Chapter ?

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(One last time, baby angels.)

I feel my skin break out into goosebumps as the cool breeze so ly flutters against my skin, the coolness of it breaking the warmth of the rays of the sun that have been beating down upon my skin relentlessly. My back feels tired from all the squatting down I've been doing throughout the day, but the exhaustion in my limbs makes me feel slightly more alive than I have felt for a while. I let go of the hammer in my hand, gently letting it rest on the side of the steps to the porch that I've been trying to fix for the past hours on end. I stand up, stretching my sti back as I watch my little project. 'Little' might be an understatement, but right now, the porch is my latest victim. It looks... well, like it won't collapse. Deciding that should be good enough for today, I nod to myself. a Numbly, I walk into the cabin. I flick a light switch, which illuminates the inside with a warm, orange glow. The cabin feels so much smaller now than it used to when I was younger. The silence presses against my eardrums, and without being able to stand the silence much longer, I carelessly flick on the old, static radio my grandparents used to dance around the kitchen to. I don't pay much attention to whatever noise the radio emits, as long as there's something that can attempt to fill the silence which keeps threatening to swallow me every single time I let my thoughts wander. đ The cabin is slowly beginning to look hospitable -like it actually wants someone to inhabit it. I have a long way to go, but I would rather spend cold nights here, in the middle of nowhere, than in my New York apartment, confined to doing nothing but going to the gym and drinking. At least here, I can raid my own liquor cabinet, leaning on the cool, burning liquid to help me fall asleep to the sound of the stars and my regrets. It's been a couple of weeks since my hearing at the FBI, and I've not heard anything from them since. I try to not overthink and dissect every word spoken at the hearing for the umpteenth time, but my brain seems to be hellbent on returning to the grey Bureau building, as if there might have been a sign I missed. I know there has not, but my brain doesn't seem to get it. Overthinking is what I do best. The radio brings me back to the present as a singer wails on about wondering who they are and whether they are someone they might dislike. It is a little on the nose. I blink, gathering myself, forcing myself into motion instead of just standing in the middle of the living room. I make my way into the kitchen, moving on autopilot, the layout of the cabin somehow still ingrained in my muscles from childhood. In the kitchen, the slightly limescale-ridden kettle turns on happily, leaving me to aimlessly stand in front of it, staring at it. "Any for me?" My body automatically jumps and I turn on my heels at the familiar, dark voice. I stare out into the empty cabin, my heart beating excitedly in my ribcage. For a second, I imagine her piercing green eyes on me. But just for a second. Slowly but surely, with nothing but the growing noise of the kettle overtaking the sound from the radio, my heart rate settles once more. She's not here. đ I turn back around to face the kettle once more, trying to ignore the slight tightness in my chest. This isn't the first time I have imagined myself hearing Wanda's voice. It's as though even though Wanda and I parted ways weeks ago, my mind or my heart still hasn't gotten the memo. I breathe out, trying to get the feeling of her presence to wash o me. It's been weeks without any sign of her, which should be sign enough. I slightly clumsily pour the almost boiling water into a mug. still not used to having to maneuver basic tasks with one arm in a sling. I drop a teabag into the water, not bothering with any sort of sweetener. Fulfilling my boring routine, the cup of tea and I make our way onto the porch, from where I slowly walk across the grass, barefoot, until I reach the old porch swing. The knitted blanket is su icient enough to keep me warm enough, together with the hot tea. I let the swing move back and forth slowly, admiring the way the leaves of the huge, three-hundred-year-old maple tree have started to morph into yellows. Fall isn't too far away, which I can feel in the snappiness of the air, once it is devoid of the warmth of the setting sun. "I hope I can be the autumn leaf, who looked at the sky and lived. And when it was time to leave, gracefully it knew life was a gi ." I murmur to myself, suddenly remembering one of my grandmother's favorite savings "That's beautiful " "Hearing voices is certainly a sign of madness." I sigh to myself,

leaning my head back and closing my eyes, enjoying the last rays of sun on my skin. "Replying to them might be genius." Her voice echoes back, a so smile in it. a I frown, wondering when my loneliness decided to evolve to Wanda's voice being able to hold conversations with me. I sigh and pry my eyes open, blinking a couple of times to focus my vision. My eyes land on Wanda a couple of feet away from me. a "Whoa, what the fuck!" I exclaim loudly, jerking up into a more alert sitting position, my tea jerking about with me, but unfortunately, I'm not quick enough to catch it, and the contents of the mug poor all over my front. "Oh, fuck!" I exclaim again, my voice pitchy with pain as the hot liquid burns my skin. "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize -" Wanda's voice drawls to a stop, and then suddenly all the burning stops, as though it never even happened the first time I look up just in time to see Wanda twirl one of her hands by her side, the remnants of scarlet whisps disappearing around her fingers. blink twice, unable to actually believe that she is standing right there, a few meters away from me. She looks good, albeit a little tired, perhaps. She's wearing old jeans and a simple, black hoodie, zipped halfway up. Her hair is loose, falling so ly down her shoulders, the dying light of the early autumn sun making it glisten, coming alive like a thousand shades of wildfire. Her emerald eyes are round and hesitant, her dark eyelashes framing her eyes, encasing the green in them like rare gems I should feel lucky enough to behold. "Wanda?" I question the apparition in front of me, wondering if my mind has finally decided to up the ante by now having me see visions instead of only hearing things. Wanda tilts her head slightly, watching me through slightly furrowed brows, as though I've just posed her an amusing question. She pouts slightly, the corners of her lips turning upwards. "Last I checked, yes." She answers, her voice sounding exactly like I remembered it, her so Sokovian accent purring behind each syllable

"What?" Is all I am able to get out, staring at her with an open mouth. Wanda doesn't reply, only tilts her head slightly more to the side, her amused expression still on her face. I don't know what to do, what to say, or even know what she imagined I would say or do. So I just sit there, not sure whether my brain is going at a hundred miles an hour or zero. I feel some annoyance, or anger boil up within me, mixing in with the pure surprise of actually seeing Wanda again when the last time I saw her she completely acted like she could not hear me. Then there's that part of me that no matter what happens or how much I try to push it away or ignore it, is happy to see her. "How's your arm?" Wanda nods towards my arm, which looks exactly the same as the last time she saw it. We make eye contact and I can see in her eyes how much she wishes that I'll accept her attempt at breaking the silence, at bridging the gap. I sigh, "Still broken." Wanda nods, apparently content with my reply, however dry. I don't

o er anything else up, feeling angry with her, although I know I have no right to, really. I watch her disinterestedly, and she takes her cautious eyes from me to roam around our surroundings. I watch her eyes so en as she watches the sunset, which illuminates her face, making her glow enviously. We don't speak for a while. I follow her lead and stare out onto the wild field which spreads out in front of my grandparents' cabin. A thought of how overgrown it has become crosses my mind, but it doesn't quite bother me the way I expected it would. Instead, I quite relish in the dierent kinds of wildflowers dotting the ground, making the field resemble a vivid painting. I spot a rather lively bumblebee making its last rounds before the night takes over, but the crickets I hear remain hidden. The breeze I felt earlier returns, making the flowers and grass sway in an unorganized version of a dance. When Wanda speaks again, I've almost forgotten she's here, and I imagine she's but a fiction of my imagination again. 'Can I?" She wonders, her voice low, so as to not disturb the

I don't instantly look at her. It's like I can't quite comprehend that she's here, standing on the grass I used to play on as a child. Loneliness gets comfortable and I think I was just starting to understand the silence around me. And yet she tugs me towards her like she's always done, voluntarily or involuntarily, it doesn't really matter. So, just as the sun eventually will have to set behind the trees on the far end of the field of flowers, I eventually have to set my eyes on her. Her eyes sparkle, so light in the orange sun I could mistake them being golden instead of green. They're cautious, as though any wrong

bumblebee's tranguil buzzing.

movement might set me o . I realize she wants to sit beside me. Like a petulant child, I want to say no, to tell her to go away, that this is mine and she's not allowed to break this too. But like the sun and the moon, we cannot help but dance around each other, and what use is there to fight the stars? a She silently moves closer, not looking at me as she sits down on the porch swing next to me. I'm once again torn, feeling on edge with her so close. If only I knew what she was thinking. Or maybe feeling. Then, I might not mess us up again. Wanda casts me an inquisitive side glance, but she doesn't say anything.

We sit silently for another while, a new soul entering our painting as a swallow flies above the field, apparently intent on showing o for us. We watch it twist and turn elegantly in the air, and I almost wonder why it dances on its own until another one joins it in the air as the shadows on the ground begin to grow long.

"Are you cold?" My voice breaks the long silence before I have had the chance to think. "Hmm?" Wanda doesn't look at me, her eyes still on the sparrows. I realize I'm stupid; she wouldn't get cold thanks to the magic in her veins.

But Wanda takes her eyes o the sparrows, finally, and watches me with a comparable amount of interest. She seems to notice the blanket over my legs, and she shyly nods. I don't question her, but rearrange the blanket, li ing one end of it to give to. her. She's forced to move slightly closer to me in order to fit underneath it. Once she is content with how the blanket lays over her, we sit quietly again, our elbows grazing each other, each touch sending warmth up my arm. Our silence is at once comfortable, but there is an undeniable underlying current of nervous electricity in the unsaid. "What was it you said?" Wanda's voice is so , making me look at her curiously.

"Huh?" Wanda sighs at my inability to catch on, a frown appearing on her face, so I continue, "I've been known to say many a smart thing, y'know." That makes her giggle bounce through the cooling air, reminding me of the sparrows up ahead. Her frown is replaced by a slightly uneven smile, but it isn't enough to chase away all of the sadness in her eyes. "Something about falling leaves," Wanda says once her laughter has echoed away from us for the last time, her expression now contemplative as she regards me. I'm struck by how close we are as I easily can recount every freckle on her face.

"Oh, that." I nod. "It was something my grandmother used to quote, it was from this book, I think it might still be in there, somewhere." I pause, looking back at the cabin behind us. Wanda's hands twist and turn in her lap, their never-ending dance as she has something on her mind. I know she wants me to repeat the quote, so I calmly recite it to her as her eyes glisten with sorrow. "I hope I can be the autumn leaf, who looked at the sky and lived. And

when it was time to leave, gracefully it knew life was a gi ." at "I like that." Wanda decides, looking away from me out onto the darkening field ahead, her eyes pooling with moisture and she bites her lip, trying to contain whatever emotion she is battling with.

That makes Wanda snivel quietly, her nose crinkling up as she pulls a face, losing the battle to her emotions. She looks so small underneath the old blanket, fighting her tears that I can't help but cautiously wrap my good arm around her shoulders. She tenses slightly before she takes a shuddering inhale, melting against me, turning herself so that she can bury her face into the crook of my neck as she wraps her arms around my middle. I breathe in her familiar scent, which makes

I o er her no words of solace, no apologies nor any acceptances. I just hold her as she centers herself. I don't know what she needs from me just yet, and so I know I have to hold her at arm's length. A curious saying, I note with a certain hint of sarcasm, as I currently find myself holding her in my arms.

"How do you decide when it's time to leave?" Wanda finally asks, her

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voice mulled against me, referring back to the quote.

my own emotions stir uneasily within me

I hum in contemplation as she tightens her grip on me slightly, now resting her head against the space between my shoulder and my chest. I watch the sparrows. They glide through the air, quick, turning "I don't think we get to decide, Wanda." I decide a er a moment of quietness. "Then I owe you the biggest apology." Wanda quietly says, not moving from her position. I don't answer her straight away. Her words makes our fight in the helicopter echo freshly in my mind, just as I know it must do in hers, too. The what if's became too many for her, and while in the moment. I could not empathize, now, I can. I was the one who kept the what if's at bay to begin with, why should I dictate what she does with her own what if's? a "No need." I finally speak, which makes Wanda disentangle herself from me, sitting up as my arm drops from her and I instantly feel colder "I think there is a need." She counters, her eyes narrowed slightly and the last rays of the dying sun casting their last kiss on her. "No." I shake my head. "Your reaction was valid, and-" "I'm not apologizing for my reaction." Wanda cuts me o . "I'm apologizing for how I handled my reaction." I tilt my head in question at her and she sighs, looking down at her lap, in which her hands have resumed their nervous fiddling with each other. I wait for her to continue, knowing her well enough by now, even though she might not know me half as well. "You did nothing wrong - no, let me finish." She gives me a look as I begin to counter her straight away. "I'm not saying the decisions I saw you make were always the best, but I'm saying I would have shown me, too, if I was in your situation.' She looks away, back at her hands which now apparently find the silver ring on her right middle finger incessantly pleasing to twirl around. I wait for her to continue again, intrigued as to what she has to say that is going to explain the last six weeks. đ "I would like to think I would show you, too, if our places were switched." Wanda muses on, mumbling slightly. "It's... I want you to understand that although I understand and I am grateful that you showed me... liust...' She grimaces in thought, apparently not pleased with how she is putting her emotions into words. Again, I wait. The sparrows fly higher. "I lived through what you lived through in real time in a few seconds. That's a lot of information to take in."

She laughs, but it's not a real laugh, it's strained, nervous. She looks up at me, getting a measure of how I'm reacting. I don't give her much. She is le to the vagueness of whatever she senses in my thoughts. If I was who I was before I met Wanda, I would surely have risen to the bait and argued, pled my case, not listened to her. But traveling through time multiple times apparently ages a person. And so I just wait for her to finish, wait for me to understand her, something I'm not sure anyone ever could. "I guess what I'm trying to get across is that when I looked in your head, I saw everything happen. I saw it but I did not feel it, or experience it." She pauses, in thought, then adds, "I felt your emotions. Not mine." "That must've been weird." I finally reply, which makes her look at me deadpan.

"You don't say?" She cracks a smile, making me chuckle. "So fucking weird." I shake my head. "It's still all weird to me, too. Like, did all of that actually happen? Stark? Hydra? If I'm the only one who remembers it all?" "Of course it happened." Wanda looks confounded. "I've got nothing to show for it."

"You showed me."
"What if that was all a dream, though?" I ask her, feeling relieved that
I'm finally able to discuss this with someone. A civilized discussion
was quite o the table in terms of an option a er Wanda had looked
into my head in the helicopter.
"Darling, I think I'm powerful enough to know when something I see
is true." Wanda looks almost touched I would doubt her prowess in
mindreading.

"Okay, let's say it's true, and it did happen, then it also didn't, because you can't remember it. Because it happened, it didn't happen to you." I say, and Wanda laughs. "Truth isn't set in stone. What is true for you isn't necessarily true for me." I give her a look, to which she shrugs. "What, I can not finish high school and still be smart. Don't, what is it, pigeonhole me." "That is one thing I can't do with you." I roll my eyes. "But seriously, you've...' "I've come to terms with what you showed me." Wanda nods slightly, her words sounding truthful to me, yet her eyes still show signs of remorse. She notices me scrutinize her, and clears her throat. "Can we go inside? I don't want you to catch a cold. And it's getting dark. an of the "You-" I begin, incredulously, ready to make about five jokes out of what she just said.

"You shut it." Wanda quickly places a finger over my lips in order to silence me. đ It works, but not for my head which begins to overthink the simple movement which she probably didn't mean anything with. Wanda's eyes look down from my eyes onto her finger still flushed against my lips, the smile on her face disappearing slowly. She looks back up, meeting my eyes, and I notice her cheeks begin to flush. She quickly removes her finger, clearing her throat as she removes the blanket from her awkwardly, letting her hair fall in front of her face. a "Anyway. Inside." Wanda scrambles up and out of the porch swing. I can't help the grin that spreads on my face as I follow her, amazed by how she can be so secure in herself one second, for the next to only crumble into self-doubt. I am curious as to what she wants from me this time around, and quite frankly, I'm quite curious as to what I want from her this time around. I am not delusional; I know I cannot expect us to ever return to a semblance of normal, and yet... I would lie if there weren't moments during the past six weeks during which I had allowed myself to imagine Wanda here with me, living some kind of grotesque domestic life together. But I am not delusional; she is the Scarlet Witch, whatever that means to her, and I am... me. đ Wanda walks up the porch which creaks angrily under her. She turns to shoot me an unimpressed look as she notices the hammer and

nails unceremoniously disregarded. I shrug. My cabin's nicer than hers, broken porch steps or not. With a final glance at the swallows now chasing each other around in huge, round loops in their own invisible rollercoaster in the air, we enter the cabin a Wanda looks around quietly. Her hair shimmers a darker red in this light, looking almost auburn. Her eyes are darker too, a mossy sort of green, the cabin reflected in her eyes as she looks around, blankfaced. I note the hollowness of her cheeks and the slight grey color of her skin. In this light, she looks much less magical, and much more human. More worn. The look of her pulls at my heart and I feel responsible for her state. I wonder if she'll let me in on what she has been up to since she le me, both of us red-eyed, but for di erent reasons. She catches me watching her, and she smiles so ly, her smile illuminating her tired expression. "It's nice.

"Thank you." Silence envelopes us again, and we both look around the room once more, as though we're trying to figure out a clue as to how the conversation is supposed to continue. Wanda seems to be the first one to find it, as she lets out a so exhale, her eyes growing on her face. She looks at me excitedly, her eyes sparkling, before she walks towards the other side of the room, where the archway is dotted with hundreds of books. I smile to myself, oddly pleased with her reaction. "Can I?" She asks me over her shoulder, her hand hovering in the air just centimeters away from the spines of the books.

"Of course.

She so ly traces her hand against the old books which have not been touched in years. I watch her from a couple of steps back. The mundanity of the moment warms my chest. Wanda stops every few books, tilting her head to read the spines, mumbling so ly to herself as she reads. "Oh." She lets out a pleased gasp, turning towards me with a genuine smile.

"What?" I finally step closer as she turns back towards the giant bookcase. "I think I'd like this one. Have you read it?" She asks me, her voice hushed as though she does not want to wake the books. I follow her gaze, which lands on the spine of a book. I bite the inside of my cheek, not able to answer her for a moment, the swell of emotion thick in my chest, bottling up my voice. I feel Wanda's eyes on me, and she quickly grazes her hand against mine, quickly enough

for it to be interpreted as a genuine mistake. "Yeah, I have." I finally answer her, meeting her so eyes. She smiles, looking from me at the book. She carefully brings the little, colorful book out of its resting place, her long fingers brushing it gently to get rid of the dust. "In the Garden of Happiness." She reads in that same, hushed tone. "I hope I can be the autumn leaf, who looked at the sky and lived. And when it was time to leave, gracefully it knew life was a gi .." I speak, and she looks up at me with round eyes.

"Is this-?" She trails o , her eyes bouncing between mine. I nod, to which her lips part and she looks down at the book again in admiration. My chest feels tight, and so I take a step away from her, and the book, turning away from them both to face the open, empty cabin. "My grandma got that book for my niece." I hear myself tell her, not really knowing why. She doesn't reply; she doesn't need to. Instead, I fee<u>l her hand so ly</u>

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rest on my shoulder blade. It travels down to the small of my back, leaving my skin in goosebumps in its wake. "I'll make us some tea." Wanda walks past me as if she knows exactly where she is going. Granted, the cabin isn't large enough for her to get lost, so I leave her to it, suddenly feeling quite worn. I slowly pace around the cabin in the silence of the crackling radio I le on, and the sounds of Wanda in

the kitchen. Whether I want to run far away from her or run straight towards her I'm not sure, but I am sure of not knowing, and I try to find solace in knowing at least that I don't know. The following hours we spend on the couch in the quiet, talking. As words tick by, our throats become tired and our voices become hoarse, but there seems to be so much to say that we don't pay it any mind. Wanda lets me do most of the talking, steering the conversation where she wants it to go by asking me questions. I don't hesitate with my answers, knowing I don't have much to lose. I've

The sun is long gone and the moon is out to play as she finally opens up about the last six weeks she spent on her own. I had imagined her on excursions to find where the mist went in order for her to bottle it and use it herself to find the people she misses the most. But in reality, it turns out she was cooped up in her own cabin, going on excursions within herself. She doesn't tell me what she found.

already lost.

My eyes are tired, my voice is hoarse and I just want to fall asleep where I am, cooped up on the side of the couch, facing Wanda, my knees up against my chest. The gravity of the conversations we have finally decided to have is heavy, pushing down on me from every direction, and yet, it is there, amongst the pressure that I find release. Wanda's voice fades in and out as I struggle to stay with her, but my eyes are just so heavy...

"Livvy? Livvy, darling-" I hear Wanda's hoarse and tired voice clearly, breaking through the darkness and I realize I must have dozed o . I open my eyes instantly, feeling ashamed I fell asleep on her. I barely even compute what she just said. "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to-" I groan and shu le around into a more upright position, Wanda watching me with a small smile. She looks exhausted, and I wonder when she slept last. Yet, she wears her exhaustion like an expensive perfume "Don't worry, I think it's time for bed, don't you?" She kindly diverts my attention as if she knows where my thoughts lie, and I feel ashamed for not having shown her a place to call her own. "Yeah, so sorry, just... follow me." I mumble embarrassed as my cheeks heat up. We walk in silence towards the wooden staircase that leads to the bedrooms. Wanda lets me lead as she follows me closely behind, which makes me feel oddly nervous, and I can feel the tiredness slowly disappear from my body to be replaced by something

listens intently, her deep green eyes looking at me as though she sees

When we get to the master bedroom, I can't help the innocent

right through me, making my heart beat intently

completely else. Wanda doesn't comment on anything else any further, but I can't help but break the silence with unnecessary comments here and there about small details which evoke memories from me. I'm not sure what Wanda thinks of my explanations, but she

disappointment at the night ending, having forgotten how much I had missed her company. I show her around the space, acutely aware of her body in the space, and mine. It's as though my brain is trying to make up for letting me fall asleep earlier by now overcompensating and making me notice every single detail of every single moment. "Well, that's it. I'll, er, I'll just be in the spare bedroom, then. I need to make the bed, anyway, and this one's fresh, changed the sheets this morning. So, yeah. All good. Oh. Feel free to grab whatever clothes you want to sleep in." I awkwardly ramble to Wanda's back as she's inspecting the counter of my grandmother's old wooden dresser. I can't imagine it's as interesting as she seems to find it, but what do I know? đ Wanda turns around at my voice, her expression slightly surprised as she keeps one of her hands trailing on the dresser. The pale light from the moon sneaks its way into the room through the window behind her, and the light catches her again in the most flattering way, I notice, slightly jealously. Wanda seems to find something amusing, as she fails at suppressing a smile. "Oh." She breathes out, her lips forming an almost perfect circle. "You don't have to give me this room." "I - oh." I suddenly catch on. "You're not staying." Wanda frowns and tilts her head at me, as if I've just spoken to her in "What?" She so ly wonders, her accent thick. "What?" I ask back and she giggles, a sound that makes me want to run to her and spin her around. "Livvy, I meant I am not taking your room from you." "It's fine, I mean, you're the guest, so-"So shouldn't I stay in the guest room?" Wanda asks, one of her eyebrows arching up questioningly as she looks as though she's thoroughly enjoying this. "Don't argue with me, Maximo ." Wanda narrows her eyes at me, and for a moment I wonder if I fucked up. "Alright." She then shrugs, giving in all too easily. I watch her turn away from me to face the bed. She traces the wooden bedframe as she walks around the bed and sits down on the edge, before looking up at me with warm, hazy green eyes. We stay like that for a moment, a moment which seems to tick on forever. She doesn't look away and I don't want to. Her lips look so , anda "Goodnight, Wanda." I say to cut my thoughts short. "Goodnight, Olivia." Comes her reply, and I take that as my cue to leave her to her own devices, not trying to overthink. đ I close her door behind me, noticing the slight twinge of disappointment coursing through me. I feel annoyed at myself for feeling like this. I don't know what I was expecting to happen. She comes running back and realizes she loves me? I hu as I walk into the cold spare bedroom. I should be content with what I've gotten from her, which is an explanation. I begin to make the bed, sloppily throwing on the covers and sheets as this is quite possibly the task I hate the most on earth. Once the bed is made, I raid the almost empty closet to find an oversized shirt that will do for sleeping in. I tiptoe out of the room, noticing the master bedroom door still closed. Why it would not be closed, I don't know. I roll my eyes at myself, making my way to the bathroom to brush my teeth. I stare at myself in the mirror as I brush, emptily staring. I look only half as bad as I feel, which is a win, I suppose. My hair is as tousled as my emotions, and the circles under my eyes are not nearly as dark as my soul feels. I should feel elated; Wanda is here, she's forgiven me and I've fulfilled my vow - I don't owe her anything anymore. She's free from me and I am free from her. But that makes me feel anything but elated. Who's to say what direction we will float in if we are untethered from the other? When my head finally hits the pillow, the sleep I so desperately seemed to crave earlier has entirely eluded me, and I feel wide awake. I stare up at the wooden ceiling, my eyes following the crevices and spirals in the wood above, which is dark and mysterious, only slightly alight by the lazy rays of the moon. The silence around me is loud and unbearable. I can't help but let my mind slip in the direction of the woman only a few paces away, only separated from me by a wall. I wonder if she's fallen asleep yet. Somehow, I doubt she has. A part of me is urging me to go check on her. To see if she needs anything. To see if she needs me I stay in bed, unmoving. The only thing that moves is my chest with each breath and the faded light of the moon as it crosses the sky, slowly. Until something else moves. The door to my room slowly hinges inwards, quietly and nervously. My heart beats against my chest, unnerved. "Livvy?" Wanda's raspy voice whispers, breaking the silence, just barely. I turn my head to squint at her dark silhouette, standing there in the doorway, her frame eaten up by the large flannel she's wearing. She shi s slightly on the balls of her feet, perhaps regretting her decision. "Mhmm?" I hum and I hear her exhale. "Sorry, I didn't mean to- well, I knew you weren't sleeping, so I thought..." Her words fade into the darkness of the night, disappearing just as quickly as they were formed. I don't say anything as she lingers uncertainly by the door. I know what she needs from me, just as I need it from her, but I'm done with pushing and guiding. Wanda seems to understand, as she tiptoes in, turning to carefully close the door behind her. Wordlessly, I shu le over to the side as she just as silently lays down onto the empty space I've made for her. I turn onto my side so I can try to read her better, as she wants to stay hidden from me like a shadow. I'm met with her round eyes, gleaming like two stars on their own accord. She's watching me just as I am watching her. I notice the flannel is slightly large on her frame, having glided down her shoulder, exposing her collarbone to the air. A strand of her hair defies the rest of her locks, lying confidently across the valley of her cheek. I realize I could stare at her forever and still, it wouldn't be long enough. "I can go if you want." Her lips form words that should be posed as a question but aren't. "Don't." "I couldn't sleep." "Neither could I." We fall silent. Her eyes are dark. I can't make out any green. They travel between my eyes and to my mouth and up again, a triangle of unexplored habit. I can't help but watch as she wets her lips, scooting slightly closer to me, making something stir within me. The silence isn't silent anymore, it's filled with the sounds of my beating heart. My stomach is in knots I can't untangle. Her strand of hair is suddenly so distracting I need to move it. I li my hand, the one in the cast, to brush away the so hair from her cheek as her dark eyes don't leave mine. I push her hair back behind her ear, my hand lingering on the space between her jaw and her ear. It feels so unreal to feel her so skin under my fingertips again a er everything we've gone through. a I lay my hand flush against her cheek, marveling at how real she is, trying to comprehend that she's right here. I feel like I've captured the howling, unstoppable wind between my fingers. Wanda is quiet, her lips slightly parted as she breathes in through her mouth, her eyes still fixated on mine like I am as interesting to her as she is to me She places a delicate hand on top of the back of my hand which is still pressed on her cheek. Her hand is warm. Her fingers wrap around mine and she pulls my hand down, tilting her head slightly as she presses a kiss against the palm of my hand, her eyes never leaving mine, unblinking. đ Her kiss seems to bypass any measures of self-preservation found within me and I feel myself falling into the pools of starlight in her eyes. Her lips press together into a so smile I might have missed were I not so close to her "Tell me to go." She whispers, her voice thick. "Don't." I whisper back in a backward a irmation. "Then I won't." She husks, her eyes falling to my lips as I fall into her. We simultaneously close the distance between us, meeting gently in the middle as our lips crash together with the strength of a waterfall but with the so ness of water. Her lips mold into mine, pressing into me with the conviction I need and she has. My hand falls to her waist as I pull her impossibly close, our bare legs intertwining until I can't be sure who is who. Her hand is on the back of my head, fingers in my hair, nails digging into my scalp. I let out a breathless, voiceless moan which lets her tongue dance into me, playfully inviting mine into a dance. And so we dance, at times with each other, at times against each other, testing the other to find a leader and a follower to a soundless beat. đ I won't relent as she fights to lead, finding her bottom lip to gently bite down on. She quietly groans, but then she surprises me by suddenly swinging her leg over me, pushing me down into the so mattress below as she breaks the kiss, finding herself straddling my waist with a pleased smile gracing her slightly swollen lips as her hair falls around her face like so curtains. She looks like she doesn't belong on this earth. We stay like that for a moment, her looking down on me with her hands on my chest as we catch our breaths. I bring my hands to travel up each leg on either side of me, traveling up, coming to rest just below her hips. She bites her lip, slowly bending down until her mouth is right by my le ear. "Tell me to go." She whispers, her voice smooth, sending shivers down my body, her words those I have wanted to hear for so long that hearing her actually say them makes me pause "No." I breathlessly manage to croak out, making her freeze and place a little bit of distance between our faces, allowing her to look me in the eyes with an uncertain twinkle, not certain of what I meant. "Are you... sure?" I can't help but ask her. She doesn't answer me straight away, but watches me with that intense gaze only she can muster. I don't dare to wonder what she's thinking. Her eyes are round and shiny, pupils dilated, framed by long, dark lashes. Then, an imperceptibly small smile graces her lips. "I'm sure." She whispers, and then her lips are on mine again without any form of warning She presses her le hand down on the pillow next to my face to steady herself, the other hand traveling down from my jaw to my throat, her nails so ly scratching my skin, making me arch my back into her. I don't know how, but every move she makes is the right one. My grip on her hips tightens as she brings her hand even further down, reaching my breast. I feel like I have become clay in her hands as all my strength leaves my body, nothing but pleasure coursing through me. She doesn't seem to mind my shirt innocently keeping us apart as her hand starts tracing patterns right where my body seems to react most. a We forget that we were kissing as she hovers above me, lips barely touching as she concentrates on her hand. I let out a so exhale as she pushes down against me with her hips as I somehow instinctively guide her into a slow, rocking motion. Nothing but our breathing fills the night as all of my thoughts escape my head and I forget who I am and where I am, the only thing I know for certain is her. The aching deep down within me intensifies and my nails dig into her, making her movements become slightly choppy as her hand finds new courage, working my breathing into a swell. I find my ey slowly opening, meeting her hooded gaze, both lazily and intensely fixed on my face, watching her movements reflected on my face. "Fuck-" She breathes out, her eyes trained deep into mine, her breath warm as her hand trembles. a "Please, I-" I can't seem to finish my sentence as she suddenly lets her hand swi ly delve underneath my shirt, her skin finally coming into contact with the sensitive skin on my chest. a She smirks as if my lack of vocabulary is amusing to her. Egged on by my breathlessness, her hips buckle against me, sending another wave of unreleased pleasure through me. "You're beautiful." I hear her voice whisper into the dark, filled with admiration. "Let me show you how beautiful you are. Her lips are on the side of my throat then, leaving wet kisses on me. My hands seem to decide they want to travel up the length of her body, skimming her curves until they find a new home tousled in her hair. She hums against me as my nails scratch her scalp when she nibbles on a particularly receptive spot by my ear. The weight of her body weighs me down, and yet her touches make me feel as though I am floating away. She keeps going, alternating between kissing my neck and kissing my lips as her hands gently play with my breasts, allowing every inch of me she touches to feel like it is on fire. I get lost in time and touch, until she stops and my eyes lazily flutter open. "I want you." Wanda whispers to me, a hunger in her eyes I haven't seen before. "But tell me to go, and I will." "Don't." I breathe out again in a whimper, my body shu ling underneath her as her smirk widens. "Stay, I-' There is no need to finish my sentence as her eyes suddenly flash red and with a loud rip, she's ripped my shirt open without touching me. I flinch, surprised, not having expected that. đ "I think I've wanted to do this for a long fucking time." Wanda tilts her head, her hands tracing up my stomach slowly, making goosebumps erupts like flowers blooming a er rain. "Then do it." I challenge her, my voice no longer a whimper but steady as I look her dead in the eye Wanda looks momentarily surprised at the challenge, before her lips curl up in a wide smile, her teeth showing. I shu le slightly underneath her as her hands find my breasts again, playing me like I've told her exactly how to, making shiver a er shiver run down my spine "Oh, I will." Wanda so quietly says I barely hear her, her accent flatting her vowels further a She scoots lower, keeping her dark eyes on me as she gently bites down on one of my nipples, making my confidence fly out of me in the form of a shaky gasp. My eyes roll back in my head as she begins her slow torture again, savoring every whimper she can illicit as a form of payment. My hands find her head again, but she stops her movements. "No." She says, her voice low, sitting up and taking my wrists in her hands, li ing my arms above my head. "They stay there. I want to watch you squirm beneath me. đ Even if I knew what to say, I doubt anything but incoherent sounds could escape my lips at this point, and her telling me I cannot touch her makes me want nothing else in this world but to do just exactly that. It looks like she knows that too, based on the content smirk on her lips. "Think you can keep them there?" Wanda asks me almost condescendingly. I nod. "Good girl. Let's test that. đ She lets go of my wrists and I obediently keep my hands above my head, although I suppose it might be the hardest thing I have even done. All I want to is to touch her, to feel her everywhere, to make her feel as beautiful as she is to me. Wanda begins to trace an invisible line with her finger down from my lips, down my throat, down the valley of my breasts towards my stomach. Her eyes are so dark they don't seem to retain any semblance of green within them as she watches my face. "Remember, you can always tell me to leave..." Her finger traces past my belly button. đ I squirm as her finger suddenly deviates from its trajectory, coming to trace indistinct patterns on the inside of my le thigh. She smirks. "Impatient?" She tilts her head slightly, her hair falling over her shoulder "Please, Wanda, I-" I breathlessly shi on the bed and she leans down towards me, slyly tracing kisses down the side of my jaw as her hand continues its torture on my thigh, inching closer and closer to where I d her most. In my state of e reaches down to guide her hand, but Wanda guickly stops and sits up. "Mhmm-mm." She shakes her head. "I told you no." She li $\,$ s one hand, letting her scarlet dance upon her skin. She watches her magic for a moment, apparently mesmerized by it. Then, she turns her gaze onto me and I shiver under her scrutiny, her eyes twinkling merrily. "I said no touching. No touching. I don't need to touch you. I can make you scream my name without even laying so much as a finger on you." Wanda explains, her voice sweet, and as she does, her magic li s my arms above my head, keeping them there. a She's being careful, I can tell, her magic feeling like a pleasant, warm tickle around my wrists. Then, Wanda gives a smile that makes me want to rip myself free and switch positions, but before I can do as much as blink, a euphoric sense of pleasure suddenly invades my mind. I yank on my restraints but feel no give. I squirm underneath her, trying to find some form of release she won't give me. The feeling intensifies and I forget I'm lying on a bed, I forget most everything as all I can feel is pleasure everywhere. It won't give. I squirm, trying to find some form of release. my hips buckle into Wanda's, which makes her smile, and the feeling stops just as suddenly as it began. a "See? No touching. Understand?" "Oh, fuck you-" I begin, my body on fire and all I want is just her but I can't reach her. Wanda chuckles so ly, "that's ironic." Wanda leans down, her lips grazing mine, but she doesn't kiss me. She instead brings her lips to my earlobe, biting down on it gently. "Ready to be a good girl for me, Livvy?" I feel her hot breath against me, making me shiver. a "Yes." I gasp, writhing against her, feeling like I might combust at any moment. She doesn't waste another moment. I arch my back as her fingers on my thigh resume their journey, her nails etching into my skin as they finally reach my center. I let out a so moan as she gently but firmly begins to untie the knot she worked up. She presses her lips against mine messily as we both breathe unevenly into, against, and with each other. One of her legs presses in between mine, spreading them, allowing her more room. She bites my lip as she slips into me. I groan into her as her hand picks up speed. My head spins and all I want is to give her everything she needs as the pressure within me begins to mount. Before I know it, her lips have le mine and I'm le gasping for air on my own, buckling my hips to meet her fingers to increase the friction as if her fingers are oxygen I desperately need. "Tell me what you want." Wanda's husky voice pulls me out of my body "I want-" I gasp as she suddenly changes pace. "I want your lips in between my legs.' "Hmm." Wanda just hums, her hand leaving my center. I watch her lazily place her fingers into her mouth, her eyes closing for a moment before she slowly pulls her fingers out again. She smiles at me, scooting downwards, dragging her hands down from my hips onto each thigh. She torturously slowly spreads my legs as she lowers herself between them. My eyes close as another gasp leaves me as she presses a featherlight kiss on my middle, making my hips twitch. She places a hand on my hipbone to steady me as her lips return to me as my hips buck forward again, warning her. I can practically feel her smirk as she nips at me before she begins to suck at me gently. My body li s towards her as she tries to keep me steady with her hand as her tongue skilfully works me higher and higher. I shut my eyes, completely submerged in how she makes me feel. She squeezes my thigh with her other hand and the magic around $\ensuremath{\mathsf{my}}$ wrists burns hotter. My head begins to feel fussy and light and I hea myself mutter out an incomprehensible 'please'. The coil within me tightens further as Wanda suddenly enters two fingers into me. She works them in tandem with her tongue, creating a symphonic masterpiece I cannot help but add to with my uneven breath, "Oh, fuck-" I groan out as she curls her fingers into me, reaching right there My voice sounds high-pitched, and she apparently approves as she groans into me, the vibrations going straight into my core, making me shiver as my back arches, my body needing more. Wanda's pace quickens and I whimper, tugging against her scarlet. "Please, Wanda, I need to, I need to-" My voice is desperate as my thighs clench together, her pushing against them. She suddenly adds a third finger which makes me moan something incomprehensible again. "Come for me, darling." Wanda murmurs into me. The magic is suddenly gone from around my hands. a My hands instantly find their way to her hair, where I curl my fingers, pushing her further into me. She groans into me, her fingers working me higher and higher still, I feel like I'm going to bend, or snap, or.. she curls her fingers just right and my legs tremble. It's all the sign Wanda needs, she focuses all her attention on that move as I feel myself begin to slip o the edge. My hips move against her and without warning the coil in me snaps and I'm free falling. Wanda guides me through my high as my entire body shakes with pleasure. I feel a rush of blood through my head and hear myself vaguely yell out something. As I begin to settle, the blood rushing out of my head, Wanda slowly removes her fingers, kissing me clean. slowly open my eyes which have been screwed tightly shut in time to see Wanda slowly push herself back up towards me, a warm smile on her face. She gently kisses me and I can taste myself on her. Wanda places a comforting hand on my cheek. This kiss is dierent, I can feel it, but I can't exactly tell how, or why Maybe it's the lack of desperation, or maybe it's whatever trust we've rebuilt. I feel exhausted, and finally, it's as though my elusive sleep $% \mathcal{A}(\mathcal{A})$ has come knocking. Wanda settles herself right next to me, placing the duvet over us as she wraps herself around me. "Are you okay?" She whispers, kissing my collarbone. I meet her round eyes, which are back to their natural, warm, mossy color. The moon has shi $\,$ ed in the sky enough to shine directly onto her as she studies my face with a so smile on her lips. I can't help but turn my head slightly and peck them. They're so and she melts further into me at the gesture. My heart constricts at the tenderness of the moment. "You're so beautiful." I can't help but murmur against her velvet lips, which makes her blush. "I wasn't expecting..." I grin at her as I pull back. Wanda's face breaks into a grin of her own. "Full of surprises." She whispers as she traces a finger across my chest, waking me up. Then, her smile drops and she looks up at me in all seriousness. "I know you showed me, but I... I needed to feel for myself. I wanted to take care of you, for once. And not the other way $% \mathcal{A} = \mathcal{A}$ around.' a I frown slightly, worried. "You know you didn't have to - I mean, not like that. "I wanted that, idiot." Wanda sighs, and then smiles. "Worth the wait, I'd say. "Would you now?" I smirk, finding it in me to flip myself over so that I'm pinning her underneath me. Wanda squeals, surprised, her eyes wide, cheeks flushing pink. "Only fair I get to review, too, don't you think?" I husk, pushing her hair behind her ear as her breathing deepens. a "I think that sounds fair." The sun feels bright against my eyelids, and warm against my skin. I imagine myself hearing mu led noise coming from somewhere, but my brain feels all too fussy to be able to recognize what it is that I am hearing. A grin slowly spreads upon my face as my memories come flooding back to me. My limbs feel like jelly, making me want to stretch. I li my arms overhead, making myself taller as I lie on my back. The motion feels good and I groan, contently. My eyes remain closed as I turn to the right side. a "Wanda?" I ask, my voice cracking from being underused a er sleeping, or maybe from being overused. My grin does not want to leave my face and I carefully reach my hands out into her space. I never seem to reach her, though. Grin still stupidly plastered on my face I open my eyes. The space on the bed đ next to me is empty. A/N: Well, my angels. Do not say I didn't send you o with a gi ~ . Now, go touch some grass. ď Anyway, this turned out to be one of my favorite chapters, so I find it only fitting to leave it here. I know, another cli hanger, but you do with it what you want. It's your story as much as it is mine, at this point. đ³ I am not going to write a long sappy thank you, no one wants to read that a er this mammoth of a chapter, but all I have to say is thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for allowing me the space to write this (neverending) story. It has meant a lot to me to get to do this, and I hope it has and will continue to be a great distraction from the world whenever that is needed. I learned some stu writing this, and I can only hope someone else out there can find themselves in this story too. I am rambling. I am going to miss you (yes, all of you). Know that I am always reading your comments, so please comment <u>d</u>2 whenever and I will be here. Maybe we will meet on here again in the form of a sequel or a new book, but until then, hasta la vista, angels xxx đ

Fire and Smoke - Wanda Maximo x Reader