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towards. With an irritated groan, I grab the closest pillow my hands could find and hastily pull it to rest around my head, hoping to mu le the sounds as the mattress promptly dips from right next to me. "It's noon, dipshit. Wake up." Martina prods, incessantly poking at my arm. a "Go away." I grumble, mu led by the cushion still pressed to my face. "As delightful as that sounds, I can't. Nat's on the way." She says, her words jolting me awake in an instant as I shoot up, all the sleep draining from my system as I snap to look at her. "Why?" I ask immediately, watching as the amusement builds in her brown eyes. "Guilty much? She's checking in." Martina chuckles so ly, popping whatever snack she got ahold of in her mouth. I was almost too engulfed by paranoia to notice the discoloration on her skin that looked a lot like a bruised eye. I snap out of my worries for a second, my gaze lingering on the black and blue peppered against her tan skin as she keeps her attention on the television, seemingly nonchalant to the fact that she looked like she was smacked across the face with a frying pan. a "What the fuck happened to you?" I breathe, watching as confusion swarms her small features. As sharp as Martina is, she's still a kid. A bruised kid. "What? This?" She motions to her eye, slightly swollen lids nearly closing her vision entirely as she waves me o . "Eh, the usual. Got into a bit of a—" She swings her fists, shadow boxing the air with a sly smile as she releases a so, dismissive laugh. "Who did that?" I say sternly, her desperate attempt at playing it o unfazing me. She sighs lightly, defeat sweeping her face as she shakes her head. "It's nothing. None of your business, actually." She shoots back, a lot harsher than her playful demeanor just seconds prior as she peels herself o of the bed, swi ly grabbing her things in a hu. "Where are you going?" I call out as she hastily gathers her stu, barely giving me a glance as she heads for the door that I rush to block. "What the fuck?" She exclaims, brows furrowed into a glare as I mimic her steps, ultimately blocking any attempt to head out the door. "Who did that?" I reiterate flatly. For a split second, she looks devastated. Not mad or harsh or defensive, just utterly defeated but in classic, Martina fashion, she sweeps it underneath all of her misplaced confidence and hostility as she drives a punch directly to my sternum, hitting harder than I had prepared for as I double over, falling to my knees. The hard wooden floors collide with my skin in a pained thud as my arms instinctively fly to wrap around my stomach, trying to catch the wind she knocked out of me. "Stay out of my shit. I'm only here because I have to be and you're just an over glorified jackass. Don't pretend to care now." She spits, nonchalantly stepping around me as she swings the door open with force. "If Nat asks, tell her I'm out." Is the last thing she says before the sound of the front door slamming shut echoes through the apartment. I peel myself o the ground in a pained breath, staggering to my feet as the jolting ache subsides. Confusion was the most prominent thing to swarm me as I make my way to the bathroom because that was the only time i've ever seen Martina genuinely upset. Sure, our daily activities consist of going at each other's throats—but she was always one to take it in stride. There was something in her eyes that told me it was more than just a measly street scu le, no matter how desperately she tried to make me believe it. Natasha arrived around an hour later, keys jingling in the doorway as I step out of the bedroom, meeting her with a smile as she steps inside, donning a black learther jacket over a simple white shirt. She had a handful of paper bags in her grasp, turning to meet me with a small smile, but actively avoiding my gaze. Why was everyone acting so strange? "Is it Christmas yet? What's all this?" I decide not to pry, taking some of the bags o of her hands and setting it down upon the co ee table. "Just some food and clothes. I thought you'd like some of your own." She hums lightly, stripping her jacket o and tossing it over to the empty chair. "Finally, I wasn't going to say anything about your wardrobe— seeing that you kind of saved me and all." I joked, trying to lighten the severely heavy mood but all Natasha o ers me are small smiles and little hums as she settles onto the couch. "Is everything okay?" I give in, taking a seat by her side. "What? Yeah. Of course." She shakes me o, a ghost of a smile gracing her lips as she begins to unpack one of the paper bags, which contained takeout. It was like something in my gut was blaring, flashing a burning red crisis light that was hard to choke down. I wanted to let it go, to brush it o because the last person I'd want to find myself on the bad side of was Natasha—but the tension was thick and the air was so, chillingly still that my stomach was churning. A lot of people call it instinct, like you just knowwhen something is out of place, when something bad is about to happen and no matter how much you try to ignore it, it claws against the inside of your chest—tearing away. "Have you seen Marty?" She asks, breaking the silence as she lays the containers down upon the table. "She's out." I reply so ly, my eyes glued to her face—trying to grasp any sort of clue that would answer why she was being so strange. "Out? Did she tell you where?" Natasha asks, glancing my way with an empty look that was all too familiar. "What's going on, Nat?" I breathe, every muscle in my body tensing up as conflict washes over her features. Before Natasha could even reply, though, the front door swings open and Martina walks in, skin glistening with sweat and donning a shirt that looks like it's been dragged through the mud. Her lip was busted, the crimson shimmer of fresh blood mixing with the deep velvet of the dried streaks cascading down her chin. Natasha and I instantly shoot up from our places, looking to her with eyes nearly bulging out of our skulls as the devastation from this morning engulfs her, only this time— she didn't hide it. "What happened?" Natasha was first to speak, practically hopping over the table to get to Martina. She holds the kid at arm's length as she's squatted to even their height, eyes frantically scanning over her dishevelled state as I sink in place. "He found me." She whispers, barely audibly but enough for the chilling words to float through the air. Natasha seems to understand what she meant, because without another word she pulls Martina in an embrace. "Who found her? What is going on?" I mange to push out as Martina's heart wrenching sobs begin to mulle against Natasha's shoulder. I could feel my blood boiling at the sight, the anger seeping through my fingertips as all that greets me was silence. Since neither of them were going to answer, I'd take matters into my own hands. I was tired of being in the dark, of all the tiptoeing around and being entirely lost. While it was true that I didn't know much, I knew enough to understand that somebody put their hands on that little girl. That relentlessly irritating little girl that sucker punched me hours ago and yet, I was practically hopping down flights of stairs, ignoring Natasha's calls until I reach Martina's door. Without hesitation, I deliver a forceful kick right by the knob, sending the door flying open as the sound of bolts and broken pieces hitting the floor paints the air. My jaw could have dropped too if I wasn't seething with anger, because the apartment was completely and utterly trashed. I didn't mean the a ermath of a party trashed, I mean furniture broken into shreds, shards of glass covering the ground, shelves pulled from the walls and food splattered onto the ceilings. I tread through the mess, the glass crunching under every step as I scour the apartment, busting down the bedroom and bathroom door only to come up empty handed when Natasha finally catches up, taking me by the arm and practically dragging me out to the hall. "What do you think you're doing?" She asks incredulously, completely mortified while I bathed in resentment. "Trying to find the asshole that did it." I spit, harshly yanking my arm out of her grip. "Her step father." Natasha says begrudgingly, a breath of defeat escaping from her lips as I take a look around, raising my arms. "Well where the fuck is he?" "He's probably gone by now." She says, sullen. "And you won't go a er him? You're just okay with... a kidbeing beaten like that?" I seethe, my voice raising with every word as Natasha looks back at me in disbelief. "Go a er him and do what, exactly? Kill him? He's a drunk and a junkie! This is the third time i've moved her and somehow he keeps finding her." Natasha fires back as I pace before her. "So kill him!" I scream, everyone in that building could probably hear my thundering yells crawling on the walls but I couldn't care less. "I can't do that!" "He deserves it." "You don't get to choose that anymore" Natasha spews in return, her words freezing me in place as I finally settle my eyes on her. "Anymore? The way I chose before? Because I was just playing god, right? Because I loved having everyone at my mercy, right?" I say flatly, looking right into her eyes as my heart sinks to its depths. "You don't exactly look like you hate it." She says a er an excruciating while, tearing her eyes away as an airy sco falls from my lips. "That might just be the most honest thing you've said today." I chuckle bitterly, turning on my heel and jogging up the stairs, leaving Natasha standing out in the hall. When I get back to Natasha's apartment, I walk through the door with no hesitation. Every bone in my body was shaking with hurt, with anger as Martina spots me from the couch, holding an ice pack to her swollen eye. She looks back at me almost shamefully, a glint of genuine worry looming behind her stare as I march to the bedroom, grabbing one of the backpacks from Natasha's closet and tossing it onto the bed. "What did you do?" Martina's frail voice rings through the room as I stu the bag with a few shirts and trousers. "You need to stay here. Don't go back down, just stay here and make sure never to leave the door unlocked." Is all I say as I si through the nightstand, grabbing my wallet and stu ing it into the bag as well. "What the fuck did you do?" Martina says, shaky and overwhelmed as her footsteps draw near. Her small hand wraps around my wrist, yanking me back to turn to her with all the might she could muster. "Look, kid. You need to watch out for yourself." I say flatly, biting back every emotion daring to spill onto my features as her eyes gloss over, hand shaky against my skin as she drops it back to her side. "So what, you're just going to leave?" She sco s, glancing between the bag and I in disbelief. "I never should have been here in the first place." Is all I could o er before turning away, tending back to the bag until I feel a sharp jolt of pain hit my back as I stumble forward onto the bed. She just kicked me. "What the fu—" I barely get a word out when she practically hops on top of me, landing punches everywhere she could. I toss her o, crawling out of bed and falling to the ground as she lunges at me again, this time kicking as well. I'm backed up against the wall, arms up in defense as the sound of her tired hu s mix with her sobs, every blow fading so er than the last until she finally gives up, falling back with a harsh thud and sitting on the ground right before me. "You're a fucking coward." She says, burying her face in her hands as her tears slip through the crevices of her fingers. "I'm doing the right thing—" "By running! Do you even get how fucking l—lucky you are to be here? To have someone who gives enough of a fuck about you to take you in, to protect you? Do you get that?" She screams, grabbing a shirt that fell to the ground right next to her and tossing it at my head as hard as she could. "You're a fucking jackass, you piece of shit. You can't just leave m you can't just leave!" She heaves, looking back at me in pure devastation and anger. "You don't know me." I whisper, fighting the tears that threatened to spill at the aching sight of Martina falling to pieces right before my eyes. "I know you! I fucking know you. I know you've done some bad shit but I know that you like coco pu s and you make good pasta and you're the only one who doesn't treat me like i'm some helpless fucking kid. I know enough to tell you that leaving is the stupidest thing you could ever do." She sobs, wiping at her eyes incessantly as I sink in defeat, grabbing the shirt she tossed at my head and doing the same to her. "Get your shit together, you're an ugly crier." I sigh, watching as she flips me o but nevertheless, the wipes her tears on the shirt anyway. "I won't leave but you have to stay hereWith me." I say sternly. "I'd rather die." She fires back, finally gaining some composure as I roll my eyes. "I'm not asking you to be here twenty four seven, I mean you sleep here. Have meals here, whatever you do in between is up to you." I explain as I catch a glimpse of Natasha, silently standing by the doorway. "Deal but I get the bed. You can have the couch." Martina agrees, propping herself up to stand on her feet as I do the same. "Fine but you do dishes." I counter, biting back a small smile as she finally gives in, nooding in agreement before extending a hand out. I actually take it.

a a "Deal." We say simultaneously, and just like that she was back to calling me a dipshit and sauntering out of the room like she owned it, passing Natasha who stood her ground as I began to clean up the a ermath of our little incident. I don't even give her a split second of a glance, making sure to keep my back turned as I began to unpack. "You were really going to leave?" She asks so ly. "Yeah." I breathe, folding the rest of the cluttered clothes as I head to the drawers and set them back inside. "I didn't mean it. I was just upset. I've been trying to protect that kid since she was nine and I—" Natasha begins. "Let's not do this, okay? It's fine. Really. Just... go have lunch with her, she's had a rough day." I finally turn to look at her, watching as hesitation pools in her eyes before she promptly cooperates, turning on her heel and walking away. Maybe it hurt more coming from Natasha, maybe that's why her words dug a little deeper—cut a little harsher. I understood that it was in the heat of the moment, both of us were at the very edge of irritation and sometimes words slip out—but the words that do, already exist in our minds. Sure, maybe she didn't mean it entirely, but she definitely thought about it. I felt more defeated than anything else. Conflict engulfing me whole at the sting in my chest, a part of me was screaming for me to bury it — carving on the walls of my skull that I had no right to be upset, most especially because of a past that I built for myself. But on the other hand, up until this point Natasha had been the one and only person who had unwavering belief in me, she supported me, took me in and in the span of a few weeks, it was hard for me to not believe that she actuallythought di erently of me. In a sea of horrified stares, she'd always be the one with a glimmer of hope and a smile and now, it's like that's turned to smoke, a cracked

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mirror that still works—but isn't whole. Disappointment was a heavy force to strike, because I feel like my chest has caved in and I was on the edge of falling into a black hole that'll tear me apart and spit me out in pieces. But I didn't want it to matter, not now. So I walk out to join them, taking a seat by Martina who was instantly racing to throw around little quips about how she 'kicked my assand that I needed to work on my form. She made the air a little lighter, keeping the conversation up enough for me to sink into little hums and nods, just enough to pass the time without interrogation. "Why don't you go down to grab some stu and take a shower?" Natasha suggests, a ghost of a smile lingering on her lips as she looks to Martina. "Is that a nice way of saying I stink?" Martina raises a brow, only earning a small wisp of an airy chuckle from Natasha before eventually hopping o of the couch. "Don't fall apart without me!" Martina bids, walking out the door and leaving us to the inevitable silence that had been waiting to swallow us whole. "I should continue cleaning up. We kind of broke a lamp and i'm pretty sure there are still shards back there." I clear my throat, making a move to stand when I feel Natasha's hand wrap around my wrist, keeping me in place. "I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry." She sighs, my eyes still refusing to meet hers. I was so desperate to choke down how I felt, to just brush it o that I was afraid of looking at her— of seeing her the way i've seen everyone else. "It's okay, Nat. It's just a loaded morning and I'm really tired. It was nice to see you, thanks for... all of this." I hum so ly, peeling her grip o and walking away to leave Natasha in the deafening silence. When I get to the bedroom, the moment the door clicks shut is the one moment I release a breath I wasn't even aware I was holding. With my heart in its depths, I bury myself under the covers right a er clicking the television on, letting the senseless, white noise fill the space. The entire time, I keep my back to the door, the covers pulled all the way up to my neck as I curl into a pillow trying as hard as I could to lose myself in any sort of distraction. About an hour later, I hear the door creak open and deduce from the lack of footsteps that it was Natasha, who stood by the doorway. I could feel her stare burning through me, but I close my eyes and stay as still as I possibly could in the hopes to avoid whatever conversation she deemed necessary. "Lexa?" She tries, almost as if to check if I was awake. "I'll see you as soon as I can. I'm sorry, for everything." She whispers, closing the door as I sink into place, pulling the pillow closer to my chest with a sigh. Her footsteps fade with a mule and soon enough, the front door clicks shut. I knew I could open my eyes, but I kept them as tightly wired as possible—willing away the loud thoughts thrashing to penetrate my mind. I'm not sure how long I go like that, just completely still and lightly trembling until Martina saunters in, placing herself on the empty spot beside me without a hint of hesitation. "Don't get this wrong, I don't care but... you good?" She says with a sigh, uncertainty slipping behind her words as I open my eyes to meet hers, dark, damp hair cascading down her shoulders as her freshly dressed wounds plaster on her skin. "I'm fine, are yougood?" I throw the question back at her, shi ing to sit up as she waves me o with a playful sco. "Psh, it's going to take more than a few hits to crack me." She confidently beams, reaching for the remote and flicking through the channels without missing a beat. "So, step dad?" I raise my brows, bringing my knees up to my chest as I train my eyes on her. "Eh, he practically raised me. Don't get me wrong, he wasn't any better than my junkie mom—but at least he could actually see me." She plays o, leaning over to pry open the drawer of the nightstand and pulling out a small packet of chips. "Since when did we have snacks in the drawers?" I question in a mild shock, watching her rip it open with nonchalance. "Since I got tired of walking back to the pantry every ten minutes. Keep up." She says, her words mu led by the food already in her mouth as I roll my eyes. "That was pretty fucking stupid, y'know." She hums a er a few minutes of silence, glancing my way as she pops another chip into her mouth. "What was?" "What you did, going in there Rambo style with guns a'blazing. That was stupid. You didn't even know what you were going to find." She clarifies, taking on a more serious tone than her usual shallow jabs. "I didn't need to know who. You were hurt and I didn't like that." I say casually. Her eyes linger on me a bit more, an unreadable expression washing over her features before she looks away. "Thanks." She whispers and I let a small smile grace my lips. I don't say anything more on the topic, because I can practically feel her embarrassment radiating from where she sat. So I said something else. "Wait—You know Rambo?" I think aloud, garnering a groan from Martina as she looks back at me in incredulous disbelief. Now, that's "How old do you think I am? I'm not five, dipshit." She shoots, shaking her head in disappointment. "I'm going to take it easy on you because somebody already beat me to the punch with socking you in the face. I would have done it myself." I fire back and she actually laughs, swi ly grabbing a pillow and swinging it at my head. "You wouldn't last oneround with me, you should know that by now." She boasts as I toss the pillow onto the floor begrudgingly. "Unlike you, I do still have some morals le . I don't touch kids so I let you win. Both times." I shrug. "Are you challenging me? Let's do this, budget Lara Cro. I will put you down with my eyes closed." She immediately challenges, setting the bag of chips aside and dusting her hands o as if to ready herself. "I'm not fighting you." I bite back a laugh as she forms her hands into a fist, raising them to her chest level and feigning a lunge at me. "Pussy." She sco s, settling back into her place with a proud smile. "I'm a pussy because I won't fight a kid that's half my size? I'd call that honorable." I hu, throwing the covers o of my body as Martina releases a sarcastic chuckle. "Honorable? Says the girl who has a booty call. You think I don't know what you do in the night with your little witchy friend?" She raises her brows, her words spiralling me into stillness as disbelief washes over me. She knew? "How did you-" "I know everything. Plus, you're not the most subtle person. You literally looked like you saw a ghost when I told you Nat was coming." She laughs, proceeding to continue eating her snacks while I tried desperately to wrap my brain around how exactly she found out. It was definitely the jacket. "So how's it going? What's the situation? Are you two on like a friends with benefits type of thing or is it really sappy and disgusting?" She asks, amusement glimmering in her eyes as I instantly spew protests. "She just visits! Nothing more." I defend, but Martina isn't buying it. "You're telling me you haven't made a move?" She grimaces, looking o ensively unimpressed as I sco at her claims. I would rather eat dirt than admit that she was right. "What move? There will be no moves made between us friends." I clarify, emphasizing the last word as she rolls her eyes, tossing the empty bag of chips into the bin— and missing by a whole foot. "I gave you a front row seat to my life within a month of knowing you and you can't even admit a little crush? That's just cold. So cold." She shakes her head, shu ling o the bed to drop the garbage into the bin with an annoyed hu. "I don't— Fine. But in all honesty, i'm not even sure about how I feel. It's weird and... uneasy. It makes me nervous." I give in, bracing myself for the endless array of teases and jabs Martina was sure to throw at me. But she doesn't. She just reclaims her spot and looks to me with nonchalance when I expected her to be throwing a party and tattooing 'I told you so' on my forehead while I sleep. "What else do you feel about her?" She asks, seeming quite serious about her question which catches me completely o guard. "I– don't know. I don't understand— I don't like it. I feel weird about it "I nearly squirm shaking of the feeling jolting through my hou at the mere thought of possiblyhaving feelings for Wanda. "Why would it be— wait, are you still in the closet? Is this one of those denial stages where you can't believe you like pussy so you're trying to fight it even when you're the gayest person in every room you walk into? Is it that sort of thing?" Martina avidly questions, her anticipative eyes tracing over my features as my face contorts into confusion. a "What? No. It's never mattered—I like who I like. It's not that." "So then what is it?" "It's that it's her" I divulge in a so sigh, hanging my head back in defeat. "What's wrong with her? She's hot, she's got powers and she seems to be able to tolerate your stupid ass." Martina snorts at the last bit, stifling a laugh as I shoot her a deadpanned stare. "You like her so much then you go date her." I fire back, rolling my eyes as I settle my upper body back against the headboard for support within the spiraling journey this conversation was taking me "Oh trust me, If I were old enough I would smoke you. It wouldn't even be a competition—but that's not the point. We need to navigate through your emotions." She promptly shi s, settling herself to fully face me with her brows furrowed into seriousness. "Navigate through my emotions? Do you hear yourself? Are you running a fever or something?" I ask, scooting away in uncertainty as Martina lets out an irritated groan. "I'm invested in this. It's probably the only entertaining thing in my life that doesn't involve people dying or me getting beaten to a pulp so shut up and humor me, dipshit." She scolds, delivering a quick smack across the side of my head that sends an aching ring through my skull. "You're getting too comfortable with that." I groan, my hand rubbing the site of impact as I send her a glare. "Stop changing the subject. Why is it weird?" She prods, crossing her arms over her chest. "I spent a while hating her. I spent a whole year trying to track her down just to— I don't know? Hurt her? The way she hurt me." I stammer, the uneasiness of my words seeping through my own skin as confusion only sweeps hers. "Hurt you? What do you mean hurt you?" She asks and I take a while to actually answer. I had never talked about it before—only grazed the topic with Steve and Natasha. "I knew her years before the Avengers found me. We were in Sokovia, in the same testing program that gave her... her abilities. She was in the cell right next to mine and there was this... this vent. She would hum the same fucking tune every night and I should have found it unbearable, but I didn't." I begin, the words tracing a gash in my throat like a dull knife tearing through flesh. "Eventually we talked, we talked every day and every night and she was—she was the first person I considered a friend. Then they took her away and the facility was breached. I asked her and her brother to leave with me and she practically spat in my face and threw me out. No explanation, nothing." I divulge, feeling uncomfortably bare under Martina's incessant gaze. "I went back to HYDRA." I finally reveal, feeling my bones ache under the weight of the guilt my words bore into my skin. "Everyone thought it had fallen but... people like that are like roaches. There's always some hiding in the cracks and no matter how many heads you rip o, it never dies. I had a choice then, to be free or to come back and I came back." The silence was deafening, like the world outside had stopped turning and every noise outside of the both of us just faded into the wind. "Why would you go back?" She breathes, her stare burning right through me as a flood of shame engulfs my entirety. "I didn't know how to be anything else. For months I tried to find my family but I never got close and I—I was lost. I had nobody, I had nothing except the darkness they put inside me. It was all I knew. I tried so hard to make myself believe I didn't have a choice, but I did. You know, you spend enough time being told you're something and eventually— it does become you." I tear mu gaze away from hers, reeling into like a scared animal that's been thrown into captivity. I didn't want to see the look on her face, the judgement in her eyes, I couldn't bare it. "So I embraced it. Set fire to the world behind me and just didn't care. When I got back, they sent me on a few missions— mostly to steal weapons and in between all of those I searched for her. For Wanda, amongst other people. I wanted to kill her. I resented her." I shakily utter, eyes glued to my restless hands as they fiddle with the loose threads of the pillowcase. "And now you find it weird that you don'twant to murder her?" Martina clarifies slowly, looking to me in anticipation. "Something like that? I don't know. Maybe i'm just not used to having friends. That's it. I probably don't even have feelings for her." I conclude, desperately trying to sound as convincing as possible only for Martina to raise her brows in suspicion. "You're hopeless. Totally hopeless. Okay we can figure this out just close your eyes." She instructs giddily, almost bouncing in place. "What? No!" "Just do it, stop being dramatic!" "Do it or i'll tell Natasha about your little late night hang outs." Martina threatens, a devilish smirk painted on her lips as begrudgingly settle into silence. "Fine." I hu, holding a pillow to my chest as I wire my eyes shut. My entire body tenses, almost as if I was waiting for some sort of strike or a blow but Martina only clicks the television shut. "Okay so when you think of her now, how do you feel?" She asks in an eerily serene tone, it resembled those over glorified meditation coaches you'd find online who look like they'd scam you out of your money and use it on coke or something. "Are we seriously doing this?" I ask and soon enough, she does deliver a quick smack across the side of my head like she was spanking a child. "Cooperate. Now how do you feel?" She prods, using that robotically creepy tone of calmness as I release a so groan, sinking back against the headboard in defeat as I rack my brain for an answer. "Uh— confused." I shrug. "What are you? A toddler? You can do better than one word answers." She scolds and for some strange reason, I fold. "Okay fine. I uh— feel warm and.... nice?" It comes out in an uncertain mess that's soon followed by an irritated hu. "Are you describing a girl or a cup of co ee? Oh my god." Martina whines and I finally open my eyes in defeat. "Do I look like I o en 'navigate through my emotion?" I throw her words back, lightly tossing the pillow o of my lap as Martina rolls her eyes. "Okay imagine that she kisses your cheek. How does it make you feel?" She tries again and I fall back into that spiral of confusion and uneasiness of the mere visual. "Weird and... frozen?" "What kind of weird, though? Is it like... a creepy uncle who always asks for hugs that lasts too long or weird like your heart is like... fluttering or some shit?" Martina asks, her hands animatedly flinging around as she tried to get a proper answer out of me. "Definitely not the creepy uncle thing. But i'm not sure if it's also the heart... fluttering? I told you, I don't know! She makes me feel small!" I fire in frustration, hanging my head back in defeat once again as Martina hums in confusion. "Small? What does that even mean? Is it a gay thing?" "No! It's—she said something last night about wanting to feel small. Small like... part of the world, normal, mundane. Small like you could fit into a crowd and just exist like everyone else. She makes me feel small when she's around and she makes me laugh and it's like the world slows down when we talk." It all comes out in one hurried breath, a sti hu releasing from my lips at the word vomit I just comitted. "That's... definitely something." Martina hums, tongue clicking against the roof of her mouth as she chases another thought. "Do you like feeling small?" She settles on a question, looking to me curiously as I nod in hesitance.

a a a In all honesty, that was the one question that wasn't entirely di icult to answer. I liked feeling small, the idea of normalcy the universe kept trying to escape. I knew my life was a mess of adrenaline and emotions but sometimes— actually, most times, I look at the people walking down the street, paper bags or briefcases in hand and just listening to music like their world was so small. I wanted that, I wanted to have even a shred of something so mundane— no HYDRA operative sister, no dead parents, no hiding out like a fugitive with witches crawling through my windows. Well, I don't actually mind the witch part. "Yeah, I do." I sigh, running a hand through my hair as Martina beams. "I'm calling it! You like her. Definitely. Is she coming tonight? What are your plans?" She spews question a er question, amusement glimmering behind her eyes as it strucks me that Wanda was actually "She is. We usually just talk. We made this... dumb deal to do anything we can to feel small this whole week." I bite back a smile as I speak, dreading any more teasing that was inevitably going to come from the girl across me. "Small like... normal stu? Like that? What did you have in mind for tonight?" She questions, seeming all too excited for something that didn't involve her. "I don't know? I never got the chance to think about it." I divulge, feeling the nerves of me being unprepared seep through my skin. "Hear me out—game night." She presents with confidence. "Game night?" "Yeah like those boring white families do on TV. Game night, haven't you heard of it?" I shamefully shake my head, bracing myself for the onslaught of judgement when Martina hops o the bed, heading right for the drawers beneath the television stand. "Game night is like... when you play board games and shit. Scrabble, Charades, Monopoly and all of that boring shit. It's like the most suburban thing ever, since that's apparently what you're going for." She explains with her back to me, rummaging through the drawers with haste. "You think she'd like that?" I ask as Martina rises back to her feet in a groan, hands on her hips as she swi ly turns to face me once again. "Probably. Bad news is, Nat doesn't do games but you're in luck because you have me. I can run out to the store and buy a bunch of shit for tonight." She o ers, which only spikes my suspicion. "What's in it for you?" I question, my eyes squinted back at her as she sco s in dramatic o ense. "Is that what you think of me? That everything I do comes with a price?" She exclaims, a hand on her heart as I only look back at her "Smart. But no, there's no catch except for the fact that I'll be playing too. That's my prize, smoking both of your asses." She happily replies, heading to the door with a bounce in her step. "Oh and I have your wallet." Continue reading next part □

coming.

flatly.

"Yes."