing like the one i'm describing now but it's not over. She just needs... she needs a chance." I breathe out, my heart sinking with every word as the soft hum of the music wraps around us both. I hated how desperate I sounded, vouching for a girl who almost killed her but what could I do? That girl is the one person in the world I promised to protect.

"I believe you." Wanda says, a sad smile playing on her lips. I know she didn't mean it, but the pity was there and it stung.

"What was he like?" I return the question, her green eyes sparking confusion as I return her smile. She must have forgotten.

"Pietro." Wanda's breath stills as I remind her, putting on a thoughtful face as she sets the book aside onto the nightstand.

"He never left my side, did all he could to make sure I was okay. Before we volunteered for Strucker and right after we were kicked out of the orphanage, there were some days we wouldn't have anything to eat or a place to stay and he'd do everything in his power to change that. He'd steal me a sandwich from some shops, find a warm place for me to stay the night while he kept watch and he always— always put a smile on my face." Wanda shares softly, her pain shining through every syllable— like a knife twisting in her chest as I'm bound to watch her bleed before me.

"I was really lucky to have him." She looks up at me, just as small and frail as when I found her this morning with her fingers around her rings and her eyes begging for release.

"He was lucky to have you and i'm... glad I met him, even if it were a short while." It slips out so quietly, almost inaudibly but there was something in the way she stared back at me that told me she caught it. That she heard.

"I couldn't save him." She tears her eyes away, mimicking my position and leaning back against the headboard.

I wish there was something I could have said to ease her troubles, even for a fleeting moment. I wish I could say she did, or that it gets better— but then i'd be lying. I felt the exact same way with Lara, helpless and drowning in regret. It doesn't get better, I still had a hair of a chance to fix mine but Wanda was stuck in a lifetime without reruns, without do overs and I couldn't begin to imagine the weight it bore down upon her.

So with my eyes drifting to the window, riddled by the dark night sky and moonlight, an idea comes to life as I shuffle to get out of bed, landing on my feet and heading to the drawers where Natasha kept her sweaters and hoodies. I could feel Wanda's curious gaze with every move I made as I pulled out two of Nat's hoodies. I promptly toss one Wanda's way and she catches it in her hand, confusion flooding her features as I begin to put mine on.

"What's this for?" She asks, looking at the garment in her hands.

"I want to show you something but it's cold out. You'd probably need that." I explain quickly, adjusting the hoodie upon my torso as Wanda only looks even more confused than she already was.

"We can't leave." She says like she was reminding me, which almost makes me laugh.

"We're not. Just put it on and shut up." I roll my eyes, watching as Wanda hesitantly complies. Once she had finished, I beckoned her to follow me out of the bedroom, the red headed witch right on my trail as we reach the front door.

"What about Martina?" Wanda whispers as I turn the knob as quietly as I possibly could.

"We won't be long. Stop worrying."

I lead her up the stairs, treading the steps until we reach the rusty metal door that led to the roof. I push it open with ease, stepping out as the cold night air hits my face almost immediately. Wanda follows closely behind, both of our hoods ridden all the way up as I head over to the ledge, hopping up the way I did just a night before.

"What are you doing?" Wanda asks in a panic, her voice looming over the sound of the bustling city below us as I look back at her over my shoulder.

"Come up."

She looks at me like I've lost my mind.

"Come up. Just look." I nod for her to come over, with utmost hesitance and uncertainty— she actually approaches.

I hold my hand out for her to take, her grip was tight and her hands were cold and shaky but she gets up on the ledge anyway— fighting to gain a steady balance as she stood right next to me, so close that our shoulders were almost pressed together. I'm looking down at the scene before us, but from the corner of my eyes I could tell she was looking right at me skeptically.

"Look down." I instruct.

"No."

"Just do it."

And eventually, she does. I feel her move closer to me, probably in fear as my eyes trace over every detail. Every passing car, every pedestrian, the glow of the open shops and merging sound of honks and conversation and little bells that ring when store doors open.

"It looks so small from above, doesn't it?" I whisper amidst the cold wind, keeping my ehes glued to the scene as Wanda did the same.

"I like high places. It makes me feel like i'm not part of the world below, like i'm just watching— faded into speculated oblivion. It feels simple up here, like everything that happened so far was just a distant story that wasn't my own." I share breathlessly, turning to look at Wanda whose eyes sparkled in thoughtful awe.

"Why'd you show me this?" She whispers, meeting my gaze.

"You told me you couldn't save him." I gently reply.

"I wish I could tell you something different and I can't so I brought you here hoping that maybe, even for a second, you wouldn't feel the weight of being part of this world." I softly explain, watching as her eyes begin to gloss over. She promptly steps down, bringing the sleeves that rode over her knuckles to wipe at her eyes as I follow suit in worry that I may have said something wrong.

"I'm sorry, It usually helps and I didn't know what else to do—" I stammer but she only turns around to pull me into her arms, freezing me in place against her embrace.

I still wasn't used to this, to her touching me in a way that didn't have to do with hostility. It was uneasy and warm, all at once— like stepping foot into a new place that reeks of tenderness and light and not knowing where to place or what to do in the fear of shattering something so new, something so precious. It almost feels awkward, having her in my arms— but in that moment we both shared merely a shred of the same pain.

And in that moment, nothing else mattered.

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