



For a week, Davina watched as her best friend laid on her bed staring at nothing and talking to no one. Asher Brinley had become a shell of the woman she used to be, the woman who never stayed in bed, always active and moving and in someone else's company because she never liked to be alone. It was a great fit for the both of them, silence reminding Davina of her childhood and Brinley never liking to be alone because she was much more of an extrovert who thrived o the company of the people around her.

Of course, Brinley got up and went to work, came home and graded alone in her room – the door locked as to not have anyone else with her – and then Davina would get home and unlock the door herself and see Brinley lying on her bed without disturbance. Davina would talk to her about her day, try as hard as she could to get the woman to talk, but she said nothing and she went back to her room and cried a little.

Every day. That was her life every day and all Davina wanted was for Brinley to say something to her; to explain what happened, where she went, why...to make her understand because she didn't and she never thought she would if this kept happening.

Today was no di erent. She finished her classes and went home for the hour before her shi to change and check on Brinley. She took the key from on top the door and unlocked the door before twisting the knob and looking at the figure of her friend. Her body was turned away, sheltered away from the outside world and Davina pursed her lips.

"Hey, Brin," she didn't move from the threshold, not wanting to truly disturb her friend and invade her comfort bubble, "I hope school was good. I was a shi soon so I'll have to leave and I think that a erwards I'm gonna go by the diner. I'll pick you something up, how does that sound?"

There was no response but at this point Davina wasn't expecting one. Still, she couldn't help but admit that it stung. "Okay. I'll get you some apple pie. Tomorrow I'm thinking about hanging out with Conrad, I haven't seen him in a while. Wanda called earlier, said that Steve was worried about you...so is Bucky."

Nothing. Davina sighed, "Look, I don't know what happened. I don't know why you le or why you came back, all I know is that I-I wasn't the greatest friend to you before you went missing. I was jealous. You were getting more friends and you weren't hanging out with me and so I tried to do the same and I pushed you out...I-I didn't even notice you were gone for a whole week until Wanda came over to ask me where you were.

"And I'm so sorry for that. I feel so bad, and-and I'm telling you this because I want you to know that I'm not leaving. I'm not going to ignore you anymore or try to move on with a life without you because that's not what I want. So just...just don't shut me out, okay?"

Davina finished her confession, looking hopefully at the girl, but didn't see any movement. She bit her lip to keep any form of disappointment or hurt to herself, not wanting to guilt her friend, and moved out of the doorway.

"Well, I'll see you later," Davina told her before shutting the door again, locking herself away from Brinley and back to a stillness that she thought would never leave.

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A er her shi , Davina found herself at the counter of Apple's Eye Diner just as she told Brinley before she le She looked around for her friend but didn't stress, looking down at her phone to see if she got any notification before turning it o . The diner was filled – something that would be an unusual sight if she was just a customer who had never worked there before.

It wasn't o en that Apple's Eye was completely packed with people, most of the time only about half of all the booths were filled, but it seemed that Friday night got people to the diner. Why, Davina didn't know, but she didn't question it. Sometimes these things happened and it was always an unwelcomed surprised to the sta because they weren't used to this many people waiting for their food but sought a er for management because they needed the business.

For the most part, the diner was small and business ran slow. That was the pace the sta was accustomed for, so even though waiters would get more tips and it was very nice for business, they weren't fans. Especially Rosie, who was le to wait on basically every table since Davina and Finn le.

Johnny was never a help, and neither was his girlfriend. Or, apparently, he had a new one and she didn't do anything either. That le Rosie, the hardworking waitress who never seemed to get the pay she deserved and worked her ass o for. Before, they were a tagteam. Davina would get one half of the diner and Rosie got the other – it was fun, for the most part. And then when she le , Finn took her place and she had seen them do the same thing, which brought a smile on her face seeing her legacy carried out.

Now, though, Davina still worked at the flower shop and Finn wasn't going to be returning to his job for a few more months – not that many though since more time had passed and the clocks kept ticking and all the months were swirling and it wasn't too long of a gap anymore. Soon, he would be back, but Davina doubted that Wilma would rehire him and if she did, she doubted that he would take it.

There would be time needed for him to get back into his life. Come back to the world a er his departure when he was in juvie. He would have to reconnect, gain control of his life again – maybe then he would come back to work, or maybe he wouldn't. Davina knew he enjoyed his job, but maybe he wouldn't come back. She liked to think she knew her brother, but sometimes she had to admit that he was a wild card.

"Davina!" she heard the cheer of her friend, feeling arms wrap around her and she laughed at the feeling, "What are you doing here? I feel like I haven't seen you in forever!"

The Royce woman smiled at her friend, turning around in her seat as Rosie let go of her to get a look at the blonde. "Hey, sorry. Brinley hasn't been...feeling well so I've been looking a er her and I just forgot to, you know, talk to anyone else," Davina lied.

If there was one thing Davina Royce did not like at all – maybe even come close to hating – it was lying. She didn't mind liars, or people who lied to her (though she had to admit if she caught them in a lie she wouldn't trust them as much a erwards), but she hated doing it herself. It always made her feel terrible, and she really wasn't the best at it either. But, for somehow, Rosie looked concerned and seemed to believe her.

"Oh my God, is she okay?" Rosie asked her, "What was wrong?" "She's fine now," Davina lied again, feeling guilt pool in her gut because she was still lying and Brinley still wasn't fine. She was holing herself up, closing everyone out...and Davina felt awful. "Something happened in her family and she took some time o work and I was helping her."

"That's terrible. Tell Brinley that I'm sorry, and if she needs anything I'm here for her," Rosie said immediately a er, concern still etched on her face and Davina felt even worse.

Rosie was great – she was willing to help – and here she was lying to her face. More than once. And Brinley wasn't fine, she was doing terribly and Davina didn't know how to help her. Didn't know if Brinley even wanted her help at all.

"I will," Davina agreed, still feeling guilty. Terribly guilty, keeping secrets and lying...she didn't like it at all – maybe even hated. She didn't want to hate anything, but maybe she hated this right now. "And thanks. Sorry that I haven't been able to come to the diner and hang out lately, but I'm back."

"Well, I'm glad that Brinley's okay and that you're back," Rosie smiled at her, the simple one that eased on her face and that made Davina feel so bad, "I missed having you around. You're my favorite customer – don't tell Conrade or Ms. Linde I said that."

"Ms. Linde still comes around here?" Davina asked her, "I haven't seen her since I quit."

Rosie nodded at the question, "Yep! Every Tuesday and Saturday evening – Sunday for brunch. She can't come out as much because she isn't moving too well, and a caregiver has been bringing here lately. It's sad, she's great."

Davina looked at the girl with sympathy, remembering her own days of being a teenager and seeing Ms. Linde there every morning she worked and sometimes again on evenings. "I remember when she came here every day. And how she would get onto me for being here in the morning instead of at school."

"Yeah, she did that a lot to me. Still does that. Always telling me to go to college and get my degree, leave the diner and get a job," Rosie smiled sadly, "I always tell her that the day she stops coming in, I'll go to college. She's holding me to that."

"She's always so adamant about school," Davina said.

Rosie nodded, "Because she never went to college herself, didn't have the money or support from her family. I feel bad for her, I do, but I really wish she'd stop forcing it on me."

"You don't know, maybe one day it'll stick," Davina teased with a smile, only to receive a light hit from Rosie.

"Shut up, V. I don't have the money for college, and I don't think I ever will," Rosie said finally.

Davina frowned. "What about your parents? You said that your sister is going to a nice school, I'm sure they can help pay a bit."

Rosie hardened at the thought of her family and Davina knew she had crossed a line. Family was never supposed to be discussed with Rosie – she hated thinking about them – and here she was bringing them up.

"I will never ask anything from them," the Harlan woman said with a low, angry voice. There was a commanding actor to it, a sharpedged sword that cut her insides.

"Okay," Davina said quietly, determined to never bring up her family again. That was personal; she didn't like talking about it – so she would never bring it up again.

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" Hey, Brin I saw Rosie today, she said that if you ever need anything from her, all you need to do is call her. Ms. Linde's getting worse. She hopes you feel better, too. Okay, I'm gonna head back to my room to do some work and then I'm going to sleep. If you need anything, you know where I'll be."

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Wanda Maximo stepped inside of the apartment and smiled at Davina The door shut behind her and Davina gave her one of the fakest smiles she could manage, trying to hide how hard life was at the moment and how everything was crumbling under her grasp. To that, Wanda felt much sympathy for the girl.

Davina took her hand and led her into her bedroom, not wasting a moment and letting that door close behind them before collapsing on her bed and onto Wanda. Immediately, she let out a sigh and closed her eyes, allowing the Maximo girl to run her fingers through her hair in a calming motion.

"She won't talk to me," Davina pouted, looking up at the girl with such large eyes that had Wanda melting – though she was trying not

to admit it.

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"I'm sorry, just give her time. She might need it – something happened to her," Wanda said sympathetically.

"I know," the Royce girl said, "but I hate it. She's pushing me out and I – I don't want to lose her, because I feel like I'm losing her. I just – I want everything to go back as it was before this year."

Wanda looked at her, wanting to do something to change it but not knowing what. Davina wanted to see something good – to go back, if only temporary, to how it was before when Brinley was still there and everything in her life was good. There was no crying, there was no stillness, there was laughter, there were cookies – there was life and it was good.

And Wanda...she could make Davina see.

"I could, maybe, show you your greatest dream," Wanda o ered, although hesitantly.

In those dark days, she only used her magic to show the greatest nightmares of people; break apart their mind and leave them a shell in a body. And the Avengers...she had shown them what she thought she had to. She had violated them. Only Pietro asked to see the great things, to see their parents again. She would show him them, smiling and happy, the day was light and there was no darkness in sight; no reality.

Maybe she could give that to Davina and everything would be okay, if only for a moment.

"What?" Davina frowned in confusion, eyebrows furrowing as she looked at the younger girl.

Wanda shi ed uncomfortably, "I – my magic, I can show you a vision with them. Your greatest dream. You'll – you'll life as it was before everything."

She stared at the girl for a moment, deciding if she was telling the truth or not. She could see Brinley, she could see Finn, she would be happy. She could be happy again. "Please," she begged, "If you can, please."

The Maximo girl nodded and a scarlet mist came from her hands, eyes turning the same red color. She flickered her wrist and concentrated, bringing her hand near Davina's head and watched as the girl's eyes gave the scarlet hew and she knew she was in...

Davina's eyes opened. She turned her head as light poured in. It was the middle of the day and she was back at her dad's house. There was a little girl running through the kitchen with laughter following her. The little girl giggled with mischief and happiness.

"Davina...where are you?" she heard the call – her mother. Her heart ached and she looked at the small girl; her. "I'm gonna get you!"

Another giggle le her small mouth and Anne came into the kitchen and started to run, ignoring the squeal that le her daughter's mouth. Anne grabbed her and held her closely, both of them laughing, both of them happy.

She was happy, and her heart ached.

The vision changed soon she was staring at her brother and friend. They were sitting on the couch, a movie on and she was snuggled up in a blanket. They were talking and she felt a smile on her face.

"Shut up, Asher," Finn pushed the girl away from him lightly, all three of them still chuckling though.

"Oh, fuck o, Finn. It's Brinley – stop calling me Asher," the woman rolled her eyes at him, faking some annoyance to add onto her own dislike for hearing her real name.

"Language, Brin. There are children present," Davina scolded her playfully, "Don't corrupt him."

Finn snorted, looking at his sister and saying sarcastically, "Yeah, because I'm so innocent. I'm like a baby."

They all laughed at that and Davina turned her head away and the vision was gone. The laughter disappeared but she standing in the kitchen, placing cookie dough on the pan to go into the oven.

"Have a good day?" she heard a voice behind her. A smile tugged at her lips again and she looked behind her to see Wanda. It was weird for a moment, seeing the girl there, but she did make Davina happy so it made sense.

"The best," she nodded, "The kids were amazing today. Kevin even gave me a flower he picked o the ground. I was a bit smooshed, but the thought was there."

"Aw, that's cute," Wanda agreed coming around to keep o a piece of cookie dough and eat it, to which Davina hit her lightly, ignoring the way Wanda laughed at her, "How is their reading."

"About as good as their writing, but they are in kindergarten so you can't expect a lot out of them" Davina said, "Maybe one of them will be a writer one day."

Wanda shrugged, "Maybe. How are Finn and Peter?"

That struck her as odd again and she felt a disconnect from the vision, a pull to bring her out, but she stayed. And her smile returned and everything felt easy again. "They're good," she said, "Finn hates college, but he's never enjoyed school so what's new? And Peter's apparently near the top of his class."

"He's going to MIT, right?" Wanda asked her.

To that, Davina nodded, "Paid for by his Stark Internship. You know, I had no idea that SI had high school internships before Peter, or that they paid for college."

"Why? Would you have filled out an application?" as she asked this, Davina put the pan into the oven.

When she finished, she shrugged, "I don't know. Maybe. I mean, I don't have much of an interest in working there or technology, but if it would've paid for college..."

"You said your dad paid, though."

"Part of it. He said he'd pay for all of it if I moved back home for my senior year and quit my job at the diner, but I told him I couldn't. So, he paid half, I kept my job, and took out student loans for the rest of it. Would've been great to have an internship that paid the rest of it for me," Davina finished with a sigh.

"Well, you don't have to worry about that now," Wanda told her with a smile.

Davina returned it. "Yeah, I've got my job and I'm hoping to keep it for a couple years."

Wanda finished the vision and pulled her hands away from Davina's head. The scarlet le her eyes at the glow over Davina's soon vanished a erwards, returning her back to reality. The girl before her blinked a few times, regaining control over her senses and looking around before her focus returned to Wanda and she smiled.

"Thank you," Davina said honestly, "It was – it was beautiful. I loved it, thank you."

"No problem. I'm glad that I could help," Wanda told her back, a smile gracing her face that reminded Davina of the kitchen scene, "But, if you wouldn't mind me asking, who was that boy? With you and Brinley?"

"Oh, I didn't know you actually saw everything I did," Davina muttered to herself before answering, "It was my brother."

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"Finn," Wanda finished o , "I'm sorry for bringing him up."

Davina was quick to assure the girl, "It's alright. You wanted to know. God, I haven't seen him this month – and it's just been so long since he's been here. I miss him."

Wanda's features so ened in understanding, knowing how much she missed her own. "I'm sorry," she repeated.

"Really, Wanda, don't worry about it," Davina said again, looking at the girl.

She looked so pretty. Her hair was down with waves in it blending with straight sections. She looked so sorry for bringing up Finn, which Davina thought was nice even though she didn't need to worry about it. And she had showed her something good...she had shown her times of the past and a future she wanted; her greatest dreams. And she felt so happy in them, a lightness in her that le her reaching for it now.

And Wanda had been coming around, checking up on her. Wanda wanted to make sure she was okay, check up on Brinley as well. She always calmed Davina down, always held her closely and snuggled with her when she didn't have anyone else...Wanda was so nice.

She made her feel this way – a certain way where she wanted to keep Wanda touching her. Feel the girl's warmth beside her. With a good feeling in her gut whenever Wanda was around, a smile gracing her face every time she saw the girl...

Oh, no.

Oh God.

She liked Wanda.

How had she not realized before? It had been months of this, and she hadn't even realized that she liked the girl – God, she was so oblivious. Here, of course she was crushing for the Maximo girl, and she hadn't even realized it until right then. How – how...

Oh, but it didn't matter, did it? Wanda would never like someone like her? She was just Davina Royce, the once waitress and now florist. She was just the girl who's back in college, with a mother in jail, brother in juvie, and father who she wasn't close with and never wanted to be around. She was just so ordinary, there was nothing special about her – why would Wanda ever like her?

No. Wanda wouldn't, so it didn't matter that she hadn't realized she had a crush on the girl until then. Nothing would come of it, so it didn't matter. Nothing had to change just because of this realization. It was fine.

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Later that night, Wanda had le because Steve would worry too much if she didn't get home would spend the whole night stress cooking, wondering if Wanda had been caught and thrown back into the Ra or killed or something, so to prevent that, Wanda went back to the apartment she was staying in and Davina was alone in her room.

Netflix was on and she folded her laundry since that needed to be done. She hummed to herself a tune that had been stuck in her head the whole day, smiling to herself as she thought back to the visions. Of Brinley telling Finn o for calling her Asher and the boy cackling and snorting at it.

Surprisingly, her thoughts were ruined by the knock at her door. Not the front door; but her bedroom door. Davina didn't even think before going and opening it, seeing the small figure of her friend. She looked so small, so vulnerable, and Davina's heart ached for her.

"I'm so sorry," Brinley choked out and immediately Davina enveloped her in a hug.

"You have nothing to be sorry for," Davina told her, because she didn't. Something happened – something which she didn't know – and it le a pressing e ect of her.

Brinley greedily took the comfort, taking the hug without protest and letting Davina hold her. "I just – I got so angry. Bu-Bucky and I were arguing and I le because I was so mad. I just wanted to cool down. And-And then my hands were in fire and I couldn't stop it."

Davina frowned and looked at the girl, "Your hands were in fire?" a

Brinley cried and nodded, "I'm sorry I never told you, I just didn't want anyone to know. I hate them – I hate my mutation and I hate that it's fire and I hate everything. I hate that I lost control and I couldn't gain it back. I had to leave. I had, I had to gain control but I just couldn't but I didn't want to stay away so I came back and I just – I don't have control. I hate it. I hate everything."

Davina didn't say anything more, didn't press the matter, just hugged Brinley, rocking them slowly and allowing the girl to cry, happy that the girl was letting her back in.

Continue reading next part $\ \square$