**Chapter 98** (you love me. you love me. repeat this mantra.) Despite hating myself for doing it to him. I carefully push Steve back into the chair, making sure he's secure, before I unwillingly turn around. My heart feels like it's about to jump out of my throat at any point. Wanda's placed herself slightly in front of Steve and me, blocking us from the door we just entered from. Her hair cascades down her back, shimmering in a thousand shades of red. I shull be a shade of red. I slightly to the side, gaining a clear view, and the view that lays before me makes my knees weak. And not in the good type of way. a My poor eyes are unfortunately accosted with the view of none other than Strucker, standing in the doorway, her black dress bat-like, her arms crossed and her hair precariously perched on top of her head in her signature unyielding bun. Her painted red lips are pulled into a strained smile that doesn't reach her heartless eyes. She watches us  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ like a hawk, and I want nothing more than to tug Wanda behind me; Strucker's eyes on her feel like a violation of my promise to never let anything hurt her again. And yet, Wanda's doing the exact same thing with me, keeping her right hand out slightly to her side, making sure I stay behind her. "Look at you two, reunited with me in this very room of all places." Strucker purrs, her voice so, her tongue tapping every consonant with care. "I was almost worried I wouldn't get the chance to speak with you again, a er your little break-away. But Hydra always gets its a Her words are gentle, but there is no mistaking the animosity behind them. From behind her, a dozen Hydra-clad soldiers begin rushing into the circular room filled with nothing but pain, their guns trained  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right) \left($ on Wanda and me. They gradually start to encircle us and I can't keep them all in my eye-line. It makes me extremely nervous. Wanda, on the other hand, has not taken her eyes o Strucker. I doubt she's even noticing how scarlet sparks have started to come alive around her hands. Her red hair shines brightly on her back in the harsh light, and although I only have a view of her profile, I can tell her mouth is pulled in a small snarl. She looks kind of terrifying, not going to lie. "You." Wanda venomously says, tilting her head. "You are a liar. You hurt me. You hurt Livvy. I don't like liars." "Oh Wanda, don't be so naive." Strucker sighs Then, my heart does another weird o beat in my chest as someone I hadn't expected to see walks up from behind Strucker. It takes me a second to even comprehend that I'm watching Agatha saunter in, looking slightly bored. a She stops, leaning against the door frame slightly behind Sturcker,  $\,$ and finally looks up. At the sight of Wanda in front of her, she looks like the sight in front of her tastes like the tastiest piece of birthday cake, her lips pulled into a real smile, unlike Strucker's, and it reaches her eyes which sparkle in the harsh light. Her brown hair is frizzy and the opposite of cheerful. ਕੇ "Agatha?" Wanda sucks in a breath, tilting her head in question. Great, they literally made her remember even Agatha, but not me, a "Hiya hon." Agatha brightly greets Wanda, as though they're merely meeting by accident in the mall, li ing her hand in a small wave "Isn't this the reunion we've all been waiting for?" Strucker looks from Agatha to Wanda and me. "Not going to lie, not particularly, no," I say, walking a couple of steps that are separating Wanda and me so she's no longer standing in front of me. She turns her head towards me, not looking happy with Livvy, I said-"I suppose having you both here will make it easier for me to shoot you both. I was feeling kind of tired today, so that's nice of you." I interrupt Wanda, knowing she wants to protect me, but I can ver well take care of myself. I fake sigh, slowly pulling out the gun from the holster on my thigh. Have you forgotten I can literally strangle them by twitching my finger?Wanda's annoyed voice sounds in my head Agatha and Strucker cackle at my words, their laughs hollow and lacking any real joy. I just raise my eyebrows at them, my hatred for them burning hotly in my veins and I don't even care about Wanda's presence in my head, her anger at the two women and fear seeping into me.  $\hbox{"Oh, you've not lost your humor, that's good." Strucker smiles}\\$ "Wanda, has she charmed her way back into your heart yet? You were really not wanting to let her go when you were sitting where good old Rogers is sitting right now. Wanda doesn't reply, but she looks away from me at Stucker and  $\,$ Agatha, now letting her hands come ablaze in scarlet, a conscious choice this time. I feel the crackling energy pulsate from her, making goosebumps appear on my skin. However, she frowns, pursing her lips slightly, and through the connection she keeps open between us. I feel her confusion seep through. What's wrong? ask her in my head, looking at her concerned. She looks back at me, her lips slightly parting as confusion washes over her features. I step slightly closer to her, raising my gun towards Agatha and Strucker as Wanda's magic disappears. Something's wrong with my scarlet. The guards around me all make a show out of pointing their guns at  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ us more aggressively than they already are, but that does nothing to  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ phase me. I know they won't shoot. Well, at least not to kill. "Olivia, stop." Agatha sounds almost bored, waving her hand and a flurry of so purple magic appears, and suddenly my gun is gone. "The fu-" I begin, but she chuckles. "Have you not spent enough time with witches, little girl, to know "Stop talking to her," Wanda growls, her voice low. I look over at her. Ok. hot? a Wanda shoots me an annoyed look, and I promptly look away from her. Not now, Liv, what the hell@chastise myself, and I could bet Wanda's lips curl upwards slightly "Hmm, interesting." Strucker says, looking like we've finally caught her attention. I don't like the look she's giving us. "Right?" Agatha looks to Strucker. "It seems your little machine isn't quite as strong as you thought.' I scowl, picking up on the slight annoyance in Agatha's voice at the mention of what I presume to be the chair. "No, it's done its job." Strucker slowly notes with a pleased smile. "As interesting as this conversation is, I'd rather not catch up with you two lovely assholes. You know, I'd actually much rather be stuck in a  $room\ with\ Vision,\ debating\ astrophysics,\ than\ being\ here\ with\ you,\ if$ that gives you any indication of how much I am not enjoying this. I presume you two wouldn't mind fucking o so we can leave?" My voice is loud, a fake front as I do not feel at all as confident as I sound. I hope no one but Wanda is able to pick up on that, though Livvy? hear her in my head, but I don't turn to look at her so as to not alert the two women in front of us to our silent conversation "No, you're correct in your assumption." Strucker smiles sweetly, making me almost puke Livvy,  $\mbox{my}$  -  $\mbox{my}$  scarlet. Something is wrong. I can barely use it. Wanda's fear seeps into me, and I can't help but look at her, confused. et her forest green eyes which are swirling with fear and confusion and doubt and anger. I wish I could soothe her unruly emotions, but I bet she can read the exact same emotions in me. Her words do little to quell the swelling pit of icy fear in my chest, but I try to keep my emotions at bay, just in case Wanda would feel them. "See, you've still got something of ours. Both of you." Strucker continues, unaware of the conversation Wanda and I are having. "Too bad, because if you're talking about your mist, well, it doesn't work anymore." I narrow my eyes at Strucker. "Oh, but it does." She smiles at me and a little bit of curiosity flares up "Nah-ah." I just stupidly reply, making Agatha cackle, her laughter echoing in the cold room. a "We had to install a safety measure, didn't we?" Strucker looks at Agatha, who nods eagerly. "Oh, yes. I will actually admit to the idea." Agatha slyly says. "When I put it in little Wanda's head that she needed to be back with her loved ones, I knew of your powers, Olivia. So, when I met you on Mount Wundagore, I placed a little tricky hex on you, my darling. I'm actually rather proud of it! I came up with it all on my own! You were too busy trying to talk Wanda over the ledge - literally, may I add, to I frown, trying to keep up with the constantly unfolding and changing situation. How could I be carrying a hex on me, and not even notice? "You are the reason I messed it up... when I was trying to bring us back in time, I messed it up!" I realize, my heart thumping with adrenaline. "And then - my nausea! Every time I try to use it I feel like a dried shit!" "Well, if you put it like that..." Agatha shrugs, still smiling widely. "Fuck!" I exclaim. "So, what, you control the mist?" "No." Agatha laughs so ly. "But you can't use your mist,not unless you are under Hydra's control. "Ah." I nod, slowly catching on. No Vernut, no mist "But don't worry, darling, we thought we'd start o with little Maximo first, don't you think, Agatha?" Strucker speaks up again, her face flashing some morbid excitement or the sort and I feel physically sick. I subconsciously take a step closer to Wanda, trying to đ a a

way.

me.

make her take a step behind me, but she, naturally, refuses to let me Wanda, come on! shoot her a meaningful look but she imperceptively shakes her head. "Hmm." Agatha hums, looking at Wanda as though she's just o ered to cook her favorite dinner. I'm still stronger than them, even if I can't use all of my scarlet, Livvy. Wanda shoots me a look, her eyes slightly glossy, and she looks like she's somewhere between trying to stay determined and not breaking down in tears. I only need to get the knife I dropped by Steve, and then just get close No!Wanda starts, and I feel her fingers grab onto my wrist, her eyes going round. "Okay, I don't want to interrupt whatever little moment you are having, but I'm trying to build suspense, here." Agatha loudly interrupts, making Wanda's and my heads snap in her direction as Steve mumbles something incoherent behind us. "You are right, Agatha. Let's get started, shall we?" Strucker smiles at Agatha, then she looks just as gleefully at Wanda and me. I don't need to be warned twice. I swirl around, yanking myself free of Wanda's grasp, sweeping up the cold knife from the floor by Steve's feet, and when I stand up again, I hold it in my hand with determination. I won't let them hurt Wanda again. Or Steve. Or anyone. This is ending now. "Oh, Olivia, that won't be necessary." Strucker lets out a cold, mirthless laugh that chills me to the core. "Prikazyvayu tebe podch-" Strucker quickly begins, and I stumble backward onto Wanda who lets out a startled yelp, somehow catching onto what Strucker is doing, and she yanks me backward. "Stop!" Wanda shouts, a crackle of scarlet exploding out of her towards Strucker and Agatha, the latter simply bored waves Wanda's magic away with a little flash of purple. Wanda exhales heavily, now grabbing onto me for support as she unsteadily tries to regain her composure. Heart pounding, I look back at her. She's pale, her hands shaking uncontrollably, her breathing shallow "Wanda?" I'm seriously growing worried, turning towards her, lowering my knife while trying to get Wanda's attention "I'm- I'm okay." Wanda looks at me with what she presumes to be a reassuring smile, but it is far from it. I frown, worried, and Wanda looks past me at Strucker and Agatha. "Hmm. Alright. No Vernut yet." Strucker easily agrees "What have you done?" Wanda asks, her voice low and menacing. "Well, it wasn't a coincidence I wanted you back in this specific room, Wanda, darling." Strucker tilts her head slightly, observing Wanda as she walks further into the room, completely unafraid of us I shoot Steve a quick glance to make sure he's safe, well, safe-ish. Steve's slumped in the chair, his eyes half-closed, clearly not with us at this moment. My worry grows, and I turn back towards Strucker. Wanda shudders next to me. Livvy, you need to get Steve out of her Wanda's thoughts are dull and tired. "I'm actually surprised you haven't caught onto my plan, even now." Strucker shoots us an inquisitive look. "As I've already explained, it started with Olivia here stealing our mist. That wasn't for you." She adds, looking at me venomously. "Well, actually," Strucker corrects herself with a small laugh, stopping a little while from us, her hands clasped in front of her. "It started with you, Wanda, Hydra created you, who you are is because of us.' "That's presumptuous, and, well, false." I pout, feeling for Wanda who's staying silent next to me. It bothers me to even have her  $consider \, Strucker's \, words. \, She's \, so \, much \, more \, than \, what \, Strucker$ "Does she ever shut up?" Strucker sighs, looking at me, annoyed. "Anyway, Hydra was willing to ignore you, Wanda. But then Olivia here gave me an idea. I could return both the mist and our chaos magic to their rightful owner. Agatha here has been a massive resource in understanding you, Wanda, and your magic - sorry, my magic.' "I did tell you, hon," Agatha pipes up shrugging at Wanda. "You were using your powers to make breakfast for children who don't exist. You aren't deserving of it. This will be better for everyone, in the end, yourself included." "Don't you dare mention them." Wanda's voice shakes with thick emotion, her hand grabbing a hold of my wrist, squeezing it almost "Still hurts, doesn't it?" Strucker smiles at Wanda. "It's okay. I lost my family too. I understand Wanda." Wanda shakes her head next to me, and I glance at her, noticing a stubborn tear roll down her beautiful face. Wanda should be far away from here and she should never let anything make her cry ever again. "Hydra is done waiting. My dear husband started something he wasn't strong enough to finish, with you and your speedster of a twin." Strucker says and I know she's trying to make Wanda emotional. It seems to be working. Wanda sucks in a shuddering breath at the mention of her brother. "But I am. We have a lot of data on you already, my dear, and thanks  $\,$ to you letting Stark study your magic, we've been able to create... well, you're already feeling its e ects, aren't you?' "I don't- I don't understand." Wanda shakes her head so ly, her accent seeping into her words stronger than before. I shoot her a concerned look which she doesn't return. "Oh, Wanda, darling." Agatha steps into the room now too. I spin my knife slowly in my hand. "Remember Westview? "What about it?" Wanda snarls. "There is no magic here." "No, you're correct, I haven't had the need for any runes, I'm very proud of you for remembering my lesson." Wanda snorts sarcastically at Agatha's words, which merely makes Agatha smile "No, we wanted to be... confident that our plan would come to fruition." Strucker notes, her gleaming eyes set on Wanda. "With the data that we now possess and Agatha's knowledge, we've been able to create we aponry that, to put it simply for you, is able to both  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ analyze the properties of your magic and store it." "Huh?" I look around, not understanding. Then, like a lightning bolt, it strikes me. I squint at the Hydra guard closest to me. He's holding up a large weapon, one I assumed was a gun, but now I can see that it isn't. It's clunkier Wanda, the guns I shoot out my thought clearly to Wanda, who I  $\,$ notice looks around. I realize they've created a circle around us, all of their weapons pointed not at Wanda and me, but at Wanda. "There you go. That FBI training really serves you, doesn't it, Olivia? Here, let me show you something cool." Strucker walks over to the man closest to her, who holds the gun-weapon-thing steadily trained "Greer, do you mind?" Strucker asks him and I recognize the man  $\,$ with another pang of anger. Greer nods, smiles at me, then clicks something on the gun, which  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right) \left$ makes a little vial pop out. He hands it to Strucker, who looks at it in admiration. Then, she stabs it into her forearm. Wanda and I watch on silently, and I feel Wanda's trepidation emanate from her. Strucker scrunches up her face as though she's just taken a shot, then hands the vial back to Greer, who attaches it to  $\hbox{"Now, remember, this is obviously just a fraction of your powers,}\\$ Wanda." Strucker points out, almost timidly She li  $\,$  s her hand, her eyes studying it closely, then she twirls it in a grotesque mimicry of Wanda's hand motions. I let out a surprised gasp as something that looks unfortunately exactly like Wanda's scarlet shoots out of her hand, zooming towards the room, right  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right) \left($ Wanda's quick to react, much quicker than me as I just stand there, gaping like an idiot. Wanda grunts with e ort as she expertly blocks the magic from reaching me, mere meters from me. I can feel the raw power of the magic colliding in the air in front of me, making a gust of  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ air fly towards me innocently. Wanda staggers, and now I'm able to react. I make it to her just before she stumbles to the ground, wrapping an arm around her waist. She exhales tiredly, her eyes meeting mine in gratitude. "Wasn't that exciting!?" Strucker exclaims, her voice trembling, high "Shut the fuck up!" I yell at her, scared, not letting go of Wanda, who's leaning on me, her eyes downcast. "Someone's feeling a little stressed. Do you think you'd benefit from a relaxing massage from the chair, soldat?" Strucker giggles, almost "Livvy, look at me." Wanda whispers through labored breaths. I begrudgingly tear my eyes away from Strucker and meet Wanda's pleading gaze. My eyes instantly so en when I meet hers, and my vision narrows until I only see her face. She smiles so ly. "There you are, sweet girl. Livvy, I'm going to hold them o so you can get Steve to the jet." She says, her voice low so only I can hear it and so gentle, trying to trick me into agreeing with her insanely  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right) \left$ ridiculously stupid plan "Wanda, I love you, so, no." I shake my head and she smiles sadly. "I don't think we have much of a choice if we want to get him to safety." Wanda drops her hand that is holding my wrist to my hand, giving it a so squeeze before she lets go. "You done eyefucking?" Agatha's voice cuts through and I let out a frustrated groan when Wanda turns away from me. "You're going to let Livvy and Steve go." Wanda speaks out, confidently projecting, pulling her shoulders back slightly as she looks over to Strucker. "You don't tell me what to do." Strucker spits out, finally dropping her facade "Hmm." Wanda tilts her head as she looks at Strucker and I don't know how Strucker doesn't just melt on the spot, being on the "What? Trying your mind tricks on me?" Strucker's eyebrows rise on her boney face. "Won't work, little witch, Agatha taught me better." "Don't call me that." Wanda warns, her teeth gritted as her eyes begin to so ly glow red. "What? Little witch?" Strucker exhales so ly. "Oh, did my husband use to call you that? "Shut. Up." Wanda growls, her hands coming ablaze with scarlet. "Wanda-" I try to reason with her, knowing that Strucker wants her to "Shut up!" Wanda yells, now at me, and I'm suddenly pushed back towards the chair, almost bumping into Steve I turn to li Steve up, knowing that I'm going to have to get him to move quickly when the time comes. It's di icult to li him using one hand, as my other is still wrapped around the knife. Steve is half passed out, and is of no actual use "Steve, come on, bud." I mutter as I try to li him, which only results in us stumbling and falling down on the cold floor in front of the This is apparently hilarious, as Strucker giggles happily. I can hear Wanda's scarlet still alive, and I can feel her hatred in my veins through our connection. I fumble on the floor, li ing Steve up, resting his torso against one of the legs of the chair, making his head roll about. I know I need to come up with some plan, but I don't know what to do. I can't let Steve down. And I can't let Wanda down. I have to get them both out of here. "Oh, I'm sorry, I don't mean to laugh, it's just - alright. Enough. Agatha?" Strucker speaks and I turn around at the change of tone I see Agatha nod, her purple magic coming alive. Wanda broadens her stance, her hands by her sides, her scarlet licking her fingers and up her arms. Then, two things happen at once. Agatha shoots away her purple magic towards Wanda, and Strucker looks at me and I see her mouth move, forming words I cannot hear but do not need to hear. "Prikazyvayu tebe podchinit'sya, soldat Vernut." "Damn you!" Wanda shouts shrilly as she squashes Agatha's magic, sending Agatha stumbling backward as I feel my body go rigid. I close my eyes, grimacing as I can feel myself struggling to stay afloat within my own mind. There's this darkness, wanting to rip me away and I try to push it away as much as I can, But, I am struggling, I suddenly realize. I couldn't even struggle before. Before, I was just pulled under. Now, there's a struggle. There's a so ness within me, something akin to a light melody I cling to as I'm being pulled down Come, on, come on. Stay. You need to- you need to- wait, what did I need to do? What was I-Livvy. Stay with meThat melodic sound in my head resurfaces and I cling to it like a lifera. WandaJ can see her lying next to me in the gray glow before the sun rises, her eyes large and dark in the lack of light, her lips rounded into a smile, her teeth brightly shining. Wanda. Stay with me. Please don't leave me again hear her voice, warm and so like honey, and carrying all the weight of our past, reverberate within me, and I know I can hold on. I open my eyes, only to see her in front of me, her back towards me, hands engulfed in scarlet, her head turned towards me, her eyes telling me she knows. I exhale shakily, her realization making my bruises face from purple and black and I lay down my weapons. She's "Vernut?" I hear Strucker say and I tense up Hold on I shakily stand up from where I was sitting by Steve, knife in hand. My body feels foreign like I've exerted all my energy. I'm shaking, but I'm here. I straighten my back, looking over at Strucker who is looking at me with what I recognize to be fear. She's fearing what is true. I smile at her. "I've always hated that fucking name." I say, my voice low and strained as I flex my right arm and watch the cold steel fly across the The knife tumbles through the air and finds a home in Strucker's le bicep. She howls out in pain and the guards around us shi  $\,$  , but no one breaks formation, all of their weapons still trained on Wanda, who is now visibly shaking from the e ort of maintaining her scarlet. "How dare you - you - get on the chair!" She strains out staggering, looking mildly drunk. My body wants to comply, and I tremble in an attempt to fight the order. Before anyone can do anything, however, Wanda so ly speaks. "No. More." Her voice chills my bones, and her eyes shimmer red, and I feel the power practically radiate o her body. She li  $\,$  s her hands, slowly tilting her fingers in the air, and with a loud ripping noise, I watch the chair li o the ground, the legs tearing out of the ground painfully. Wanda twists her hands in the air, her fingers twitching, and the chair li s higher and higher. And then, without warning, Wanda pulls her hands apart to her sides and the chair explodes into thousands of sharp shards, the computers below it all crackling loudly, beginning to smoke. As Wanda drops her hands and her eyes begin to return to their familiar green color, the chair, or whatever remains of the chair, falls pathetically to the ground. I turn to look at Wanda, who's breathing unsteadily, looking like she might pass out at any second. I don't want to even think about how much power Hydra stole from her at that moment. Wanda looks at me, her lips parted, a sense of relief washing over the both of us. "Shame." Strucker sneers, pulling our attention back to her She smiles wonkily, watching us with crazy eyes as she pulls the knife out of her arm, letting it clatter to the floor "Greer?" She calls out, her voice strained. Greer takes a step to the side, looking at her expectantly. "Can you sync them?" Strucker asks him and he nods "Right away, ma'am." He says, pressing something on his weapon, making all the weapons around the room beep in unison. "Done "Give it. Now." Strucker extends a trembling hand out towards the larger man, all the while keeping her eyes on Wanda. Greer hands her the vial, and Strucker repeats her motion, stabbing the vial directly into the wound I caused her. Her face contorts into an ugly grimace, somehow looking as though she's enjoying the pain. I ball my hands into fists by my sides. When the vial seemingly has worked its magic, Strucker hands it back to Greer and smiles insanely at Wanda. "You shouldn't have done that." She says, her voice low. "It's okay, I didn't need it anymore, but you'll need your magic, little witch.' And with that, she suddenly makes Wanda's scarlet emerge from her scrawny fingers. The magic crackles to life and Strucker watches it in "Let's see how powerful you really are." Strucker shoots the magic towards Wanda, who manages to block it with a so grunt. The force of the powers smashing together makes a wall of air crash  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right)$ onto me, pushing me backwards slightly. Wanda's hair flutters in the air around her like a golden halo. Wanda takes a step to the side, trying to block Steve and me more from Strucker Then, Agatha decides to join in on the fun. She makes a glowing  $purple\ ball\ come\ alive\ by\ her\ fingertips,\ which\ she,\ smiling,\ or\ rather$ grinning, flings o at Wanda, who again, manages to block it with a powerful blast of her own scarlet. I know she's more powerful than either of the women in front of her, but I can tell she's becoming tired, whatever weaponry Strucker created taking its toll on her, as she keeps being siphoned from her magic each second she is forced to use it. I know this was Strucker's and Agatha's plan all along by the looks of ecstacy on their faces, their eyes shimmering at the sight of Wanda's magic. a No, no, no I frantically watch on as Wanda barely manages to keep her own magic at bay, the force of it mixing with Agatha's purple  $\,$ magic and it pushes against her. She grits her teeth, a couple tears rolling down her cheeks as she holds her ground, her arms outstretched in front of her Livvy, I can't I hear her weakly call out to me and I know I have to do something, and quick. I feel all along my pockets, but I've got no weapons on me. How stupid was I to go into this with one gun and  $\,$  one knife ?I guess I wasn't really expecting my gun to literally disappear into thin air. Wanda yells out and knocks one of the Hydra guards onto Agatha, who stops the man at the last second, surprised at Wanda's actions. Wanda, taunting her with her signature cackle My blood boils at the sound of her, and Wanda's tiredness which seeps into me. I get up and make a stupid run for Strucker, attempting to distract her somehow. Wanda yells out at me to stop, but I know I've got to help somehow. I make it to about halfway across the space before Strucker grins and directs a blast of Wanda's magic towards me. It's stopped by an  $\,$ identical blast coming from behind me, the force of the two powers knocking me over. I sit up just in time to see Wanda stumble backwards, loosing ground as she had to safve me. Again. Fuck, think, Olivia! look around, but I have no idea how to get us out of the shithole we're in. I suddenly decide to make a last-ditch e ort, calling upon the mist that has done nothing but let me down. It might work. Strucker said the words, and Agatha said so herself; no Vernut, no mist. And although I can control myself, I can definitely feel it, in the back of my mind, ready to take over once I slip up. "Vernut - do no..." Strucker yells from the far side of the circular room, catching onto my train of thought, but Wanda motions with her hand, and I suddenly cannot hear Strucker at all. Wanda's blocked her words from reaching my ears. I look over at Wanda in gratitude, but I notice that the motion of breaking her protective stance against Strucker and Agatha makes their magic gain traction, and Wanda begins to stumble backward for real, their magic creeping closer to her. My heart pounds as I watch her hands become... burned by the magic lapping against her own magic, getting closer and closer. Wanda lets out a small gasp of pain, trying to regain her foothold. "Wanda!" I shout, my voice sounding small, the fear within me feeling like it wants to explode out of me, and it does, in the form of feeling a massive release within me, like a wave finally crashing against the  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right)$ A pale wave of blue shoots out of me, without me being aware of it  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right)$ even happening, all I am aware of is Wanda's scream of pain, and my immense need to make her pain stop. The wave tears at my insides as it finds its release, feeling like something is trying to hold it back, and  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right$ yet it escapes. I drop to my knees from the lightheadedness that follows, not being able to keep myself upright. I feel my head spin. and I place my hands on the cool floor, trying to find steadiness in it  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ as I breathe erratically A so touch brings me back to myself, back into my body. The touch on my cheek is sending shivers of warmth through my cold body, and I look up to be caught by the safety of two so orbs of summer green. "Hey." Wanda smiles so ly at me, kneeling down to my level, he hand staying on my cheek, slightly trembling. "H-Hey." I fumble for words as I feel myself wanting to slip into sleep. "Stay with me Livvy. I'm going to get you out." Wanda whispers to me, giving me a small, exhausted smile I frown, confused as to how she's here with me when a second ago I was watching her failing to keep magic at bay. When I look around  $\,$ me, I finally understand. The blue that exploded out of me was the mist, the mist that, because of Agatha, I could only reach when I was under Hydra's control. I presume whatever state I am in now, somewhere stuck in limbo between Olivia and Vernut, is a place in which I can access the magic. Agatha and Strucker are frozen in time, even their magic is static in the air. All around us, the soldiers holding their weapons are frozen, pointing the weapons at a place where Wanda stood. I feel the familiar draining of my energy from my body as I fight to uphold the magic. "I did it." I breathe out, slightly amazed and Wanda lets out a so chuckle, dropping her hand from my face and interlacing our fingers. "Yes you did." She smiles and I look down at our hands, seeing hers "Wanda-" I gasp out, looking up at her in terror, but she only shakes "I'll be okay, Livvy." Her voice is so soothing, so calming, I just want to close my eyes. "Come on, it's time to leave." With that, Wanda stands up, leaving me alone on the floor next to Steve, who seems to be frozen by my magic, too. Wanda looks around at the weapons directed at her, a small furrow on her brow. She flicks her hands, a slither of scarlet erupting at her fingertips and at the same time coming alive around every single weapon directed at her, but nothing happens, other than I suddenly feel like I'm about to pass out. Wanda turns, looking at me with a little bit of surprise "Your magic-" She pauses, confusion etched on her face, which then is replaced by a so smile I cannot quite decipher. "What?" I question her, my tongue heavy in my mouth and my head fuzzy "Nothing." Wanda shakes her head, making her hair bounce around her face. "We have time later. Now, we need to go." Before I can say anything else, she gives me another so smile, one that feels somehow definitive, and then she widens her stance, li ing her hands above her head towards the ceiling. I frown, confused about what she's doing. I begin to push my way o the floor, which takes a considerable amount of energy and I feel my grasp on my Wanda arches her back slightly as her scarlet comes alive around her hands once again, and I hear a rumble. I look up at the roof in fear, the sound emanating from there. Wanda's scarlet is lapping at small cracks in the ceiling and the groaning of the entirefacility becomes "Wanda, what are you-" I begin breathlessly, finally pushing myself o the floor, my head pounding wildly with the  $\ensuremath{\mathrm{e}}$  ort of holding everything frozen. "I'm ending this once and for all." Wanda grunts and her expression contorts with exertion. Wanda groans with e ort, pulling her hands slightly further to the sides above her head and the rumble above us becomes almost deafening. And then, the ceiling begins to break. I gasp, accidentally inhaling dust, causing me to cough as Wanda screams and the facility begins to collapse around us. "Wanda, stop!" I yell, but she doesn't seem to hear me, her eyes closed with e ort. Her magic is so strong the hairs at the back of my neck stand up as goosebumps erupt on my skin and a wave of it crashes powerfully at the ceiling and my brain cannot quite comprehend what I am It looks like she's breaking the ceiling in two. Dust flies around in the air, landing in her red hair, making it looks like she's covered in snow. Her teeth are gritted and she leans back more and I'm surprised she doesn't fall backward. The facility grumbles again, loudly complaining as Wanda tears it in half. I hear screams from people on levels above us as Wanda's scarlet rips upwards without any consideration. I briefly hope the rest of the team made it out. I cough in the thick air, turning around to pull Steve closer to Wanda, so he won't be hit by any falling debris The e ort leaves me short of breath and I have to screw my eyes shut, hands on my knees as I fight the urge to either puke or pass out. The wave of queaziness passes and I open my eyes to find Wanda breathing heavily, a sheen of sweat in her hairline, making her hair stick to her face. When I look above us, I gasp. The view is grotesque. Floors upon floors have been torn in half, creating a huge hole upwards above Wanda. Pipes have burst, raining down water, and electrical cords are sending out sparkles as lights twinkle, fighting to stay lit. People are screaming and shouting faintly. Wanda suddenly yells out and a powerful wave of scarlet magic crashes upward from her and suddenly she's broken through the last layer of earth, and far, far above me. I can faintly see the night sky through the dust and water. I stagger toward Wanda, where she's standing, hands outstretched, scarlet still flowing out of her so powerfully it makes my hair blow backward as I approach her. Wanda has her eyes closed and face scrunched up in e ort, dust and sweat sticking to her face, and yet she's so beautiful to me "Wanda." I whisper, frightened of touching her or doing anything to Even amongst the chaos, she hears me, and her bright green eyes come alive and find mine. A faint red flickers in her eyes, juxtaposing the pale green of their natural color. Her lips part and her eyebrows pull down as she fights the enormous pressure from above. "Come here." She struggles, her voice strained and weak and I don't have to be told twice. "I'm going to li you and Steve up, and then I'll come, okay?" She looks deeply into my eyes, her e ect on me indescribable as she freezes my body and I forget there exists more than just her. á "No, what if-" I begin but Wanda smiles weakly. "No what ifs." She whispers and I shiver tiredly, my eyesight going "Okay, but you promise, you'll not do anything stupid? You'll follow us straightaway?" I ask her, stepping as close to her as I dare to, scared I'll make her lose her concentration. "I promise." She strains, a vein growing on the side of her neck as she exhales forcefully. a "Okay." I nod at her and she chuckles weakly, her nose scrunching up. "No good luck kiss?" She tilts her head slightly and I'm not certain I haven't passed out. "What if you drop a rock on us?" I grin, trying to pass it as a joke but I'm half-serious. "I'll drop a rock on you if you don't get over here right now." Wanda laughs and shakes her head and I take a hesitant step closer, eliminating the space that exists around us. I feel so lightheaded I'm not sure I'll manage this, but my heart aches for her, and seeing her arms tremble, a droplet of sweat running down her temple, I don't have to be reminded of the fact that I'm wasting time. I lean forwards, my eyes closing, her clear green eyes pulling me close as I lose grip but sink into her lips, which feel salty and rough. Her current sweeps me away, pulls me in and I struggle to hold onto reality as she makes me float away. Her magic pulsates around us and I'm not sure it's stronger than the  $\,$ glow in my heart at this moment. Even though it tears at me I have to  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ let her go just in time before we both are pulled under. I open my eyes, seeing nothing but her. She opens her eyes, her so  $\,$  lips pulling "Fly safe, dorogoy." Her pupils dilate and she takes a deep breath, her hair flowing so ly around her face. I suddenly feel my stomach lurch as my center of gravity tilts and I feel a strange, familiar, warm tickling all over. I look down at my body, seeing it encased in red flames that do not burn. I see Wanda through the magic. Her face is pale and her mouth is open, her teeth showing  $% \left\{ 1,2,\ldots ,n\right\}$ as she holds one hand towards the sky, another is outstretched towards me, her fingers bent unnaturally. The last thing I see are her piercing round eyes and then I hurdle upwards through water and air and dust, my vision going blurry and I slip into darkness for a moment, no matter how hard I try to cling onto her green. I awaken as I roll onto hard, cold grass, my head thumping against the earth painfully. My heart beats quickly, and it takes me a second  $\,$ to reorient myself. I look around, seeing Steve land next to me with a loud thump, scarlet magic fading from around him. Steve groans loudly, opening his blue eyes which are filled with confusion. The air is clean, crisp, and cold, but it burns my lungs even more than the air inside Hydra. Hydra. Wandal clumsily push myself o the ground, my limbs not wanting to cooperate. My heart clenches painfully when I see the giant hole in the unassuming ground. I run to the edge of it, my heart beating almost painfully in my throat. I peer  $\,$ The air is filled with dust which is illuminated by the few fluorescent lights that still work, making it di icult to see. All around the sides of the broken floors, there are red tendrils of magic, holding everything together. I narrow my eyes, willing myself to see her. I can't quite  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right$ make her out, but there is no mistaking her magic, far, far, down, shining brightly. My heart swells. You're okay. You're alright. Now come up to me, love. A flash of purple explodes into her red. Her red flickers dangerously and pieces of the facility break free from the grasp of her magic, falling down towards her. I notice the ground all around me start to sink slowly. I watch on with horror as another flash of purple explodes into her and then a flash of red against red. I let them go. This is my fault. I passed out, and my grip on the mist vanished. I let her down. I watch  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1$ as more blasts illuminate the darkness far below. And then her magic flickers again and huge chunks of the facility begin to crumble out of her grasp, imploding inwards. The ground beneath me and all around me starts caving in. "WANDA!" I shout, my voice is shrill and scared as I fall to the ground which begins to fall inward. It all happens so quickly a er that. I try to escape the growing sinkhole which begins to swallow everything around us alive. The earth crumbles into the hole Wanda created and I run to Steve. grabbing him by the shoulders, fighting to pull him away from the The earth crumbles with growing ferocity, the area quickly growing and I assume the entire facility is collapsing upon itself. I sob loudly as I yank on Steve "Come on, you motherfucker." I yank at him and try to access my mist, trying to stop everything from crumbling apart but a weak wisp of blue escapes me, my panic too blinding for me to concentrate. \\ My knees hit the ground and I feel the familiar feeling of sinking. It starts slowly, but as the area of impact grows exponentially, so does the speed at which we sink. I yelp, trying to save Steve and me, but there's nothing I can do. Chunks of the earth fall with us, darkness swallowing us and I have no idea what is up or down. Something hard hits my waist and I gasp for air as my fall is reversed An explosion above clears our path. My eyes are irritated with dust and are watering and I can't really see. I cough furiously, my head  $\,$ It must be Wandal think. She must've made it out, and is getting us I float for a while until I feel the ground underneath my feet again. I drop to my knees, my center of gravity confused. I grip the grass underneath my hands, coughing. I feel like I'm still falling. I keep expecting the ground to give way again, but it doesn't. It takes me a minute or two, but I finally recover somewhat, still feeling unsteady, but my tears seem to have cleared the dust from my eyes. I blink furiously, trying to orient myself. Natasha is here, to my right, hovering around Steve. I gasp, relieved. She made it out. "Hey, Liv, you okay?" Natasha asks, looking up from Steve, looking agitated. I can't seem to find my words. She looks me over and I nod, regretting the action as it makes me suddenly feel sick, and I turn my head away from her just in time to expel the empty content of my stomach. The acid burns my throat, making my eyes water again I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand, looking toward Natasha again, now noticing Vision behind her, who looks away into the distance with a solemn expression. "What-" I begin, looking around, my heart rate picking up Llav eyes on Natasha, Steve and Vision Where are the others? My heartrate picks up once again, my poor heart already having been through enough. I feel myself begin to panic, my breathing becoming shallow "Natasha. What -" I cough, my eyes burning. "What happened?" Natasha looks like she's close to tears, stroking Steve's hair as he still seems disoriented, not speaking. "Nat! "We... We were trying to get the files, but they... they came back. The  $\,$ soldiers." Natasha's voice is hollow and I wish she would talk quicker. "I'm sorry." Steve suddenly voices. "I couldn't stop the Germans, they were- they had us cornered, I er, I'm - sorry. Can I... Can I speak to Natasha and Listare at Steve, who looks at us with kind, sorrowful eyes, not really seeing us. No, no, noI stare at Steve, not knowing what to say. "You were talking about the soldiers, right?" He looks at me, then Natasha, and then Vision. "Wait, I'm sorry, have I - I'm confused. Have I met any of you before? Where are we?

Natasha looks at me with a look I don't think I'll ever forget. Ever. She's blaming me. I didn't stop this from happening. I could have, but I couldn't. This is my fault. I feel the wind being knocked out of me Suddenly, without any warning, Vision walks up to Steve, and touches his temple, and Steve crumbles to the ground like a sack of "What did you do!?" Natasha yells at Vision furiously, her eyes shooting daggers at him. "Mr. Rogers was in a state of confusion. Had we waited any longer,  $\boldsymbol{I}$ presume he would have entered a state of shock, and nothing we could have said would have appeased him. I just put him into an induced state of sleep. He'll be alright." Vision explains, sounding even more machine-like than usual. I frown at his odd lack of any emotion. "Guys, Where are the others? What happened?" I reiterate my question and Natasha doesn't answer straight away, looking at the form of sleeping Steve for a moment, before she meets my eyes, her eyes glistening with tears. She chokes up slightly. "We got out, thanks to Darcy, but she... she..." "Didn't," Vision finishes for her, still not looking at any of us. å My stomach drops and I feel like puking again, feeling as though the wind's been knocked out of me. Surely, they're mistaken, surely 'Yelena came to find you, once Vision promised to get me out." Natasha's voice sounds far away from me. "Where is she? Did she I cannot bear to meet Natasha's eyes. I stare at my hands in my lap, tears starting to blur my sight as I hear a so nocome from Natasha. I feel like I can't breathe. I need to go, I need toa "Wanda?" I push myself o the ground, almost falling back to the ground, but Vision catches me, his hands strong and steady. My question goes unanswered. No one says anything. My fear,  $\,$ sadness and anger bubble to the surface. Why are they quiet? I look around, finding Vision. My look goes unnoticed by him. He's ignoring me completely. I frown. His expression... I follow his eyes. He's looking away into the distance. Darcy, Yelena... they didn't get out. They-I squint, trying to make out whatever he is looking at in the darkness. The vast grasslands we tracked across earlier stretch out in all directions, cold and empty, but in the distance, I see a large cloud of smoke, and then it hits me again with full force. The ground crumbling. Steve and I almost being swallowed alive. Darcy and Yelena didn't make it out. The facility crumbling down upon itself. Wanda's magic flickering into darkness down below. Someone saving Steve and me. "It wasn't her." I speak slowly, my voice hoarse. Vision looks at me for the first time. He's crying. "You saved us." He doesn't say anything. Instead, he just looks back out onto the dark plains, and I follow his gaze. Maybe we're both waiting for her red hair  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right)$ to appear under the fading starlight, her green eyes sparkling mischievously, but on the inside, we can both feel the emptyness where she used to live. a I bite my lower lip, trying to clear my tears away from my eyes. I can't let myself - I can't give thought to the ache in my chest, the massive emptyness that is screaming, clawing at me, tearing at every fiber of my being, because if I do... If I acknowledge it. I know I'll fall to my knees and I won't be able to get up without her warm hand ever to caress the side of my face again And the ground crumbles underneath me and the tears begin to fall with no one to wipe them from my cheek. đ A/N: So, uh, I did warn you. I did. đ⁴ Go ahead, this is a safe space, hurl your abuse at me:) I can take it, I'm prepared. đ۴ I hope everything made sense in this one, there was a LOT of information to take in, I had so many lose ends to try to connect (and I could have done a better job at planning when I was writing earlier parts)... If you're confused I'll do my best to explain! Any thoughts on how this will all end? Cause we are very, very close to the finish line, my little darlingest angels... Anyhow, please come back for the next chapter, don't abandon me. I do love you all very much, although it might not always seem like I do xxxxx (on a very separate note, not me going onto tiktok and seeing a best of Wanda fic recommendations and this not being on there? I don't want to toot my own horn, but come on?) å⁴ Continue reading next part  $\Box$