Epilogue

The first thing I did when I woke up, was check the clock.

I was dreaming again, watching the little digital clock sitting upon the nightstand go absolutely wild. I don't know how long I laid there, staring at the jumbling numbers, trying to recall all that happened. For a split second I forget, and for a split second my heart wasn't sinking and my bones weren't aching with grief.

But seconds pass, and I remember it all too well.

The way she felt in my arms, the press of her fingertip on my chest, the look in her eyes right before she goes limp. I remember everything, like the weight of the world had been dropped right on my chest. But I also remember the choice I made.

Maybe this time I wasn't dreaming, maybe when people die their subconscious takes over and we dream forever. I remember these walls, the distant sound of music and humming. Even when my heart was shattered, the thought that nothing more could hurt me here brought me undeniable solace.

No more fighting, no more loss, no more heartache. Up in my head, nothing can hurt anymore. I can smell the scent of coffee seeping through the door cracks, I can hear the ruckus of pans and her heavenly hums, I was home. Home in my head, home where i'll always be safe.

I wonder what Lara was dreaming about.

I stumble out of the same bed i've been before, only this time I was less disgruntled and more... relaxed. I knew what i'd find on the other side of the door and even if deep in my heart I knew it wasn't real, it was real enough to me.

With every step I took down the corridor her hums get louder and my heart grows fonder, thrashing in my chest even when there was little to no suspense of who it would be. Of course I knew, i'd know her voice out of a million if she had called my name. I never had to try.

When I get to the entryway of the kitchen, I lean against the frame, my arms crossed over my chest and a smile etched onto my face. There she was, my Wanda— or whatever version of her plagued my dreams. Her autumn hair a little wavier, balled up into a bun as she bopped her head lightly to the hums falling from her lips while she tended to something on the stove.

"It's not nice to stare." She suddenly says, I could hear the smile on her lips before she even turns around.

"I can't help it." I breathe, the overflow of emotions bleeding in my chest was almost too much to bear. If this was my finish line, if this— whatever this is, was where I'd get to rest then i'd be alright.

"Well... I don't mind anyway." She turns to face me and my heart swells. I almost cry, seeing her looking back at me with those cool green eyes and her vibrant smile.

"You sleep too much." She says just like she did the first time, treading over to me in a shirt that was too large for her body, stopping right above her knees as she throws her arms around my neck.

"I'm here now." I smile fondly. She looked so clear, so vivid, she felt real too.

Sometimes in my peripherals, I could feel things changing, I could feel the unsteadiness but with her it was like she was the one thing that could never be moved. Everything about Wanda was right in front of me, and I was happy.

"Do you want to go out later? Take a stroll? We haven't been out in the city in a while." She says, wiggling her eyebrows like she needed to do anything more to convince me. I'd do anything for her.

"That sounds perfect." I lean over to place a kiss on her lips, feeling her relax into me immediately like it was second nature.

"I'll get this done and we can start getting ready, yeah?" She hums, arms falling back to her side as I offer her a nod.

"I'll go take a shower." I say as she turns back to the stove, her body immediately freezing as she snaps to me.

"No, wait." She says almost urgently, stopping me in my tracks at a midway turn our the doorway.

"Hmm?"

"Wait for me. I'll join you." She says simply and my heart nearly bursts in place.

I could feel the blush creeping onto my cheeks at the smirk on her pink lips, and I only offer a timid nod before walking out and heading to sit on the couch. Even in my own head she had me wrapped around her finger, blushing like a little kid with a playground crush.

Wanda soon finished up, and joined me on the couch as we ate our breakfast. She was telling me about this show she had recently watched, talking so freely, so happily that I couldn't do much but watch her in complete and utter awe.

"You're not listening." She points out, setting her plate down onto the coffee table as she sends me a knowing look.

"I'm sorry I just... can't believe you're here. I'm here. It just... means a lot." I hide the depth of my words with a light chuckle, her eyes softening as she slips a hand into mine and thats when I notice the rings.

Two gold bands that turned crimson halfway around as she brought my hand up to cup her face, pressing a soft kiss to my palm. I wonder if she knew what had happened, if she felt just as real as she looked. None of that mattered anymore, not as much as it did the first time. This is my home now, whatever or wherever it is— I have her.

"I'll always be right here." She whispers, a gentle smile on her lips that calms my heart.

"Now come on, we need to get ready." She beams, getting up and pulling me along with her.

We stumble to the bathroom in a fit of smiles and laughter, her hands never leaving mine until we had to strip of our clothes. Even then, if felt like cloud nine. She was smiling so big and I was too, stepping under the warm stream of the shower as she made it her point to wash my hair.

"You know, I really can't imagine being with anyone else." She says, fingers gently massaging my scalp as a laugh falls from my lips.

"I'm butt naked in front of you and that's what you're thinking about?" I question playfully, I can practically feel her rolling her eyes.

"I'm just saying! This... it's easy with you. I never thought I could have anything like this." She says, her hands retreating from my hair to gently snake around my waist.

"Anything like what?" I hum as she pulls me up against her, our bodies flush as she absentmindedly traces circles over my bare stomach.

"I always thought i'd be fighting my whole life. I never... saw a way out until you. I never thought it was possible to feel so..." She trails off, searching for her words as I turn myself around in her arms to face her.

"Small?" I ask, my heart in my throat as her face lights up like i've said the perfect thing.

"Yeah. Small. This is all I want, you're all I want." She breathes in satisfaction, beads of water peppering down her porcelain skin as she looks back at me with so much bleeding affection.

"You're all I want too. I'm here now, I won't go anywhere. I promise." I cup her face, thankful for the water that hides the tears streaming down my cheeks as I pull her in to connect our lips.

I could relish in this forever, like seeing a sunset after a thousand sleepless days. This beauty, this feeling is incomparable to all that came before. All the anguish, all the heartache had been washed away in this single moment. Lara was probably happy in her own world, I could only hope that somehow, I was part of it. Even if it wasn't truly me, it would have been nice to know she wasn't so alone in her own head.

Once Wanda and I had finished, we had gotten dressed much to her excitement. She was practically bouncing as she walked, bleeding pure joy as I only watched in delight. There is no single moment I run out of wonder for that girl, no single moment that my love would ever feel anything other than everlasting. Neither of us were burdened by demons, and her smile reached her eyes in a way that made it shine. There was nothing more I could ask for.

"Hurry up!" Wanda calls from the front door, a foot already out as I pull on my boots with a cheek eating grin.

"It's not nice to be impatient." I tease, approaching her as she rolls her eyes.

"You're so slow all the time. We've got a long way to go." She says, wasting no time in slipping her hand into mine and tugging me out.

It looked exactly like the corridors of Natasha's apartment... but it cleaner. No cracks in the ceiling, no loud noises or distant footsteps. Everything was crisp, almost brand new as Wanda led me down the stairs. Even the rails were new, painted a smooth, deep blue as we descended. It was almost eerie, but Wanda was too excited to notice my reluctance. I did my best to shake off the feeling churning in my gut, trying to focus on the girl who was beaming with joy and holding my hand. As long as I was with her, it'd be fine.

At least, I think so.

When we stepped out of the building, my heart stops. The sight before me was extraordinary, and in a very obscure way. The whole city, all of New York... was empty. Not a single person in sight, all the buildings were polished, streets clean and free of rampant cars and pedestrians cackling at someone over the phone or across the street. Every brick, every lamp, every corner was brand new. Glossed over like it had been built to perfection.

"What's wrong?" Wanda asks when I stop in my tracks, gawking around me like a lost child.

"I- Where's everyone?" I ask, my eyes falling to her as she looks back at me in confusion.

"What do you mean everyone? It's just us. It's always been." She replies, spinning me further into misunderstanding. Was my mind just unable to conjure up other people? Was there something wrong with me?

"Are you feeling okay?" Wanda strides over, worry now looming in her tone as her eyes go over my face like she's trying to understand how what was going through my head.

"It's just us?" I reiterate, still scrambling to comprehend her words as she nods slowly.

"Is there something wrong?" She questions again, gentler this time, with that same look of fear in her eyes when she thought I was about to disappear again.

"No. No. It's... fine. I'm just confused." I brush off, giving her a weak smile that she thankfully buys before slipping her hand into mine once again.

We walk through the city with half my attention bleeding into my surroundings. It was haunting, every place was familiar and yet different all at once. Wanda was able to fill the silence, telling me about memories I didn't own, about a shop I never had and a wedding that never happened and usually, I'd be a mess of blush and butterflies but I couldn't shake the feeling that something was different, off even.

"You're spacing out again." She sighs, stopping right in the middle of the sidewalk to turn to me.

"I'm sorry." Is all I can offer, because what else was there to say?

It was disorienting enough to be thrusted into my own subconscious, except none of it felt like my own at all. It was like there was a piece that was missing and everything was just painted over, glossed to feign a shine. Wanda gives me a small, understanding smile, leading me across the street to the entrance of the park.

"This is my favorite place. Right where we met." She breathes happily, leading us to the same bench Wanda and I had settled on after our rambunctious night out. She sits down first, lightly patting the empty space next to her as I uncertainly comply.

"Something's bothering you." She points out, this time she wasn't asking. She had that light tone of determination, and I knew I was backed into a corner.

"Something feels different." I admit sheepishly, tearing my eyes away from hers to settle on the scene before me. Just an empty park, everything green was greener, everything blue was bluer, but it didn't feel right.

"What kind of different?" She asks. I can feel her stare burning through the side of my head, but I don't look. I can't risk shattering this while staring into her eyes, I'd go back into forcing the churning feeling down once again.

"Like something isn't... right. Like something is missing." I finally mutter, the words tasting sour on my tongue as silence blankets us. Even the silence felt crisp, deafening without anyone around.

"Missing... with us?" She questions, trying and failing to hide the insecurity in her tone. I look to her almost immediately, eyes shimmering with fear as I shake my head.

"No. No, not you. Never you." I reassure quickly, finding her hands and holding it in my own. I could never bear to see her afraid.

"Do you want to know why I brought you here?" She asks quietly, veering the subject as I only nod.

"Because I feel it too. The... difference. I've felt it for a while now." She sighs, a sad smile painting on her lips as my brows twitch into a furrow, waiting for her to continue. She's looking away now, not meeting my eyes which inherently wasn't a good sign.

"You feel different, don't you?" She asks, fiddling with our intertwined fingers the way she used to do with her rings when she was nervous.

"Like a piece of me is..."

"Gone? Unfinished?" She cuts me off, finally looking at me with a look I've seen before, but this one was worse because she was right. She knew she was right; she didn't have to ask.

"I wanted to come here because I needed to make sure." She says softly, pulling away to cup my cheek again. She was holding me with the familiar tenderness, her fingers gracefully looming over my skin as she sighed.

"Come on. One last place." She says, getting up with a small huff as I do the same, our hands falling to intertwine with each other once again. Even if everything felt shaky, her hands were warm and it gave me solace.

To my surprise, Wanda leads me back to the apartment in silence. There was an air that surrounded us, something building between like she was leading up to something. And she was, because she brought me up to the roof. Again, it was all so polished. No chipped bricks or trash in the corner, it was just an empty rooftop. She tugs me over to the ledge, hopping up on it the way I did when I was trying to make her feel better.

"What are you doing?" I ask worriedly, our hands still connected as she towered over me with a smile.

"Come on, I have to tell you something." She nods for me to join her up there. I look between Wanda and the thin ledge, taking a breath before eventually complying.

The view alone nearly pushes me over the edge, because in the distance the skyline fades into clouds of light red. It almost looked like cotton candy and mist, covering most of the buildings that used to stand tall.

"Do you remember when you told me you'd take me down with you and I said i'd let you?" Wanda whispers, taking my by surprise as I snap to look at her.

"How do you—"

"Your memories are mine too." She answers quickly, but still with a looming hint of tenderness on her lips. She's still looking down below, eyes never meeting mine as the cold wind picks up.

"So you've known? All this time?" I ask and a smile unfolds on her lips, she nods.

"Of course I do. But I need to apologize." She sighs, turning to look at me with somber eyes.

"Apologize for what?" I question, my stomach was turning again as her grip tightens ever so slightly.

"I lied to you." She breathes, bottom lip rolling in between her teeth like she was suppressing tears daring to break from her eyes.

My brows twitch into a furrow at her words, both of us still on the ledge but the wind just keeps getting colder and colder. I keep my eyes on hers, watching it gloss over with tears as she brings a free hand up to cup my face tenderly.

"I can't go down with you." She says, tears falling to trail down her cheeks as her thumb gently treads upon my skin.

I felt sick again, the kind of sick that was ridden with anxiety. My heart felt like it was going a million miles a minute, the wind keeps getting harsher but somehow— it felt like everything around us had frozen. I don't understand how it's possible, but it happens. It's confusing, contradicting as her autumn hair, and my own, blow with the wind.

"What are you talking about?" I ask shakily, she was scaring me. It felt like she was saying goodbye.

"Remember what I said? That i'll always be right here?" She asks, her voice trembling as I offer her an uncertain nod.

"This is the only place I can ever be and when you're ready, i'll meet you here again." She sniffles lightly. Her voice was crystal clear, even with the violent gusts of wind.

"What do you mean when i'm ready? Wanda—" I try to pry but she only shakes her head, looking more and more pained with every passing second.

"You have to wake up." She finishes, nodding like she was trying so hard to believe she was saying the right thing.

"I— It's over, Wanda. It's done. I can't wake up." I argue, my heart thrashing in place as she releases a soft breath.

"It's not over and we both know it." She steps closer, letting go of my hand to wrap her arms around my waist.

She's doing that thing where she balls up the fabric of my shirt, holding on so tight it felt like the world depended on it. I reluctantly snake my arms around her, holding her as tight as I could as I tried to make sense of her words.

"Lexa!" A distant voice calls in the wind, blurring into the madness of the cold air.

"Come on, come on!" There it goes again, like somebody was screaming up in the sky.

"I love you, in every lifetime. I'll see you at the finish line." Wanda steps away, a sad smile on her lips as she retracts her arms back to her side and takes a deep breath.

Before I could say another word, she pushes me off. Our eyes never break as I fall, and her tears only flood harder. My arms are flailing, eyes wide and stomach dropping as I wire my eyes shut, trying to brace myself for an impact that never comes.

What greets me instead, is blinding light and a horrible ringing in my ears. Air floods into my lungs all at once, and I shoot up like I had done once before, when the blade had been lifted from my chest. My eyes pry open, but all I see is brightness. All I feel is warmth, nothing like the freezing air of the rooftop.

Then I feel hands cup my face, and a body press against mine.

"You're alive."

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