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We had been walking for hours. I was starting to think Lara had no idea where we were going. All there was— all there had been for the past few hours were trees and dirt and nothingness. The sun was peeking through the branches, shining down on us as we tread through what felt like a never ending forest. It's been days since we le the compound and Lara said she knew how to get to The Corrector, or at least how to find her. So far, we've stolen a car, a bike and snuck onto a ferry and still— we were getting nowhere. It's been days since i've even had a proper

shower— or eaten something that wasn't out of a street cart where Lara threatened to slit the vendor's throat. We were plastered on the news by now, o icially and loudly wanted by probably every security organization under the sun and having our faces posted on every security organization.

faces posted on every news channel and paper drove us out of going through the city. So here we were, treading through the woods like fugitives, but I guess we were merely staying true to the role given to us.

"Do you even know where you're going?" I hu , my eyes firm on the ground trying to avoid protruding roots that have nicked my foot many, many times. Too many for me to comfortably admit without feeling like an idiot.

"She said to meet near here so just shut up and move." Lara groans, both of us drenched in sweat and fatigue as we continue deeper into the trees.

"I'm just saying, it really seems like you're lost." I mumble, grabbing on from trunk to trunk just to help keep my momentum.

"I'm not lost!" She snaps, irritation dripping from her tone as I follow closely behind.

"We've been walking for hours." I argue, honestly— I knew I was getting on her nerves but a screaming match was much more eventful than silence. I just needed a little something to keep this journey interesting.

"You know, for someone willing to die— you complain a lot." Lara fires back, sharply glancing at me over her shoulder.

"I'm not complaining. I'm pointing out an observation." I reply, keeping as much of my focus as I can on where i'm stepping as Lara

releases a tired groan. "It's a shitty observation." She mumbles, irritated and tired as she suddenly comes to a halt.

I don't notice her stopping immediately, so I nearly crash into her back— but i'm able to stop myself before we actually touch. She's looking up at something, so I follow her line of sight to find a small cabin. It really looks like the kind you'd find in horror movies with cobwebs up on the ceiling corners, dark, murky wood and gas lamps for illumination. It was pretty small, looking like it was only meant to

accommodate two people as Lara goes up towards it. "That's where we're staying?" I ask, lightly trying to catch my breath as Lara continues up the slope that led to the cabin. "We only have an hour of surlicht be the

"We only have an hour of sunlight le . If you wanna stay out here and be a feast for bears or something then be my guest. I'm staying there." Lara replies amidst little grunts, still treading up as I follow begrudgingly. I guess she did have a point, staying inside was probably better than whatever the woods had to o er me a er sundown.

I muster up enough strength, and willpower to get up the slope, surprisingly without eating the ground. Lara was first to reach the cabin, cautiously tipping the door open with her foot before peering inside.

"What are you doing?" I ask, finally coming up behind her as she carefully peeks her head inside to look around. "I'm looking out." She whispers, she looked so focused I almost wanted to laugh.

"For what? Possums?" I question in amusement, raising a brow as she snaps back to look at me flatly.

"People, dumbass." She hu s. "People? Look at this place. You seriously think anyone would squat here? Even a rat wouldn't." I move past her, walking inside to find I was right. It was completely abandoned, the only source of light being the rays of the sun peeking through the busted windows.

"You are unbelievable." Lara groans, walking inside as well while I curiously roam through the space. Everything was covered in dust, a small dining table still peppered with open cans and used plates that donned a crust even I couldn't recognize. There was a small fireplace, but no firewood. The sofa was

patched, old and ripped in some parts while the single bedroom the whole cabin held was a mess. The bunk bed frame inside was rotted, caving in on itself. There was

an old, thick TV with an expectedly broken screen and a chair in the corner with a jacket hung over it, covered heavily in dust. It looked like it's been decades since that cabin was inhabited and don't even get me started on the smell that seeped even into the little bathroom. Actually, the bathroom wasn't too bad. The tiles were a little worn,

but it actually looked useable. "We're going to need fire. I'll look for some outside." Lara calls out, heading for the door when I practically bolt to block her way.

"Oh no. You're not going anywhere." I shake my head, watching as irritation floods her features once again. "What now?" She grumbles, but I knew better than to let her leave

without supervision. I wasn't that stupid- anymore. "How do I know you're not going to just take o and leave me here?" I

question sharply, raising a brow as Lara deadpans. "Are you fucking stupid? Where would I go? Huh? If I wanted to leave your ass, I would have done it on the first day. Plus, i'd never miss a chance to watch you get what you deserve so move or we'll both freeze to death in an hour." She barrels past me with a hu , walking out the front door.

It was the most we had spoken in days, really. You'd think that if two people were on the run then it would be a perfect scenario for team building but Lara was adamant on keeping her emotional distance. All she did was bark orders, or take matters into her own hands while I watched.

Maybe it was for the best, i've practically made her my own personal escort to death. I wanted to finish what I started, whatever the cost. I knew the moment I stood in that bathroom with Wanda— that she'd be next. If not her, Natasha— or Steve or James or Vision. Anyone who would ever try to protect me, would be engulfed in the flames. Sure, I was still hurt. I was still angry for what they had put me

through but i'm out of the place in my head that was willing to let the world burn with me. They may not be my family, but they're Wanda's and i'd be damned if I let anything happen to any of them. I'm doing it for her, for everyone who needs them— even if the mere thought of their faces break my heart this has gone too far and I'm the only one

who can end it. While Lara was out doing god-knows-what, I spent my time trying to tidy up. It was a miracle I didn't choke on all the dust, or that the faucet on the sinks still work. I used some of the le over clothes in the bedroom to wipe surfaces, even going as far as to toss out the trash. When Lara came back, most of the small living room was

adequate enough to be in without constantly inhaling dust. She tossed the wood into the fireplace, sitting in front of it trying to start a fire with the little gasoline she found laying around and surprisingly, she did. By the time the fire was roaring, the sky outside was dark and the air was cold. Lara kept her place by the fire, sitting on the ground just staring at the flames while I le her to take a much needed shower. When I was finished, she was still in the same spot

with an empty look in her eyes. Not wanting to cause much disruption, I just silently settled myself down right next to her. I expected her to berate me— or to scramble to get away from me, but she doesn't. She just gives me a quick glance, then turns back to the fire. Neither of us really wanted to talk and I was more than exhausted, honestly, I was just happy she wasn't making a thing out of it.

The only problem was when silence came, when we weren't constantly running or trying to survive, my mind only wanders back to one thing— or one person. With my arms draped over my knees, the light of the fire cast the perfect glint on the ring that was still on my finger. The ring Wanda gave, the ring that held a lifetime's worth of happiness.

I think about her all the time, I never really stopped. Every moment my mind had a chance, it would float back to her. To say I missed her was an understatement, even when it hurt to even think about her waking up to an empty bed and a letter on the nightstand.

I could already see her face, the panic in her eyes, her scrambling to

Natasha for answers. I know I broke my promises, I could only hope she understood that I had to. I had to go when she couldn't watch me walk away, when she couldn't say my name— or reach out to touch me because I would crumble. I would fall to my knees and let her hold me and never let go.

"I heard you." Lara breaks the silence, her voice was so faint it coul have le with the wind.

I would give up everything for her, and I did.

I turn to her, my movements stilling as she keeps her eyes on the flames. Her hands were pressed to the ground behind her back, legs outstretched as her face masked any and all emotion.

"When I passed out, I woke up to you screaming at those doctors. I heard everything you said." She sighs, the first words she had ever spoken to me that wasn't completely laced with resentment or irritation.

"Why do you still do this? I hate you. I hate you and you know it. You know I wouldn't hesitate to kill you if I could, but over and over again you still call me your sister. You're still on this— this desperate attempt at redemption." She says, never moving to look my way as she spoke.

"I don't know if you're delusional or just... pathetic." She breathes. "I tell you every time. You just don't believe me." I hum, turning to mimic her position as I look back to the fire.

"How could you still love me a er everything? Can't you see i'm not the same? I'm not who you le behind and yet you still— you still look at me like i'm curled up in the corner of your room waiting for you to save me. Don't you ever get exhausted?" She asks, I can feel her looking at me now, her emotionless tone faltering through the cracks of her frustration as a small, quaint smile places itself onto my lips.

"I've given up on everything in my life, Lara. I've broken all of these promises— i've broken all of these people. If I give you up, then what's le of me?" I meet her eyes, my heart laid out on my sleeve as she looks back at me with a look I couldn't figure out.

"I know you're not who you were. I never— the moment I realized what happened, I understood. But I promised you i'd come back for you, I promised you that I would never stop loving you and I haven't. I won't." I say so ly, wondering if she could feel the way my heart was

sinking. "Maybe I am pathetic, delusional even— but you're the only part of me that has ever been worth saving. Even now, even a er everything." She looks away like she's been burned, subtly wincing as she snaps back to the flames but I keep my eyes on her. I do, because for the first time in a long time I feel like I can actually see her.

"You're going to kill yourself so i'd forgive you." She points out,

stating more than questioning as I shake my head. "I'm not a er your forgiveness. I can love you even when you despise me, because that's what love is. I would tear the world apart for you knowing you would never do the same and it'd be okay— i'd be okay." I explain, meaning every word that falls from my lips. I was so tired of lies, of deceit— I was so tired of living behind a wall of fear and masked emotions.

"I'm doing this— to end it. To end whatever war I unknowingly started. It's the only way the people I love can live a life they deserve, free of all the pain, all the burden—" I say, trying to keep my tone from shaking even when my bones ached with every passing second.

"—free of you?" She cuts me o , her question tracing the delicate air as she turns to me. If I didn't know any better, i'd say there were tears in her eyes. But it was probably just from the smog.

"Yeah, Free of me," I nod.

"I thought for a while that I could fix it. I thought... maybe I could find a way to undo everything, to untangle the knots, to be good. It's funny, that I ever believed I could be anything good in this life. Looking back at it, I guess I knew I was living a lie but... it was a nice dream. I just didn't want to wake up from it." I sigh, my arms falling to my sides as I scoot back enough to rest against the body of the couch just a few inches behind us.

"The only reason I went with Natasha— with the team, was because they promised me you. I thought you were dead, but she told me you weren't. Made me believe there was a way for me to find you again. I remember thinking ' This is it. I have a chance'so I said, fuck it. I'll see where this leads." I recall, the bittersweet memory flooding back to me.

Natasha's cautious voice, her standing next to me in a hallway littered with bodies that I took down and yet she still spoke to me like I was somewhat human. Even if it was all a lie on her end— the way I felt was real.

"I watched them. The ' heroes in action. It was ironic, that I stayed under the same roof as a bunch of people I was told i'd have to kill someday. I thought it was pathetic, swore i'd never be like any of them who tried so hard to be good. To do good. I didn't care for any of it, I only wanted you." I chuckle bitterly, shaking my head at the memories. All the nights I spent critically looming over them, wondering how anyone could care so much for someone else, even at their own expense.

"At the start, they were just a ticket. Once I had you, i'd let them burn without a care in the world but the longer I stayed— they treated me like a person, Lara. It was so strange because I could feel things I never did before. I felt like... I was getting better. I had this silly hope that maybe you'd see it, that i'm di erent too, in my own way. That i'm better." I looked to Lara, who was peering back at me over her shoulder.

"I felt like if I kept going, if I kept fighting to be good then maybe you'd look at me the way you used to but i'm... i'm tired of fighting. I'm awake now, I know that the only way I could ever make things right is through this." I sigh, hanging my head back to keep my tears from spilling.

"I fucked up as your sister in this lifetime, but if I get the chance again — in some other universe, I hope you know I never would have le your side. Not even for a second. I would choose you, over and over until my last breath." I shakily mumble, unable to hide the crack in my voice as Lara shi s to move herself back, mimicking my position until she rests her torso against the sofa.

"Whoever you were, whoever you are and whoever you'll be... I love you. I'm going to make things right for you, I promise." I take a deep breath, finally feeling like i'm able to contain my tears as I turn to look at her.

She's already watching me, tears silently streaming down her face that takes me by surprise. She snaps away, turning to look at the fire as she incessantly wipes her eyes, the frustration in her movements was spilling from her fingertips— like she hated that she was crying,

or she hated that I saw. I don't say a word, I don't pull her in even if my bones ached to wrap my arms around her. This was enough, it was enough. My hand travels to my ring, eyes dropping to it too as I sigh so ly. Everything was hurting again, ringing in my ears. I try to focus on the ring, on Wanda, on her cool green eyes or her smooth voice telling me everything will be okay.

"Which one is she?" Lara asks, her voice hoarse and still flat— but there was something di erent. A very distant spark.

"Hmm?" I ask, my fingers stilling on the ring as her eyes travel to it. "The one who gave you that. Which one is she?" Lara asks, looking right at the ring as I try to act as nonchalant as possible at this...

surprisingly mundane question. "Wanda... Maximo ." I clear my throat, watching as her brows li ever

so slightly. "The one with the... red thing?" She asks, making a move with her hands that only looks a lot like she's being electrocuted. I try to stifle a laugh, even if I feel like I was choking on my own air because I was

trying not to break such a delicate moment. "Yeah. The one with the red thing. It's magic, or at least looks like it." I hum, trying to be casual despite my heart swelling at our completely

underwhelming conversation. "You love her?" She asks a er a few moments of silence, sounding

completely unsure of the words that fell from her lips. "I do. A lot." I nod, unable to hide the smile that crawls onto my lips.

To merely say I love her may be the biggest understatement of the year. I could spend a thousand nights just talking about all that I feel — all that she is, but even that wouldn't do it justice. My words would never be enough to encompass the way I love her, and maybe the way she loved me too.

"A lot? That's it?" She raises a brow, looking at me curiously as I smile down at the ring on my finger.

"Maybe... if I loved her a little less, then it'd be simpler to talk about." I hum, twisting the metal that hugged the base of my finger. I wonder if she knew I was talking about her, I wonder if she was thinking

about me. "That's disgusting." Lara hums, shaking her head as a laugh slips from

my lips. "I bet."

She just sits there, both of us do— maybe it was all I could have ever asked for from her. Just this one moment, one normal moment of us just talking before things turn to shit once again because it was going

to, I could feel it. You know that whole 'calm before the storm' moment people talk

about, how you just know when things are toogood, tooquiet and

you know something is about to happen. It's exactly like that. I think Lara knew it as well, because we sat there just staring at each other a glint of grief in both our faces and for a moment, I could see us as kids. Her and I, in this exact position in our Seattle living room. The floor

littered with paints, crayons, crumpled paper with every color under the sun smeared onto it except there— we were smiling. The TV would be playing some random channel and we'd be smiling, we'd be happy in our own little world.

The way things change can be heartbreaking and head spinning. It was almost bittersweet, the contrast of it all. We were together again, sitting on the ground by a fire. Both of us a little bit older and both of us a lot more broken than we used to be. The scars on her face, her arms and the ones in my heart were just the same.

Maybe she was thinking what I was, because I was wondering how we got to this. We were just kids in a shitty home, with shitty parents who never cared about our days or if we were alright. We were just kiss with our lives ahead of us and yet here we are, in a cabin in the middle of nowhere as everything around us burns to ash.

"You should get some rest. I uh– cleaned the couch. Well, as clean as it could get. I'll stay here." I speak up, fearing that if this goes on any longer it'll shatter too, so i'll end it while it's still good. While I still have something good to remember.

"Oh, yeah. Yeah." She looks conflicted, reluctantly scrambling to her feet as she glances between me and the couch.

"Don't worry, I won't smother you in your sleep." I o er her a small smile, and she hesitantly places herself onto the couch. Without another word, she lays down, curling up into herself with her back to me as I take a breath.

"Good night, Lexa." She whispers. It was so faint, so so that I catch it only by a hair, by the last few syllables as a smile etches to my lips. "Good night."

And so that's what happens, she falls asleep and I stare at the crackling fire. I couldn't find it in myself to sink into slumber, even when every bit of me was exhausted. Every time I closed my eyes, my mind would run a million miles a minute and I'd feel like the walls were closing in again. So I just sat there, a hand on my ring and my eyes to the fire, pretending like Wanda was in my head, like she could hear me, feel me.

It was barely sunrise when the front door flew open, the skies painted a dim shade of blue when Estelle walks in. Lara jumps awake, scrambling as our eyes turn to the blonde. She was dressed in all black, from her skin tight sweater to her cargo pants. Her hair was

neatly tied into a ponytail as keys dangle from her fingers. "It's cozy, but not my style." Estelle hums, walking around as her eyes scan our surroundings. Her accent was still pretty prominent, the thud of her boots against the creaky floorboards mixing into the air as

Lara and I rise to our feet. "Unusual place to have a reunion, no?" She asks, turning to me before moving to look at Lara. She makes a face of disgust, her perfectly manicured nails pointing at my sister as she shakes her

head.

"You look like shit. Is there no shower here? Go clean up. I'm not driving with your stench in the car." She barks at Lara, who looks like she was contemplating ripping Estelle's head o and honestly, I was too.

"Don't talk to her like that." I seethe, and she flashes me a beaming smile before slipping the dagger out from her one of her pockets. "Or what?" She hums lightly, and Lara storms out of the room to head to the showers. She walks around the couch, coming to a stop inches away from me as she brings the blade up to press beneath my chin. "You are in for a treat, mon amour" She chuckles so ly, dropping the knife back to slip inside her pocket before leaning to drag a finger over the surface of the couch. She makes a face, inspecting the light collection of dust before shrugging and taking a seat.

I really can't believe I ever found this woman attractive. "So what are you? Some sort of puppet for The Corrector?" I spit

bitterly, walking over to the kitchen sink for a quick splash to my face. If I was going to endure a car ride with her, i'd need more than a splash. Actually, drowning myself in murky water would be more appealing. I'm not sure if she was just entirely dierent from when we first met, or this has been who she is all along and i've just been too blind to see it.

"You make me sound so weak, darling. I'm merely... a follower. A believer of the sorts." She replies smoothly, so casually. "You sound deranged. Actually, you sound Catholic." I fire back,

running a damp hand through my hair as I take a breath. "Say what you will. This is all a means to an end, you'll understand what I mean soon." She hums, rising from her seat to head around the

couch, leaning against the back of it as she watches me. "What belief are you even talking about? What do I have to do with

this?" I ask, my frustration seeping through as she smiles at me again. I swear, every time she smiles I feel absolutely sick. af "That some abominations need to be corrected, of course. Save your questions for a more... adequate person. I'm merely the transporter." She shrugs, crossing her arms over her chest as Lara walks out, hair damp and lightly dripping as a scowl is painted onto her lips.

"Perfect. Let's go." Estelle happily hums, twirling the keys on her finger before promptly walking out. Lara and I exchange a look, both of us releasing a so sigh before trailing a er the blonde. "You know you could have greeted me with more excitement, mon

amour A er all, we do have history." Estelle calls out, just a few steps ahead as we tread through the trees once again. Lara snaps to me, eyes wide and quite frankly, horrified as she subtly moves closer. "You dated?" She whispers in disbelief, motioning to Estelle as I

shook my head. God, even if I had the chance I don't think i'd last a day with someone like that. I'd never get a good night's sleep— and I don't mean that in a good way.

"No— it was just... y'know." I whisper awkwardly, trying to motion my hands so I don't actually have to say it out loud. Sleeping with Estelle isn't exactly on my list of my proudest moments.

"You had sexwith her?" Lara nearly exclaims, eyes wide as I wish for the ground to open up and swallow me whole.

"It was a one time thing! I was lonely!" I argue in a sharp whisper, but she's only cringing at me and shaking her head like some kind of disappointed parent.

"I can hear you." Estelle sings, all of us nearing a clearing that led to an empty road. "Oh please, don't act like you didn't enjoy yourself." She adds,

leading us to a large, four seater, jet black pick-up truck as Lara groans loudly, begging for silence.

Estelle unlocks the doors and I go to open the passenger side until Estelle grabs me by the wrist, stilling my movements as I look up at her in surprise.

"Lara in the front. I trust her more." Estelle smirks, and I yank my hand away harshly before moving to swing open the back seat. We all climb into the vehicle, the smell of cigarettes and vanilla instantly hitting my nose as Estelle turns the ignition. The first few hours of the drive were spent in silence, mostly just the hum of the

radio and the heavy atmosphere that surrounded us. Estelle drove us deeper into the woods, actively avoiding large cities as most of what passed us by were tall trees or vast fields.

All I could really think of the entire time was how every second took me farther from Wanda. How I wished to have seen all of this, the fields and flowers and running, clear skies with her. She would have loved it. She would have put on some old song, rolled the windows down and flowers would have bloomed everywhere we went.

But here I am, sitting in the back of a pick-up feeling like a prisoner. Maybe if I close my eyes, I could pretend she was right next to me. That she was holding my hand, or resting her head on my lap. It

would have been a good dream— an amazing dream. "It never is easy with you, is it?" Estelle's voice pulls me from my head, snapping me towards her as she meets my eyes through the

rear view. "What?" I ask, watching as Lara moves over to look back— to look beyond me.

I turn around, my heart nearly dropping out of my chest when my eyes land on another car hot on our trail and of course, behind the

wheel was Natasha. Anger spikes through me as I watch her, because why couldn't she just let me go? Why couldn't she understand I was trying to fix it? Her being here, is the one place in the whole world I didn't want to see her. "We have a tail." Estelle points out, reaching over to pop open the

glove compartment and tossing me a gun. It falls to my lap harshly, my eyes horrified as I look at her in surprise.

"No. No. You can outrun her. I'm not shooting." I seethe, but before I could protest even more Estelle slips the dagger from her pockets and swi ly brings the tip of the blade to press against Lara's neck. "Either you shoot, or I push. It's your call." Estelle smirks, a hand on the wheel as her eyes meet mine through the rear view.

"What the fuck." Lara growls at her, but she's frozen and the same deranged look in Estelle's eyes was swimming menacingly.

The look in her eyes— the same one she had when she plunged the dagger into my chest just a few days ago. She was going to do it, and

even if she wasn't, i'm not willing to take the risk. So with my heart in my gut, I grab the gun against my will as I set the window down, hanging half of my body out as I point the gun at Natasha's car.

I was stuck, I didn't want to shoot and everyone knew it. I was hoping Natasha did too. The tint on her windshield was light enough for our eyes to meet, and i'm screaming for her to turn around without a word falling from my lips. I don't want to hurt her, If she had only listened to me then we wouldn't be here— it wouldn't be so fucking di icult.

"Turn around!" My frustration gets the best of me, I'm screaming at Natasha trying to rise above the heavy wind but she doesn't budge. She's got that determined look on her face and my stomach was turning, I would have been on my knees— begging if we weren't in the middle of a fucking car chase.

"Fucking turn around, Nat!" My throat was burning with pleas, scorching with the hope that she would do everyone a favor and just listen.

"I'm not leaving without you!" She screams back, her windows rolled down as she actively speeds up, so close that she's almost touching the back of our truck.

"I told you to shoot— not to have a conversation. I'm going to count to three and if you don't get her o our trail, i'm going to slit her throat." Estelle loudly states from inside, only pushing the pressure further on my chest as I glance down to see the blade still pressed to a frozen Lara's throat.

"Three, two–" She begins and red lights just flash in my mind. In a panic, backed into a corner I pull the trigger to fire a shot that digs right into the hood of Natasha's car.

She looks at me through the glass, and my heart shatters. She looks at me the way she did in that alley, right a er Tony's party. She's looking at me without a hint of hurt, without a hint of doubt. She's just looking at me like she understood what i'm doing, like she knew I didn't want to do it— like she still had faith in me and it breaks my heart.

With everything laid out in pieces, I fire again but this time it hits her front tire. It pops immediately on impact, and everything slows. I watch in horror as Natasha loses control, the panic in her eyes— the desperation as she swerves o road and goes right at a tree. Her good tire rolls up the trunk, flipping the car over as it's engulfed in a thick cloud of smoke.

"Stop the car!" I scream, slipping back inside but Estelle doesn't listen.

She just moves to tuck the blade back into her pocket when I hastily lean over the partition, harshly twisting her wrist until the dagger falls from her grip. I grab it before it tumbles to the ground, immediately pressing the tip of the blade to the side of her temple as I carefully repeat my earlier sentiment.

"Stop the fucking car." I say through gritted teeth, everything in me aching to plunge it deep into her brain but she eventually complies. The vehicle screeches to a halt, and I waste no time and jumping out.

My heart was lodged in my throat as I ran to Natasha's overturned car, the gun and the dagger still firm in my grasp as my legs take me as fast as I could go with adrenaline coursing through my veins. You know that slow motion moment when you know your life hangs

in the balance, that everything was about to change in just a second? Your heart is still but thundering all at once and it's like you can hear everything You can hear your blood pumping in your veins and it's almost like your brain is heaving, expanding. It was like that. My ears were ringing, it was deafening. I was screaming to the high heavens that she was alive, because if I come to find a lifeless body then i'd never hesitate to plunge that dagger into my chest myself. As

upset as I am with Natasha, it could never be enough for me to be okay existing in a world where she doesn't. I finally get close enough, wasting no time and treading down the

little slope where her car laid in smoke. I wade through the smoke, falling to my knees on her side as I peer into the mess of broken glass to find Natasha still strapped into her seat, heaving as her eyes slowly flutter open. She was completely upside down. It was like breathing for the first time in years, seeing her chest rise and fall— knowing she was alive.

"Nat? Hey, I need to get you out of here. I need to get you out. I'm going to cut you free, okay?" I try to instruct as clearly as possible, the smell of smoke and gasoline only pumping my nerves as Natasha o ers me a weak nod.

I use the dagger to cut her seatbelt, her arms already held out to the roof of the car trying to break her fall. I slice through the material, setting her free as she finally caves into gravity and lowers to the ground. I drop everything in my hands to grasp her upper arms, positioning her enough to drag her out through the open window right as the car catches on fire.

With urgency and ease, I throw Natasha over my shoulder like I was merely carrying a sack of flour. The fire was roaring with every passing second as I rush to put as much distance as I could between us and the burning vehicle. Luckily, when it blows we were far enough to merely stumble forward at the thundering explosion.

I set Natasha down on the opposite side of the road, propping her up against a tree as my eyes frantically go over her whole body. I was trying to find for anything critical, a wound or a break— anything that could threaten her life aside from the little cuts and bruises she garnered from the tumble.

"I'm okay— i'm okay." Natasha heaves, hanging her head to rest back against the tree as she wires her tired eyes shut.

"Where's your phone? we need to call someone." I say urgently, going to feel her pockets when she catches me by the wrist. "I never wanted to hurt you." She says, tears streaming down her face

as I freeze in place. Her grip tightens with desperation, eyes pleading I look back at her somberly.

"Nat—"

"No. Please just... hear me out. I know it was selfish, I know I never should have lied to you but I... I didn't want to lose you. I knew it would break you, I knew you'd hate me and I— I really do care about you. It wasn't for my guilt. I care and I believe in you." She stammers, looking so afraid— so frail. I had never seen her look utterly vulnerable, Natasha was practically the face of strength and here she

was, in tears begging me to forgive her. "I'm not wrong about you." She pressed, desperation in her tone as she looks back at me.

"Please... Please. You have to believe me." She says, stifling her sobs as I pull her into my embrace.

"I've always forgiven you... but I have to go." I whisper, her arms wrapped around my neck so tightly, so desperately that I almost wanted to cry too.

"You can still fight with us. We can fix this." She pleads as I pull away, her eyes so painfully filled with hope as I slowly shake my head. "I'm the only one who can end this but everything will be okay, I

promise." I whisper, making a move to rise to my feet as Natasha, still chest deep in denial was shaking her head.

"No. There has to be another way." She stresses, but i'm already taking a step back. As the distance grows between us, the farther my heart sinks.

"I can't lose more. I can't lose you. Please." Natasha begs, tears in her eyes that only twist my gut as I watch them fall.
"If you really cared about me, you'd let me go. Don't look for me—don't try to stop me. Just pretend that... everything was a dream and you have to wake up now." I whisper shakily, taking everything in me not to let my tears fall as Natasha looks back at me, completely tormented by my words.
"Goodbye, Natasha. Please, let this be our last one."

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