Its been two days.

Two days of silence, of nothing, of Martina barely even looking my way. She comes out of her room just to grab a bite, to take a shower and goes straight back. For the first night, I spent it sitting out in the hallway begging for her to talk to me— to just listen. The sun set and rose and the door never budged. I knew I hurt her, I could see it in her eyes that night. The betrayal, the pain, the disbelief all sweeping her features.

The thing about hurting someone else is that you can't heal them in your time. Even if you're truly, utterly, agonizingly sorry— even if you'd rip your heart out for them to see, what's broken is still broken. They say time heals all wounds, but I didn't have that either. It was the night before I had to go and her door was still locked and as painful as it was to even think about, I had to accept that maybe that's where our story ends.

That tomorrow, when I go— i'd be leaving her shattered even when I would crawl through fire to undo all i've caused. Maybe i'd never see her face again and i'd be reduced to another bitter memory she keeps in the back of her mind, one that cuts to the bone every time it surfaces. Regrets come with where we stood, leaving me wishing I had spent more time telling her how much she meant to me, how

much her friendship meant to me.

I was back out in the hall, sitting on the cold wooden floors and leaning against her door. I stopped trying to get her to open it, to get her to talk to me but I wasn't leaving without a goodbye. I held the folded paper in my hand, lightly twirling it between my fingertips before slipping it under the crack of the door. I wrote it all, everything I wanted to say— everything I needed her to hear. I didn't know if she would even pick it up, if she'd read it or crumple it up and toss it in the bin like it was nothing. I deserved it, anyway.

But at least by morning, I'd know I tried. Maybe it'd bring her peace, maybe it would bring me peace too. All that was le was for me to hope that someday, she'd understand and know that no matter where life takes me, she'll always be on my mind. Martina is many things, but she gave me a friendship unlike any other. She treated me like she'd treat anyone when I came here feeling like a monster, like some vile, discarded toy hidden away from a world that wanted nothing to do with me— but she didn't see that.

"Hey." Wanda hums, a sad smile placed upon her lips as she sunk down to sit by my side.

Somehow, she got Natasha to let her in on the plan— even going as far as to be the one to drive me to the hangar where a jet would be waiting. Wanda was going to spend the night, this time with Natasha's approval but when she arrived I was nothing but a wreck of guilt and agony. So she made dinner, she sat with me out in that hallway and she held my hand, even if it took hours for me to move

away from the door. "I'm leaving tomorrow morning— just before sunrise. It's up to you if you want to read it, but everything is in there. I just hope you find it in you to forgive me someday." I call out in defeat, in a last ditch e ort to get her to hear me and when the familiar ring of silence greets me, my heart sinks all over again.

"You did what you could." Wanda whispers from right next to me, placing a gentle arm around my shoulder as she pulls me into her. My head was hung low, tears brimming my eyes as I melted into Wanda, resting my temple against the crook of her neck.

"I never wanted to hurt her." I so ly mumble, feeling her run a gentle trace up and down my arm, trying to bring me comfort. "I know." She sighs.

I don't realize how long we stayed there, just her holding me while tears silently traced down my cheeks. It was a mess of everything, of Martina, of what happened with her step father, of the overwhelming sense that tomorrow was going to bring. I felt like I was on the brink of insanity, taking blow a er blow and running in circles just trying to survive. I had barely gotten a wink of sleep, my head was aching along with my heart and my body felt like it was about to shut down. All that kept me going was what I had to do, was getting to Lara. Wanda eventually leads me back into the living room, staying with me on the couch and putting on a record to drown out the noise. She turns it down enough to a gentle hum, taking the spot next to me as I

curl up on the edge. She's been here every night since, keeping her promise and quite honestly— keeping me afloat. She was patient and kind when I needed it most, sitting with me in silence without a hint of complain. Sometimes she'd just nab a book and read, sometimes she'd go o

into the kitchen and try and bring me back some snacks just to get me to eat and when my chest caved in the bath and the tears wouldn't stop— she sat there too, just holding my hand in the silence. She was reading again, right next to me with a book snug on her lap. It was past midnight and my thoughts were racing too much to ever grant me the peace of slumber, but I noticed her dri ing o in place. "Lay down." I mumble so ly, almost jolting her awake as she turns to me in surprise. I o er her a weak smile, patting my lap and motioning for her to settle down.

"I'm okay—" She tries to argue, but I shake my head. "I'm not going to be able to sleep tonight, so just lay down. At least one of us can get some rest." I so ly prod, watching uncertainty sweep her features before eventually giving in and setting the book

down onto the co ee table. Wanda carefully shi s, moving farther and gently laying back so that her head lands right on my lap. Her sea of autumn hair covers my thighs as I grab the blanket that laid over the armrest by my side, swi ly tossing it to spread over her and bringing it up to her chest.

The couch was big enough for her to fit completely, and it almost made me smile how small she looked all tucked in. Before I could pull my hand away, she catches it in her own to settle down upon her chest. Her fingers trace absentmindedly over my skin, mostly fiddling with the ring on my finger— the one she gave. "It looks nice on you." She hums, twisting the metal gently at the base

of my finger. "I like it. Thank you." I whisper, mustering a small smile as she moves to look up at me. She just keeps her eyes on me, an unreadable expression on her face as I bring my hand to cup her jaw, tracing a

thumb over the shape of her chin. "What's on your mind?" I ask and she looks away, melting into my touch as I cup her face. That night out in the city was almost like a turning point, like a barrier

had been broken between us. We'd find ourselves touching all the time, even in the most mundane ways like her head on my shoulder or a hand absentmindedly resting on mine. It was almost a bittersweet feeling, because if things had been better then maybe I could have appreciated the tenderness more— maybe my heart would be leaping instead of sinking every time she's near. It wasn't her fault, she knew it too, it was just like what we had was buried underneath a mountain of problems that were still continuing to arise.

Plus, neither of us really knew what we actually were. "Why do I feel like everything is going to change tomorrow?" She says a er a while, a slight tremble hiding behind her words as I look down at her, brows furrowed as she restlessly plays with her rings.

"Maybe because it will." I reply so ly. I wish I could have eased her worries, I wish I could have thrown out a meaningless lie just to watch her smile back at me but she deserved more than that. All we had was a plan that would dissipate halfway through, me getting to London was the only sure part of it. Whatever happens next, whatever chaos ensues, whatever casualties would come out of it was a mystery that neither of us could prepare for.

"You know sometimes your thoughts are really loud and sometimes I can't read you." She mumbles a er a few moments of silence, looking up at me as her hands still to find mine. "Really?" I o er her a small smile and she nods slightly, eyes

travelling back down to her fingers which were tracing the outline of my own as she hums in thought. "I heard you in the park." She admits in a single breath, a ghost of a

smile gracing her lips as I raise my brows.

"I know why you didn't kiss me." She adds, the corners of her lips twitching up into a small smirk as my heart stops in my chest. I feel my cheeks flush at the memory, thankful that she was preoccupied with my hand to take a look at me.

"I understand but... I just need you to know I don't agree with you." She says. "What?"

"I don't think you'd ruin me. It's kind of generous for you to think you'd have that much of an impact, really." She jokes, stifling a laugh as I yank my hand away from her grip. "See now I'm glad I didn't, asshole." I roll my eyes and she bursts out into a fit of mu led laughter, reaching back up to pull my hand down

"No but seriously, you're wrong about that." She breathes, I could still see the beaming smile on her lips as she presses her hand to mine, almost like she was sizing it up before eventually intertwining our fingers.

"I didn't want to risk it." I say with sheer honesty, even when my heart was pounding against my chest.

"Maybe I wanted you to." She whispers, almost inaudibly but I catch it anyway as I tense up at her words. The only light that was le was from the kitchen and moon, pouring

through the window behind us and onto her, Wanda Maximo who was on my couch, curled up with my hand in hers and telling me she wanted me to kiss her. I wish more than anything that I wasn't so fragmented, that I was whole enough to feel joy without the looming sense of guilt that came with it.

"You know for an assassin, you're kind of a nervous wreck. It's bad for business." She lightly teases, our hands still intertwined as a smile crawls onto my lips.

"I make it work." I chuckle so ly.

to her chest.

"Yeah, yeah you do." She hums, turning over with our intertwined hands still pressed to her chest as she curls up beneath the blanket with her back facing me.

"Goodnight." She whispers.

"Goodnight." I reply, le wondering to the moon how somebody could be everything all at once. I felt like I had the best parts of the universe in my grip, her and her green eyes and autumn hair and that goofy smile that makes my heart skip.

Maybe I didn't want things to change too.

Maybe I was cursing the world for giving me this piece of existence, this taste of tenderness when all I had known since the beginning of time was the cold, cruelty of life and loss and heartache. Now that I know what it's like to hear her laugh, to watch her nose scrunch up when she smiles, to hear her singing the same damn tune when she cooks or cleans or does anything absentmindedly because then a life without felt almost bleak. But this wasn't a choice I had the liberty of making and she knew it too.

So I didn't sleep, I didn't move, even when the cold outside began to seep through it still didn't stand a chance against the warmth I felt just having her there. She never let go of my hand, even as I felt her completely relax and dri o she kept my hand in hers, pressed against her chest so firmly I could feel her heartbeat.

Wanda Maximo is a whirlwind that I've been sucked into since the first time I laid eyes on her in that wretched facility. Since I saw her being dragged o, even with the emptiest eyes she still shone amidst that rubble of monstrocities— she always did. I understood then, as I watched her on my lap sinking into slumber that maybe i've known all along, maybe thats why the fights were so ferocious, the words were so sharp, why the pain ran so deep.

There was something about her heart that gleamed with goodness, and not in the way most people could expect. She fought to be good in a world designed to paint her as a monster, she was good amidst her cracks and broken parts, amidst her loss and demons that still haunt her every corner. She was braver than I could ever be— maybe that's why I searched for her.

I didn't want to kill her, I just wanted to be near her. And now I am, on a couch in New York City, she's curled up in my

arms with her heart in my hands and I know that when the sun begins to paint the sky that our time would be borrowed once again. Borrowed, changed, twisted like it always is. That's why I didn't sleep, why I fought o all and any sign of exhaustion because I wanted to remember, I wanted every second, every minute and every hour to be embedded in my memories, to hopefully do her entirety justice with just the thoughts in my head if tomorrow ends in destruction because Wanda Maximo is everything worth remembering.

Soon enough the moon began to sink and the dark skies melted into a cool blue and Wanda's phone began to ring. She stirs in place, reaching for the buzzing device just inches away on the table without ever letting go of my hand. With the phone to her ear she shi s to lay on her back, looking up at me with a lazy smile and sleepy eyes as she mumbles half conscious replies to whoever was on the other end. Then she clicks it shut, sets it back down and she gives me a look that tells me it was time to go.

So we do. I didn't have much packed, merely just a backpack of a few shirts and my wallet while I prepared breakfast to leave for Martina. It was the least I could do. Wanda stepped out, talking to Natasha over the phone to go over the plan once again while I finish up in the kitchen. Then I hear the door click.

The bedroom door.

thought.

I freeze in place, my heart lodging in my throat as the patter of footsteps draw near and stop right behind me. I almost didn't want to look— afraid of what i'd find until I feel small arms wrap around my torso from behind. Tears almost instantly pool in my eyes as I spin around, pulling Martina into a tight embrace without a second

"I'm going to miss you." She mumbles against my shoulder as I try to blink away the tears that were daring to fall. I spot Wanda by the kitchen entrance, a warm smile on her lips as she backs away into the living room to give us privacy.

"I'm going to miss you too." I chuckle so ly as we pull away and I come face to face with her swollen eyes and tear stained cheeks that she immediately wipes away.

"I had allergies." She defends amidst a spew of light sni les but It only makes me smile. "Sure you did."

"Okay maybe not but don't let it get to your head, dipshit. You're still an asshole but just... a cool one. I guess." She stammers, shaking her head at her poor attempt while I ru le her hair, much to her disapproval.

"Maybe it's not goodbye, y'know. I make a lot of stupid choices and you do too so maybe we'll meet again." I smile, watching as she actively avoids my eyes in an attempt to hide her face.

"Yours are dumber though, so maybe i'll have to save your ass again." She counters, shi ing awkwardly on her bare feet as I pull her in for another hug.

"Stop hugging me this is disgusting." She tries to fight but I keep my grip and eventually, she gives in and wraps her arms around me too. "I hope you get to her. I really do." Martina sighs as we pull away, finally meeting my eyes with a somber smile.

"I hope so too." at "Lexa, we have to go." Wanda clears her throat, stepping into the kitchen as Martina whips around to look at her. Wanda o ers her a bright smile, raising her brows as Martina glances between us several times.

"Did you guys fuck?" She blurts out, because that's just the kind of person she is and Wanda and I stammer into a mess of protests. "Okay, okay geez. Defensive much. But hey, you finally navigated through your emotions." Martina mocks as we all head to the living room, giving me a quick nudge while I sling my backpack over my shoulder.

"Even up until the end you're still annoying." I shake my head, biting back a smile as she looks at Wanda. "She likes you." She blatantly says, a mischievous smirk on her lips as

I bury my face in my hands at the sound of Wanda's laughter. "I know. I kind of like her too, still undecided." Wanda chuckles, pulling Martina into a quick hug.

"Yeah don't go down that route. Have some self respect." Martina hums as they pull away. "And to think I made you breakfast." I sigh, walking over to the front door as Wanda exits first. I join Wanda out in the hall, Martina

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standing by the doorway with a hand on the knob and a small, bittersweet smile on her face.

"Good luck, dipshit." She beams, watching as we stand at the top of the staircase. I take one last good look at her, trying to gather as much as I can with a smile even though my heart was trembling. "You too." The door shuts, Wanda slips her hand into mine and we eventually make our way down.

The car was parked right outside the apartment, lightly covered in snow as Wanda unlocks it. There was something in the air, something eerily still. I didn't know how to place it, it was unnerving and uneasy like that feeling in your gut when a big drop comes at a rollercoaster—only this time it doesn't go away.

"You okay?" Wanda's voice pulls me out of my head, snapping me back into reality as I o er her a small nod. I walk around the car, tossing my bag into the floor of the passenger seat before getting in

"I didn't know you could drive." I comment with a weak smile as she turns the key, bringing the engine to life and adjusting her mirrors. "Nat was actually the one who taught me." Wanda hums, eyeing the side mirror before pulling out of the curb and into the street with

as Wanda follows suit.

ease. "Natasha taught you?" I couldn't hide the surprise in my tone as Wanda nods, a small smile present on her lips as she turns the radio

onto a gentle hum of background noise. "Yeah when I moved here around— last year. We studied at the

compound with one of Tony's cars and thankfully we didn't crash because I'd never have the money to pay for the damages if we did." She shares with a delighted smile as I watch her from my spot, a hand on the wheel and another rested upon the door with nonchalance. I can feel it in the pit of my stomach, the rumbling, the anxiety, the

inevitable loss that was about to come like watching a tsunami approach from miles away knowing you'd drown no matter how far

you ran. The sun was starting to seep through the glass, illuminating her skin as she keeps her eyes on the road and it was such a simple sight– but it could best the view from the tallest of buildings or the starriest skies. She had her brows slightly furrowed when she drove, bottom lip

rolling in every now and then as she focused on the road. Her rings sparkled under the sunlight, cool green eyes turning warm as I take in every bit of her. It was almost unbelievable, the turn we took from drawing each other's blood to holding each other every chance we got like our skin was peppered with magnets and space was a scorching sin and maybe the first night she crawled through my window was never meant to happen, maybe it was a mistake in the timeline, a story that spun out of control but god, how could something so tragic be so beautiful?

Wanda Maximo is so, so beautiful.

"I can't hear you." She hums lightly, turning to me with curious eyes as we come to a stop at a red light.
"You don't have to. You know what i'm thinking about." I o er her a small smile, watching her eyes trace over my face with agonizing tenderness.

"Sometimes I wish we could have known sooner." She finally speaks, her words floating into the air with such delicate vibrance. "I think maybe I always knew."

"Maybe I did too." She smiles, turning back to the road as we began to move once again.

The rest of the ride was met in comfortable silence, with Wanda finding my hand halfway through as she drove. Maybe she could hear my thoughts screaming for time to stop, for it to slow down, maybe she was too— but the universe could never be so kind and soon enough we were pulling through the gates of the airport, driving up to a hangar as the car comes to a stop just a few feet away from the

entrance. Wanda puts the car in park, reaching over to pop open the console and fishing out a phone that she hands to me. "Nat wanted you to have this, her number is on it— and mine too. I

slipped it in before she put it there." Wanda smiles as I take the device from her hands, nodding slightly before slipping it into the pocket of my jacket.

"Thank you— for everything, for all of this." I look back at her, willing a smile even when my heart was tearing at the seams. She looks back at me, a bittersweet flood washing over her features as her hands cup my face.

"Is it selfish of me to want you to risk it now?" She breathes so ly, her thumb tracing over my skin with so much gentleness as I melt into her touch.

I understood what she meant, and believe me when I say I wanted it too but I was afraid— afraid to know what it's like, to know how she feels, how she tastes, to find that maybe I can't go on without her again. Me getting on that jet wasn't a choice, going to London wasn't a choice— us parting would always be inevitable and maybe we could make it hurt less.

"Maybe it's better that we both wonder." I say shakily, my heart sinking as she o ers me a somber smile and nods.

"It's not goodbye, right?" She asks with uncertainty as my hands find her own.

"No, I still have to return your ring or did you forget already?" I chuckle so ly as she pulls away, biting back a smirk as she unlocks the car. We both step out, bag slung over my shoulder as she meets me halfway in front of the car and wastes no time in pulling me into an embrace.

Her arms wrap tightly around my neck as I snake mine around her waist, pulling her in so close we could melt into each other. I don't know how long we stand there, just holding each other with our eyes closed until eventually, reality breaks in and we pull away. I take a step back, never taking my eyes away from her even as she stood by the open door of the car.

"A whirlwind, Wanda Maximo ." I mouth and she smiles, she smiles so bright that her nose scrunches and my heart leaps as I finally turn around and she finally gets into the car.

With a smile on my face, I walk into the hangar as I hear Wanda drive away. The jet sat there, waiting for me with its doors wide open. Then my gut begins to churn, my steps begin to slow as the familiar feeling comes flooding back that something was entirely o . All my instincts prove to be right when Maria steps out of the jet, in full uniform with her eyes instantly on me as she descended to the ground and began to approach. My heart sinks immediately, a sigh of defeat falling from my lips when she stops just a few steps away with a flat expression on her face.

"I don't want to do this— I don't want to fight you." I breathe so ly, shaking my head as she raises her brows.

"Do you see any agents?" She asks calmly, looking around to further press her point as I watch her with cautious eyes.

"I never wanted to hurt anyone. I just need to get to my sister, that's it." It comes out more like a plea than anything else. I was exhausted, drained by the events of the past few days and I was hanging on by a thread, the last thing I wanted was another casualty that could be avoided if she just listened.

"I'm not here for a fight, Lexa." She replies, taking me by surprise as her words struggle to sink into comprehension. "Then what are you here for?" I stammer, my brows drawn together in

confusion as she tosses me the keys to the jet. "Let's just say I've decided to do things my way. I was never against you, Lexa. I was only following orders." She explains as I grasp the keys in my hands, looking down at the object in disbelief as I glance

back at her. "And this? Is this still part of those orders?" I ask cautiously and she actually cracks a small smile.

"No." She hums, almost looking amused.

"Go ahead, you'll find everything you'll need inside and if you check the phone that Ms. Maximo handed you, you'll find my number in there too." She casually states, motioning for me to head to the jet as I hesitantly comply, stepping around her. "Maria." I call out before stepping inside, and she whips around to

look back at me.

"Don't make me regret this."

The ride was rather uneventful, and I found that I was assigned a pilot despite my protests since I did have knowledge on how to fly the aircra . I wish I could even call it peaceful, but the entire trip was filling me to the brim with anxiety. Natasha called halfway through, her hushed voice bleeding through the speakers as she hashed out the plan for me, giving me spot on directions on where the event would be held, the hotel room she arranged for me to wait in and what route I was meant to take.

I also further found that Maria did leave a bag, which happened to contain an array of weapons and almost ironically, a bulletproof vest because i'd definitelyhave use for that. So with my heart in my throat, we eventually land in the airport, pulling into a hangar where a motorcycle sat waiting for me with a gleaming white note stuck to the handle.

Try not to crash, pulled a lot of strings for this. – N

The hotel was a quick ride through the city, amounting to no more than thirty minutes until I was pulling into the garage of the building and stepping into the elevator that took me to the lobby. It was quite cozy, with its warm lighting and gold details trailing the walls. There was even a fountain in the middle of it all, with coins peppering the base beneath all the murky water. With my backpack hanging over my shoulder, I made my way to the front desk and put on the most cordial smile I could muster.

"Good a ernoon, how can I help you?" A bright, blonde haired woman asks through her thick accent with a beaming smile plastered beneath her red lipstick. She looked merely a few years older than me, her crisp uniform sitting beneath a nametag that read 'Amelië. "I have a booking here." I clear my throat, instinctively looking over my shoulder. I wasn't used to being so freely out in the open yet, it almost felt like somebody was watching me.

"May I have your name please?" Her voice pulls my attention back, snapping me out of my paranoid trance as I turn to meet her expectant gaze.

"Laura Matthers." I sheepishly reply, watching as she taps away on her little screen. Eventually, her face lights up, turning to look back at me with the same rehearsed smile.

"Ah yes, Ms. Matthers. You'll only be with us for a night, correct?" She asks and I o er her a quick nod as she begins to dig through her drawers before handing me a card along with a pamphlet of the hotel and its ammenities.

"Room 409. Do you need assistance with your bags?" She asks as I take the items from her hands with a small smile. "No thank you, no."

And with that, she bids me goodbye and I'm o to the elevators. I click the button, standing with a hand around the strap of my backpack as I waited for the doors to open. I couldn't wait to retreat into the confines of a room, feeling more and more on edge as I waited in such a public place. Maybe it was just the lack of sleep or the nerves that came with the events that were about to happen, but my stomach was churning and my gut was screaming as my thoughts were brutishly interrupted by the sensation of a body crashing into mine.

I spin around, my card and pamphlet flying out of my hand and onto the floor as irritation crawled onto my expression at the sudden force

only to come face to face with a man looking no older than thirty, smiling lazily back at me in a loose black shirt and jeans. Tattoos peppered his arms, his dark brown hair messily falling over his forehead as he scrambles to grab the items he so hastily knocked from my grip while I stare him down. He seems intoxicated, giggling to himself as he spews a lazy mumble of apologies.

"Didn't see ya' there, mate. My bad." He chuckles, slurring his words as he hands me back my things and thankfully the elevator doors eventually dings open.

"Yeah, your bad." I flatly reply, taking my stu back and stepping into the elevator that he casually walks into as well. I was hoping somebody else would catch up while I press the corresponding number to my room but as the doors began to ring close, I realized i'd be stuck in an awkward ride with an obnoxious stranger. "You're not from around here, are ya'?" He asks, hos tone dripping

with his accent as he leans against the metal walls of the elevator, looking back at me with the same irritating smirk. "Let me guess, you're American?" He prods again when I only shoot

him silence, clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth in a chuckle while I firmly keep my eyes ahead.

"That'd explain why you're so uptight." He snickers, finally garnering my eyes as I turn my head to shoot him a glare. "Oi, ease up. Just trying to make conversation." He raises his arms,

a

enough for his sleeves to ride up and my eyes to graze the scars on his inner bicep as the elevator comes to a stop. "Enjoy your stay!" He calls a er me as I step out to my floor, shaking o the irritation as I headed down the hallway to find my room.

I feel the phone in my pocket begin to buzz as I turn down a corner, fishing it out until I finally find my door. I hold the device to my ear without ever looking at the caller ID, swiping the card through the receiver as the door clicks open and I step inside.

"Hello?" I hum, kicking the door shut as I set my bag down by the television stand. "You got in okay?" Wanda's hushed tone bleeds through the speaker,

her voice instantly washing me with a familiar sense of comfort as I plop down onto the bed.

"Yeah, I just got here. Not too shabby, tell Nat i'm impressed." I try to make light of the situation, trying to bury the jolting nerves coursing through my veins.

"I was just checking in. We just started loading the quinjet. Look, i'm starting to think maybe this is bigger than we expected." Wanda's whispers engulf a haunting sense of franticity, looming panic behind her hushed words as I sit up.

"What do you mean?"

"It's not just us. Fury is sending in two more jets for backup." Wanda reveals, worry shining through her attempt at a calm delivery.

"Is that not protocol?" My brows furrow as my stomach begins to churn, sitting on the edge of the bed as I wait for Wanda's reply. "Not for something like this. It's an auction— with one primary target.

It just feels... o ." She sighs, sounding genuinely troubled. "Look, maybe it's just for precaution. I'll be there before you, the event begins at 9 and i'll be scoping the area by 7. Hopefully, it'll be a quick in and out "I trutto case her worrise, but i'd be wing if I saw it

quick in and out." I try to ease her worries, but i'd be lying if I say it wasn't hypocritical of me because my gut was turning with suspicion too."It's not going to be that easy, you know that. It's going to be a fight."

Wanda replies so ly. "I know, so i'm going to draw her out of the venue. My only goal is to

knock her out, Nat gave me some of the tranquilizers they used on me back at the facility. It'll be okay." I say, only half believing in my own words as Wanda reluctantly hums.

"Okay. Be safe." She says, the conflict in her tone beaming through. "You too."

The line clicks shut soon a er and I fall back down onto the bed with a defeated hu. Wanda was a hundred percent right, it was not going to be easy. If i'm basing it on the last encounter we had, I was in for the fight of my life but I had everything on the line, everything to lose and I was going to get Lara out of there even if it tears me apart.

The a ernoon goes by agonizingly slow while i'm le to sit around in my room, overthinking every possible scenario and going through roadmaps and blueprints of the venue where it was going to be held. It was at a warehouse by the docks, one that was apparently reserved mostly for the elites to do their business, protected by money, power and corruption. I can only imagine the horrors that unravlled within

I had most of my personal plan down, being able go put together several backups along with di erent points of entrances and exits in case anything goes south but no matter how many times I go over it, no matter how many maps or prints I burn into my brain, the events will still be reliant on Lara. She's the wildcard in the situation, the storm I couldn't possibly be completely prepared for.

As time drew closer, I decided to freshen up. I plowed through the minibar already, ingesting nearly all the packets of co ee they put out which happened to be at least four cups. Maybe it was the ca eine mixing with the stakes, but I was hyperaware of every detail. I head to the bathroom, running a warm bath that'll hopefully help ease the nerves as I stood in front of the large mirror.

God, I looked like shit.

those walls.

The bags under my eyes were so prominent and dark, I looked like I had been thrown into a sack and tossed around like a dummy. I did my best to shake o the overwhelming feeling, going to brush my teeth and splash some water on my face as the bath continued to run, the sound of the water filling the tub bouncing o of the tiled walls. It was almost loud enough to drown out the chilling sound of my door clicking shut. Almost.

I freeze in my spot, my hands gripping the edge of the sink as I looked back at my reflection. Was it all in my head? Maybe it was the lack of sleep, maybe I was just hearing things but when the distinct sound of rumbling footsteps echo from outside the bathroom door, I realize I wasn't spiraling into a hole of deteriorating illusions.

Somebody was in my room. My eyes quickly dart around the bathroom for any sort of leverage to

use as a weapon and when I come up empty handed, I chalk up my defenses and carefully make my way to the bathroom door. My hands find the cold metal of the knob, taking a deep breath as I twist it open and step outside. With cautious steps, I make my way to the bed only to find the same man who crashed into me earlier standing over the mess of maps and prints, hands behind his back as he hums and nods.

"Been doing your homework, I see." He smiles, looking back up at me with nonchalance as my hands ball up into fists. "What are you doing here?" I mutter, brows furrowed and eyes

intently glued to him as he hums in thought, almost mockingly. "Here in London or in this hotel? Personally, I would have picked a more scenic location. I'm quite tired of the bustling cities and all. It gets a tad congested, doesn't it?" He replies with such veering casualness, amusement poking through his menacing smirk as he pulls the curtains back to reveal a view of the streets.

"Too many people, not my thing." He shrugs. "What are you doing in my room?" I seethe, the gut churning feeling

increasing with every passing second as he laughs. He laughs like those men in those dark rooms, he laughs exactly like them— drunk on power and agony. He laughs with the ghost of

destruction behind his dark eyes, I know that look all too well. I used to see the exact same thing in my reflection just a few months ago. "About that..." He begins, finally unclasping his fingers from behind his back to reveal a sparkling, silver knife. He holds it up to his

eyeline, a smirk etched onto his pink lips as he releases a sigh of satisfaction. "I'm here to kill you."

Continue reading next part 🛛

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