I am going to kill Wanda Maximo . Or she's going to kill me. At this point, I wasn't really sure who'd get

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there first. "This is the fi h time in two weeks! Two weeks!" Natasha exclaims, looking between Wanda and I in incredulous disbelief as we sat there, slumped over with frowns on our faces like children being scolded at

a dining table. "She keeps throwing me across the room!" I speak up first, motioning to Wanda with frantic irritation as the red headed witch sco s at my remarks.

"She keeps choking me!" Wanda fires back, defending herself. Our arguments were familiar to the walls, and probably to anyone within earshot since it happened every single time we were within arm's length. There was just something about her that prodded under my skin, like she had a special little button to push just to agitate me. đ "I'm trying to teach you." I cut in, rolling my eyes at her childish ways. She was unwilling, stubborn and brutish. I had no patience for it. "Teach me what? How to stop breathing?" She mocks sharply, her insult only fuelling my aggrivation as my glare turns dark. a "How to stop being a little bitch." I fire back. a

"Enough! You're both acting like children. You think I'm running a day care? I don't have time for this!" Natasha cuts us both o in an angered hu , pacing on the other end of the trashed training room as Wanda and I sat on the bench, which happens to be the only thing in the room that wasn't completely destroyed.

Wanda and I have been ' training for about two weeks and by training, I mean bickering and trying to go at each other's throats. In my defense, Wanda was extremely closed o . Every time I'd get near her or try to teach her anything, she'd revert to begrudged glares and uninterested movements like Iwas the one wasting her time. I could have easily refused her but I thought maybe, if we spent enough time together we'd come to some level of tolerance.

As expected, I was wrong.

"Okay you know what—"

"How do you two ever expect to work together if you keep trying to kill each other?" Natasha spews, unable to mask her annoyance as she turns to us.

"She's being di icult." I mumble under my breath as Wanda's head snaps to me in disbelief. " I'mthe di icult one? You're the one who purposely sabotages everything. You make me do things you know I'm not good at just so

you can mock me." Wanda chuckles bitterly. She did have a point, maybe I was harsh but what kind of training isn't? Did she expect me to hold her hand or something? "If you haven't noticed, this is combat training not a fucking therapy

session. If you wanted to sit and talk about your feelings, you came to the wrong place." I roll my eyes again, shaking my head at her stubborn nature. If she thought her measly complaints would so en me up to her ways, then she was wrong.

"You two are unbelievable. You are going to fix this mess right now and I swear to god if this happens again... I'll just let you kill each other." Natasha storms out, the door sliding closed behind her as a latch clicks and confusion swarms us. I spring to my feet, heading for the door only to realize it was indeed, locked. "Natasha! What are you doing?" I call out, peeking through the glass

as Natasha stood on the other side, completely done and exhausted. "You fix the room then you fix whatever you two have going on. Talk it out, I'm done babysitting." She shakes her head, walking away as I began pounding on the door. Something tells me I wasn't going to be able to get through, but I'd rather try than be stuck there with Wanda.

"It's not going to work. This entire floor is built to withstand people like us." Wanda sighs, arms folded over her chest as I finally give in, snapping around hastily to settle my eyes on her.

"Don't ever use the word 'us'. We are not in the same category." I spit, pacing to the other end of the room with an irritated stomp. "And what category would that be?" She quickly shoots in return, the challenge in her voice was unmissable but I don't give her the

satisfaction of acknowledgement, she's taken up too much of my energy to be honored with more. "Why do you hate me so much?" Wanda voices out, not of malice or

revulsion, much to my surprise she was looking at me like she was genuinely curious. Her words stop me in my tracks, my tongue immediately halting as the flood of words dare to rush out. I could so easily tell her everything, a part of me wanted to. I could recount it all, why the

mere sight of her makes me spiral into anger, why every look, every word, every breath makes my body numb and heart sink. But she didn't have to know, she didn't have a right to and frankly, I wasn't ready to admit it yet. For both of our sake, I keep my mouth shut. But she doesn't.

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"What did I ever do to you?" Wanda rises to her feet, eyes strictly trained on me as I place the scattered weights back on the rack. "Why does everything I do get to you?" She tries again, but I keep my back to her. I wasn't going to risk showing her my face, letting her get in my head.

"I can only hear what you're thinking when you're vulnerable and right now, you've got all your defences up. Why?" Her voice is close, feet planted right behind me as I straighten my posture, catching her eyes from our reflection on the mirror before me.

"Because you're dishonest. You're delusional and selfish." I say through gritted teeth, spinning around to look her in the eyes as I let my rage seep through my fingertips.

"Why do you hate me?" She dodges my daggered words, keeping her

"Because you think you're good. You keep pretending like you are when in reality, you're just a monster." I take a step closer, so close that I could feel her staggered breath on my lips. Hurt flashes in her eyes, not anger or disgust, just hurt.

"You're an abomination. A lab experiment gone wrong. That's all you are, all you'll ever be." I say with sinister passion, all the built up anger dripped from my lips as she takes a tentative step back, like I had just plunged a dagger into her chest. a "There's never a day that goes by where I don't think about all i've done and all i've lost. I'm not here because I think i'm good but

because this— doing this is the only way that I can live with myself. It's the only place that I don't feel so... alone." She shakily reveals, tears welling in her eyes that strike me in a way I wasn't able to anticipate. My heart sinks to my stomach as she stood there, her demeanor

breaking into shreds right before my eyes. The words are lodged in my throat, begging, itching to come out as I watch her take a step back, wiping at her eyes incessantly. My face is stone cold and somehow, I have a feeling that only hurt her more.

In one swi motion, I turn around without another word and began tending back to the mess as Wanda retreats to her side in silence, cleaning up as much as she could before packing her things. A er a few minutes, the lock clicks open and without missing a beat, I head for the door as Wanda stood by the bench, zipping up her bag. "You..." I stop in my tracks halfway out the door, willing myself to

keep my eyes ahead even when every inch of me itched to look back at her. "Are everything i've tried to leave behind." I say in a defeated whisper,

barely audible as I feel Wanda's eyes burn through me from where she stood.

I didn't wait for a response, the moment the words le my lips i'm blanketed in regret and uncertainty, tainting my every step as I retreat to the showers on my floor. With an angered thud, i drop my bag to the ground and practically rip my clothes o, stepping into one of the stalls as I press the digital pad that controlled the temperature, turning water all the way to the hottest setting that was nearly boiling. It wasn't going to a ect me physically, even when it was hot enough to at least cause a first degree burn but i'd feel it all. I'd feel it all.

I don't know how long I stood there, how long I let the scorching stream run over every inch of me as Wanda's words replay in my mind, her tears, her face, the shakiness in her voice that haunts me. I couldn't turn back now, not when i'm closest i've ever been to a shot at coming back to Lara, at a someday that maybe we could still have. Wanda Maximo is nothing but another casualty, a distraction, the way she's always been.

Steve shows up in my room hours later, his gentle smile plastered on as he stands by the doorway, arms crossed upon his chest as he takes a quick glance around my room like he was about to tell me to clean it, Steve could be fatherly that way. I wasn't really expecting the company, but ever since my spat with Wanda my thoughts have been

even more relentless than usual. "You're settling in alright?" Steve asks, his short blonde hair brushed back as I shi to sit by the foot of my bed, not knowing how to act a er the events that had unfolded.

"I've been worse. Why are you here? Did Natasha send you?" I hum, brows perked up in intrigue as Steve releases a so hum.

"No, I'm here on my own accord. I'm actually inviting you up to dinner, Stark's here and he wants to meet you." He informs lightly as my face contours into one of uncertainty.

"I don't think I should." I reply bluntly. A er everything that happened, the idea of sitting around a table full of people I constantly disregarded wasn't the best decision, especially when I just made one of them cry.

"Why not?" "Because... It'd be awkward? I don't know." I sigh, running a hand through my still damp hair.

For the past few weeks, Steve had been most interactive aside from Natasha. He's surprisingly quite so spoken, gentle, which was ironic considering his build. He felt a lot like a father figure to the group, sometimes i'd be able to watch their dynamic, their interactions

when we'd have meetings, the way Steve looked out for everybody. Even me, surprisingly. Steve had the ability to be stern without being cruel, a sight I was most definitely not used to. Some nights we'd train together, when he couldn't sleep he'd stop by

my room and we'd go down a level to do our thing in silence. He'd be on the punching bag, I'd sometimes be on the weights. It was comfortable silence with him, like we both understood that we didn't like to be alone with our thoughts but also didn't like to talk about it. Some nights he'd hit a little too hard, taking it o Its hinges and when I look at him, he's not the hero on the news trying to save lives. In those moments, late in the night when everyone around us was asleep, he was just a man trying to outlive his demons.

And that, that was something I knew all too well.

"Come on, we do this at least once a week and you've turned it down every time. They're all asking to have you, especially Sam. He still thinks it's hilarious that you choked Nat." Steve chuckled so ly, the corner of his mouth li ed into a charming smile. Admittedly, I was only worried about Wanda- and everything that happened hours prior.

"I'm never going to hear the end of it if I say no, am I?" I question with a defeated breath, Steve only shooting me a knowing look as I lazily get up, swiping the hoodie folded over my desk chair and slipping it on.

"If it gets awkward, i'm blaming you." I say, brushing past him hastily as he followed suit. I didn't have to look at him to know he was smiling, probably feeling triumphant for coaxing me out of my hole. We step into the elevator, Steve pressing the corresponding button as I shove my hands into my pockets, trying to control the urge to fiddle with my fingers and give away the fact that I was— maybe a little nervous. Steve, in his usual fashion, picks up on it anyway and settles

a curious gaze on me. "It'll be fine." He reassures as we begin to ascend, giving me a little nudge of support.

"I know." I lie, unwilling to break my facade.

"I heard about what happened with Wanda. Is it really that bad?" He hums casually, eyes still trained on me as I let out a so sigh. "We just don't get along." I reply quickly, keeping it as short as

possible and hoping for the topic to drop as the doors ding open. "Is it because she didn't remember you?" Steve asks, stepping out as I feel my feet sink into my spot— solidifying me in place. He turns to look back at me, picking up on my surprise as he releases a so breath.

"I've seen your file. I know." He gently says as I will myself to step out, the doors closing in the nick of time only inches from my back. "That doesn't matter to me anymore." I utter, uncertain of just how

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true my words were. We could hear the ruckus from a distance, the clanging of plates and silverware and the merging of conversations. Sam's laugh echoes

through the entire floor, but it barely penetrates the tense bubble Steve and I were trapped in. His blue eyes scan over my face, an unreadable expression on his as he finally settles on a small nodmuch to my relief.

"You ready?" He asks, dropping the topic.

"Definitely not." He smiles at my words, leading me down the short hallway and into a large open room with a kitchen, a bar, a dining table and a living room where most of the team were plastered. Natasha on the couch by James and Vision, Sam on an armchair and Wanda by the window, looking out. Even Maria was there by the bar, conversing with a man I assume to be Tony Stark, dressed to the nines with a perfectly pressed suit and a glass of champagne in his hand.

"Tony." Steve remarks, earning the man's attention along with Maria, who eyed me instantly.

"Is this her?" Tony motions to me, taking a sip from his glass before setting it down and approaching us. Steve o ers a quick nod, moving aside to fully reveal me.

"This is... underwhelming My apologies I just expected you to be more... threatening." Tony shrugs nonchalantly, arrogance dripping from every inch of him as he swi ly removes his glasses, folding it to hang upon the collar of his inner shirt.

"She took on a whole level by herself. Wiped out—" Steve began, instantly coming to my defense with his hands in his pockets as Tony stretches a hand out to me.

"Twenty men, yeah I've heard. Impressive. I mean, if you ask me it's a little over dramatic but impressive nonetheless." Tony promptly cuts him o , noticing the way I stood my ground, merely glancing down at his anticipating hand.

"Twenty five men." I sarcastically correct, silence taking over as Tony shamelessly scans me from head to toe before his hand falls back to his side.

"I like this one." He claims, stepping around me and taking a seat on the couch next to Maria.

"Told you it'd be fine." Steve whispers to me, nodding over for me to follow him towards the rest of the group who all took turns spewing out a quick greeting or acknowledgement— all aside from Wanda who made sure to keep her eyes trained out the window.

"So what's your... thing?" Tony crosses a leg over the other, a glass back in his hand as his eyes settle on me. "My thing?" I reiterate flatly, taking the spot next to Steve and Maria.

"Yeah— your party trick. I have a suit of iron, Clint's got his arrow things and Cap's got an overrated moral compass. What's your thing?" Tony reeks of confidence, his hard gaze unfaltering from mine

as the conversation around us dies down to listen in. "Regeneration and... strength." I reply against my wishes, realizing

there was no way out of that intolerable interaction. "Regeneration? So you're like a homicidal starfish?" Tony practically mocks, his brows raised in curiosity as I try to calm my irritation.

"Tony." Steve chimes in, trying to cut through the tension.

"What? I'm just intrigued. If, per se, your arm gets chopped o . Does it grow back?" He animatedly asks, brushing o all regard for comfort on my end.

"It's never happened before." I reply coldly as Tony groans, by that point all eyes were on us, watching, anticipating the outcome of such a densely hostile conversation.

"Oh come on, hypothetically then. What do you think would happen?" Tony pushes relentlessly, clearly foreign to sensitivity as my eyes find Natasha, who sends me a small smile of reassurance.

"It would probably grow back." I sigh, sinking back into my seat as Steve o ers me a beer, which i promptly accept because if I were to make it through the night, it most definitely was not going to be sober.

"Interesting. How old are you?" Tony asks, seemingly o the top of his head as I began to wonder if that man had even an inch of a filter on his brain.

"Twenty two." "And you worked for HYDRA?" He questions, his words garnering even Wanda's attention as Natasha clears her throat. I subtly sti en in place, dwindling into distress of a topic I wasn't quite used to

discussing so casually. "More drinks anyone?" Natasha cuts in, her words followed by a string of awkward answers that fill the deafening silence between Tony and I.

"Why do you have so many questions?" Unable to hold my tongue under Tony's evidently hypercritical gaze, the words slip out.

"Well, you're staying in my building. Wearing my clothes, eating my food, sitting on my furniture. I think I get a pass on some harmless questions." He replies without missing a beat, a condescending smile on his lips as he brings his glass up for another sip.

I do the same.

"Yes. I worked for HYDRA." I reply begrudgingly, my stone cold glare unmasked and out for everyone to see. "Why?" Tony nonchalantly throws, the anticipation radiating o of

everyone in the room. Natasha returns at that exact moment, handing out a few beers as she settles onto her seat.

"Tony, ease up." Natasha sighs, an apologetic look smeared across her features as Tony looks genuinely ba led. "Did I strike a nerve?" He asks me, condescension swimming in his tone as I plaster on a sarcastic smile. Two can play at this game, a er all I never liked losing.

"No, It's totally fine. Since I'm such an interesting topic to all of you, I worked for HYDRA to save my family. Y'know- the whole my life in return for theirs. I'm sure you're familiar with such nobility, Mr. Stark' I spew casually as the entire room falls into a thick silence. Natasha was the only one who knew, assuming by the exchanges of realization and confused looks, it was news to everybody else.

"Must have been a great family." Tony remarks as all emotion drains from his face, swi ly veering his attention to somebody else in the blink of an eye. Soon enough, conversation began to flow once more as I sat, reserved to myself and humming along dejectedly once in a while.

Steve would nudge me sometimes, looking to check if I was alright as Natasha did the same, doing her best to include me in the conversation as casually as she could but undeniably, I wasn't in the most chipper mood to socialize. I excuse myself about an hour in, retreating to the bar and opting for a much stronger drink than just a few bottles of beer. As i scavenge the cupboards for glasses, I feel a

presence join me. "Shall I assist you?" Vision says from right next to me, donning a simple sweater over his smooth, crimson layer and peering over my

shoulder while I pull out a glass. "I'm fine, if that's why you're here." I sigh, eyes scanning over the array of choices laid out onto the counter. I really had no energy to prove myself to any of them, to reassure their fragile egos that I could take a few arrogant jabs in stride.

"He is... not a very sensitive man." Vision states thoughtfully, eyes lingering onto Tony as I pour myself a full glass of the most expensive looking bottle of bourbon I could find. Surely, Tony wouldn't mind. "Yeah, I noticed." I chuckle bitterly, downing the liquor in one go. It

leaves a burning trail in my throat, the warmth spreading within as I refill the empty glass before me. "Can you drink?" I hum, curiously looking to Vision who promptly

shakes his head. "I don't require sustenance." He replies.

"So you don't eat? Not even... motor oil or something?" I feel the buzz kicking in as i knock back another glass, watching as his eyes widen at my actions.

"Well, no. That doesn't sound appetizing. Are you alright?" Genuine concern shines through him, glancing between the bottle and I with an anticipative gaze. I guess robots have feelings nowadays.

"I'm fine— have you never been to a party? This is what people do. They get wasted." I move to pour myself another glass but Vision halts my movements, his hand settling upon my own, barely touching but still there nonetheless.

"I suppose alcohol and high tensions don't mix well. You should give this another thought." He warns, hands parting from mine as I only release another bitter laugh. Oh how unpredictable life could be, one

day i'd be looking through the scope of a sniper rifle and the next i'd be getting advice from a robot. "Here's a thought for you, buddy. Leave me alone. I'd rather get this

night over with and this—" I hold up the bottle of bourbon, the brown liquid thrashing within the crystal casing as I shook it mockingly by his face.

"Will speed up the process."

"If you insist." Vision gives in, sending me a cordial smile before walking away; leaving me to the liquor and the thoughts I was trying to drown out.

"Kind of harsh, don't you think?" Natasha then approaches, right as I finish my third glass without a flinch. She's got a beer in her hand, leaning against the counter and watching me pour myself another drink.

"I'd like to see him cry. I've got a theory that his tears are made of jet fuel or something." I stifle a slurred laugh, my words sparking Natasha's amusement as I take another large gulp. I was going too fast for my limit, but that was the plan anyway. To not remember. "You and Thor would get along; maybe you'd even outdrink him."

Natasha hums so ly, bringing the bottle to her lips and taking a swig as I set my glass down. The sensation washes over me, the tingling in my fingertips, the

warmth spreading to my cheeks, Natasha's voice echoing in my ear. I'm beginning to think I should have done this sooner, everybody was a lot less annoying when I was tipsy— and it feels less miserable being stuck there.

"Thor... hammer guy? The Blondie? I've seen him on the news. He looks greasy; do they have shampoo where he comes from?" At that point my thoughts were quite literally spilling out, my filter dissolving in a sea of alcohol and desperation— much to Natasha's amusement

of course. "He likes you, y'know. Tony." Natasha says casually, nodding over to the group who was laughing about something out of earshot.

"He likes me? I'd love to see how is with people he doesn't like. Smug son of a bitch." I roll my eyes, finishing whatever was le of my glass as Natasha chuckles.

"That's just who he is. Don't take it personally." She says with a shrug, seemingly finishing her own drink as well as she goes to grab another bottle from the fridge.

"What you have here... you're all very close." I point out, earning Natasha's attention instantly as she hums in confirmation. From where I stood, they just looked like a bunch of friends who were out

for a drink. If i didn't know any better, maybe even family. "We've been through a lot together... and separately. I think that's what makes it work, that we've all got demons." Natasha replies, a small smile on her face as she looks upon them as well from right by

my side. "I used to want that." It slips out before I could even stop it, the

alcohol smoothening the way for my emotions to spill through my fingers.

"Want what?" Natasha asks so ly. "Family."

When she looks at me, concern and sadness in her eyes, it almost hits me like a punch to the gut— the reality of my words— the vulnerability it held. My insides turn of regret, churning

uncomfortably like I've done something entirely wrong and I was on the verge of breaking apart. Without another word, I bid Natasha a quick goodbye, leaving her no time to call out for me as i make a beeline down the hall and step into an open elevator.

My sight was blurred, spinning beyond coherency as I struggle to focus on the buttons. With a slurred Hail Mary and impaired

judgement, I close my eyes and press a button only to hope it was the right one. My body felt heavy, like everything inside me hung lazily upon my bones. The metal doors open to a hallway, one that looks just like every other hallway in the building— which was annoying, by the way. It was hard enough to find a way around sober, by then it was practically impossible to figure out if I was even close to being on

the right floor. I stumble out of the carrier, trying to steady my vision enough not to trip over myself and land on my face. A er a few minutes of wandering and severely intoxicated exhaustion, I turn around and decide to just occupy one of the rooms-hoping it would be some

empty supply closet or o ice. At that point, I was desperate to just lay down and possibly shake o the throbbing pain shooting through my skull.

Then from a distance, I hear music. Without a second thought, my feet gravitate towards the soundgoing against my better judgement I find myself standing outside a door, the sound seeping through the cracks, mu led by the barrier that I so harshly pull open. All at once, the sound of the television wraps around the silence as my eyes lock onto a... sitcom?

"What are you doing here?" Wanda questions in surprise, curled up at the base of her bed and looking at me like I had three heads. Well, I did find a room.

"Is that a sitcom?" I reply, looking back to the television and completely disregarding her previous question. Sober me would have

bolted, turned on my heel without another word. My brain was screaming for me to, every inch of me begging me to go, warning me with desperation.

I wanted to be alone, is what I told myself. I wanted to be in my room, to lay down and close my eyes and feel the world spin o Its axis right beneath me. But against all that's pleading for me to do what's right, I step inside- much to Wanda's irritation. I walk in, sit on the ground by the foot of her bed with my knees curled up to my chest and my eyes locked onto the television before me, playing a black and white sitcom filled to the brim with fake laugh tracks and sequences I

couldn't quite understand. I want to be alone, so why couldn't I leave?

care, I couldn't find it in me to.

"Why are you here?" Wanda tries again, unmoving from her spot. Her words float right through me, like all I had was the wind and the sound of cheesy monologues and bad jokes. "What show is this?" I hum out loud, probably too loud but I didn't

"Dick Van Dyke." Wanda replies in a defeated sigh.

"Hmm. Dick." A giggle slips through my lips; the vibrations shaking through me like they weren't even my own. I could hear the duvet

sitting at the foot of her bed as her knees level with my head.

"Are you drunk?" She questions, her curious gaze trained on me.

shi from behind me and soon enough, Wanda was right next to me,

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"I'm sorry." I say with all the honesty I could muster, hoping that when the sun begins to rise once more- I'd be brave enough to mean it sober.

the same chance. That's why." She says, torturous sincerity pooling in her eyes. "Nat?" I croak out, deviating from her gaze as she hums for me to

continue.

never thought I'd have— not in a million years. I have a family, those guys up there, those smug assholes are family. I wanted to give you

words as quickly as i'd like. "Before I worked with SHIELD, before I joined this team— I was an assassin. I was trained and raised in something called the Red Room. I was the one that presented the mission at your base— to find you. A long time ago someone did the same for me and I found something I

her—like every word came with an ugly visual that tore her apart. đ "She— raised you" I stammer, unable to comprehend Natasha's

ramble, panic lingering behind my tone as Natasha places a gentle hand on mine, squeezing so ly to halt my downward spiral. "I know what happened to you. I know what they did— I know HYDRA sent you away. I know who trained you... because she raised me" Natasha reveals in a single breath, the most pained I had ever seen

"Tell you what?" Natasha almost whispers, distress peeking through her expression as my mind struggles to continue. "Why you took me. Why you're trying to help me. I need to— I don't understand any of this. I don't know why I'm here-- I don't--" I

"Can you please tell me why?" I shakily utter, facade shattered and out for her too see.

shi to sit up, back pressed against the headboard as I release my grip— which was probably harsher than I intended even though it didn't show on Natasha's face.

Then of course, my impulses weren't finished because I find my hand wrapped around Natasha's wrist, eyes wide open just to see her concern ridden face as Steve steps out with a small nod. Natasha resumes her place, settling back down upon the side of the bed as I

"Nat- maybe we should go." Steve sighs from farther away as I feel the weight li o of the bed.

"Lexa? What happened up there?" Natasha's voice fill the air around me, a dip in the bed following her words. My eyes were tightly shut, brows furrowed in pain-trying to numb the downpour my thoughts were putting me through.

me as I lay there in his arms, defeated and burnt with the fire I willingly set for myself. Being in that room with Wanda was the most dangerous thing I had ever done, the only time I walked away in pieces-pieces I broke o myself. I feel the mattress press against my back as Steve gently slips his arms away, leaving me to sink above a world that was hell bent on leaving me behind.

weak, stomach turning with Wanda's words echoing inside me. It would have made a di erence to me. Before I knew it, Steve's arms were beneath my legs, swi ly carrying me with ease as I feel myself go limp. It wasn't the alcohol anymore, at least I don't think so. It was everything, all at once, taking shots at

supportive grip under each side of my arms. "We've been looking everywhere for you." Steve sighs, leaning over to motion something at Natasha, who promptly lets go. My knees grow

But Wanda was falling apart too, in her own way and I had no place, at least not there so before my body could betray me, my hand grips the knob and I step out in a single breath, without looking back, afraid that if I did, I'd see her face and sink into place. I couldn't a ord that, I couldn't deserve that. Not now, maybe not ever too. I feel like I've taken a million punches to the chest, with bruises that won't heal as I stumble down the hall in a frantic state. My eyes are burning, head throbbing with a shooting pain when Steve and Natasha spot me from another end, instantly jogging to my aid as they both place a

"It would have made a di erence to me." She whispers ever so so ly, almost inaudibly as the door lock clicks open. There's a split second - a split second where i'm waiting for more, to hear more, for her to say more.

Just like before.

"It wouldn't have made a di erence, Wanda. I'm still me, only less veiled." I croak out, torn and pained as silence engulfs us both. I could feel every inch of me beginning to mellow out, weaken like jelly coming undone at the tightness in my chest.

tightly. I should have never come. But why don't I want to go?

"Please open the door." I breathe out as the alcohol slowly wanes away, the clarity of my weakness taunting me more and more with every passing second. "Why didn't you tell us? About the deal- I said things about you... about your family. If I knew-" Wanda rambles in a panic, voice closer than before as my heart continues to sink into Its depths. I step forward, resting my head on the surface of the door as my eyes shut

"I... should go." I scramble to my feet, distress aching through every inch of me as Wanda promptly rises to her feet. When I'm only steps away from the door, it slams shut with a fleeting gust of red that shakes the room, and even me. "Wait." Wanda pleads, stopping me in my tracks.

This one just happened to have green eyes and magic. "What?"

path through my throat. The only problem was, there was still a part of me that found peace in the agony and it came in many, many forms.

"I'm sorry." It physically hurt to say, like every syllable le a scorching

her hands, harshly rubbing her temples.

spewing out the first thought that pops in without much regard for my better judgement, which was entirely frustrating and... serene, all at once. "Sometimes. It's not like... you're lying, anyway." She finally breaks her silence, elbows resting upon her knees as she settles her face in

"Is it... because of me?" My tongue was severely betraying my brain,

the ground as her hands go to fiddle with the rings that were no longer on her fingers, so she ends up intertwining them instead.

came with being in a restricted area, every step, every view was plagued by dangerous wonder, never knowing what to expect in every corner. "What hurts you?" She tenses up at my bluntness, eyes dropping to

That moment almost felt illegal, like I was seeing something I knew I wasn't supposed to. It had the air of caution and uncertainty that

just a size too big. If I didn't know any better, she looked like a harmless puppy out in the cold. Her hair was lazily tied into a bun, exhaustion sweeping her features as I struggle to tear my eyes away.

She looked frail, small and weak, slouched in defeat beneath her tan cardigan, wrapped tightly around her and hanging past her fingertips,

"Because I'm not happy." She sighs, turning to face the television while my eyes stay on her.

through my sentence, struggling to form it into something that resembled coherency.

twitching into a furrow as she sat stunned, at a loss. "The... the show is funny- why aren't you laughing?" I stumble

consciousness that wasn't doused in liquor was thrashing within, begging me to stop. Wanda looks surprised by my words, brows

"Maybe. Are you sober?" I turn to meet her eyes; a lazy smile plastered on my lips as uncertainty sweeps her features. The laugh track fills the silence in painful irony, because she wasn't laughing. She didn't even look happy, not one bit.

"Why aren't you happy?" I knew I'd regret it when I came to, the small