I've always wanted to die. I've always begged to. Countless nights I've spent, screaming up at the sky to give me a choice, to let me go. All the tears I've cried, all the hope that has been drained out of me over and over again, it was all beyond exhausting. But I guess it's true, isn't it? We crave most what we can't have. Those who live crave time, immortality, power, happiness. Life is structured that way, to always make you want more, maybe its curiosity or just the feeling of acquisition. It's almost like a drug. But you never know exactly what you're asking for until you have it. I've seen many spend their years in search of power, and yet when they've got the crown the loneliness eats them up. There is nothing in the world that can be gained without sacrifice, without loss, maybe if you're lucky you come out of it without a smear of blood on you hands but if you're like me, well, you might as well be covered in it. I told myself I was ready. I've pounded it into my head, from the moment I've grasped the truth in the compound I knew there was only one way to end all of this. I've had quite a bit of time to come to terms with my end, a bit of time to fully understand what I've chosen to walk into. Not a single second was spent in hope that I'd walk out of this alive and vet, as I was the needle puncture into my skin, it's almost like all of my comprehension was crushed. Vanished, like a blip in thin air. I just watch Estelle set up the IV line, it was like I was a child. Scared, terrified out of my mind but I had half a brain to keep it to myself. I kept wondering about how it would feel, if it was merely just like going to sleep or if it would feel just like the dagger. I wondered if every inch of me would burn in agony, if it would be slow, if everything my body had been through would catch up to me. What a sick thought, but fear twists us in ways we can't control. "Where's Lara?" I ask, it's been a while since my sister was called out of the room, leaving only Estelle to tend to me, much to her irritation "Conversing with mommy." She mocks, a smirk on her lips that I craved to punch o "Have you been working for her all this time?" I ask amidst a wince, trying to douse my anger as she purposely missed my vein just to puncture me over and over, like some sort of human pin cushion for her amusement. She was really lucky I was in shackles "Yes. All this time." She replies coldly, finally sticking the needle in before walking away to a cart she's put together. It looked quite menacing, with all the syringes, bags and medical tools laid out upon "And does she know your little stunt in Moscow?" I ask, a brow raised as her laughter fills the air. "Of course, she does. It was part of the mission." She wheels it over to my side, eyes meeting mine as her words hit harder than I had anticipated. I really meant nothing to Lydia, so low that she'd knowingly pimp me out for a fucking mission "Don't be so glum, it was fun, wasn't it? You're quite good in bed for a virgin, I'll give you that." She winks, and my stomach turns in disgust. I can't believe I ever shared myself with her, of all people. The girl who was practically leading me to my doom with utmost joy "You disgust me." I hiss, but she only chuckles at my words as she begins to connect a tube to the port inserted into my vein. "You didn't seem so disgusted when you were begging me to fuck vou." She fires back hastily. "You never deserved that." I spit, the anger in my stomach boiling with every passing second that a smirk was plastered onto her face "Oh, and who does? Your little witch? You think she loves you? Look at you. You're a walking catastrophe, you're destined to ruin everyone you touch. If she really loved you, why wasn't she the one in the car that chased a er us? Why isn't she here to save you? Even until your final moments you're still so unbearably naïve." She says lowly, dragging it out as if she were intentionally spiking the agony of her words deep into my chest. Even if they were lies, to hear them in such a devastating state was still a tough blow to take "You're just jealous." I shake my head, mustering up a smile amidst my anger as she raises her brows at my remark, almost as if she was "You're jealous because no matter what you do, you will never ever be half as good as she is. You'll live and die in this miserable life of yours and neveramount to her, to all that she can do. You'll never be good enough, just like my sister said... you'll always be a fucking reject." The moment the words fall from my lips, her fist connects with my jaw. My head is thrown back on impact, the whiplash of her punch aching my neck as I feel the blood start to build up in my mouth from where my teeth had sunk into my tongue "Your life is in my hands and thanks to your reckless choice of words... I'm going to make sure this goes slowly. I'm going to make sure you feel every last bit of it, tearing you apart from the inside. She grabs me by the chin, her manicured nails digging into my skin as she forces me to look at her but I just laugh. I laugh as the blood spills from the corners of my lips, then I spit My blood peppers the porcelain skin of her face, and she stumbles back in a sco. She's glaring at me, shooting daggers with her eyes as she brings a hand up to wipe the blood that had stained her skin while I only watch with a smirk "Fucking reject." I reiterate slowly, and she hastily sets up the drip with rage bleeding through her fingertips. Once the bag filled with the dark liquid was hung above my head, all the tubes connected with a straight line into my veins, she takes a step back "And you're fucking dead." She smiles, watching the liquid slowly begin to travel from the bag down through the transparent tubes Even amidst our heated exchange, the anxiety still bubbled in the pit of my stomach. "Exit the room." A resounding voice booms through the speaker mounted in the corner of the ceiling, and just like a puppet on a string, Estelle does as she's told. 'You're hiding behind glass, Lydia? You fucking coward." I chuckle as the door slams shut, my eyes dead set on the mirror in front of me that I knew she was behind. I have a certain instinct when it came to monsters nearby. "You were never a mother. You could have been, if you weren't so fucking selfish. I raised Lara, I fed her, I bathed her, I listened to her problems and praised her for her accomplishments and where were you? Sulking in the corner like a pathetic little bitch." I exclaim, my resentment burning through the cracks as the liquid slides closer, merely inches away from entering my system. "You think you're so smart when the truth is, I'm only here because I chose to be! Without my surrender, you'd be nothing. You are nothing." I seethe, and that's when it begins I can feel the distant rumble of heat, travelling up my arm. It burns like a spark, a spark that is slowly being doused in gasoline until my entire body begins to feel warmer and warmer. Within seconds, I'm already covered in sweat, trying to get a grip on my composure as the mere act of taking a breath begins to hurt. "Everything you think you've done, was all because of me." Her voice finally bleeds from the speakers as I'm sitting there, shackled and being drenched in my own sweat. "All it took was a little anonymous tip to send your beloved Avengers to your father's facility. I knew he'd be destroyed without his prized creation; he would beg for an end and he did. Everything relied on your good little assassin, her and her guilt. Do you know what she's done? She may act so innocent now, but if you could see the horrors on her file... you'd never look at her the same." Lydia says, taunting me, mocking me as the heat keeps increasing. It was getting harder to stay in control, to keep a straight face when I felt like my whole body was being lit on fire "You see... guilt is the most powerful tool. You can make anyone bend to your desires, to do whatever you want without them even realizing it and your Widow did a magnificent job, really. She went above and beyond; I didn't expect her to care so much about you but I guess the two of you have so much in common. Both monsters, both killers." Her voice drips of amusement as pain engulfs me, even blanketing the anger I felt hearing her speak about Natasha that way. A mu led grunt falls from my lips as I jolt in place, held down by my shackles as my body begins to shake. It was exactly like the dagger, except this felt more detailed. I could feel everything, down to my toes, to even the smallest part of my body. I was on fire, on fire and rolling in a bed of blades that were endlessly and constantly piercing through my skin "Once you were taken in, the plan relied on you. All I needed was for them to like you, for you to form a bond so strong... that they would defy orders and search for you. Imagine what the world would say if they knew their perfect little band of heroes held a so spot for a fugitive, a fugitive with a thousand lifetimes worth of blood on her hands." She says, but her voice was shaky in my head. I was drowning in the agony, convulsing as if my skin was slowly being torn away from me but I was coherent enough to comprehend through the haze of the torturous sensation. "The c-camera." I mutter weakly, amidst winces and pained grunts as my eyes travel to the mounted device pointed right at me. "Well of course, they needed some motivation. What better than a front row seat to your su ering?" Lydia chuckles as everything pieces together in my head. All of Lara's words, her apologetic looks, the uncertainty in her demeanor I was bait. I am bait. She wanted to kill them "W-why can't y-you stop w-with me?" I scream through the mindnumbing pain, shaking and jolting as my shackles pull harshly against my skin. I was almost sure I was drawing blood with how violently I was shaking, but that could never compare to the agonizing sensation blanketing my entirety. "The world relies on balance. If people like you, like your beloved band of over glorified Avengers continue to exist, then equality will never prevail. People were never meant to wield so much power, so much glory. Everyone must live and die as nature calls it so and all of you are nothing but abominations. I'm here to correct all your existence has pushed awry, to rid this world of the monsters masking as heroes." Lydia replies sharply, tears streaming down my face at the pain- and the thought of any of them seeing me this way. The thought of Steve, or Natasha, the thought of Wanda seeing me in the height of my destruction was a gut churning feeling. They'd each all blame themselves, each of them will be doused in the same shining guilt I saw in Natasha's eves as she sat wounded by the side of the road. It was the kind of guilt I knew too well, the kind that tore you apart just as painfully as I was being tortured now. It was everything I never wanted them to have "They're g-going t-to kill you." I utter amidst grunts, curling up as much as my restraints allowed as the pain only continues to increase I have no idea how long I'm going to last, it's way past the sensation I felt with the dagger. Everything was heightened, my bones felt like they were being broken in half over and over, my insides doused in diesel and set alight. I was melting from the inside out and I could feel everythingbut if there was even a quarter of a chance that Lydia was correct, then it meant they'd be coming for me. It meant Wanda would be here and as much as I believed in their abilities. I could never let myself go with the thought of them having to face all of my mother's monstrosities alone. "No. I've been preparing for years. They wont even get the chance to touch me." She says and suddenly, the lights go out. I can hea everything power down, leaving me in darkness all alone with the pain soaring through my body I can hear ruckus outside the door I was brought through, sounds of thudding, gunfire, I can hear it all but I was too busy convulsing to even react. Soon, the creak of the door slamming open rings through the air as rushed footsteps draw near. Before I could comprehend anything else, I feel the tube being yanked from my skin with utmost urgency but even when the flow had been disrupted, the pain was still searing. You have to get up." Lara's hurried voice fills my ears, her fingers slipping into the small space between my shackles and my wrist before tearing it apart with a hu . She rushes to do this to all of my limbs until I was free, until I was shaking and jolting without the restraints.

"Please, please you have to get up. We don't have much time." Lara whispers frantically, wrapping an arm around my waist and practically tossing me over her shoulder as she treads through the dark and into the hallway, where there was a little more visibility. I was still shaking in her arms, every breath feeling like knives tearing through my throat as she the sound of her rushed footsteps ring against the metal grates that peppered the floor. She was running, I could feel her running but my mind wasn't letting me think of anything other than the scorching agony my body was in. I couldn't even question the gunfire roaring behind us.

When Lara finally puts me down, I realize we're in one of the abandoned rooms, taking cover behind a dusty o ice chair still peppered with files and papers that looked like they haven't been touched in ages. The lights finally flicker back on, and my eyes land on Lara who was holding my head in place, because if she let go then I'd fall to the floor like a melting puddle of blood "Can you hear me? Lexa? Lexa please. Please." Her voice was so distant despite her being right in front of me, it was like I was held underwater and she was screaming above the surface. "Lara." I mumble weakly, still shaking in her grasp as my vision fades in and out. "Please stay awake. You have to stay awake." She whispers, her grip on my head tightening almost as if she were begging me. "I forgive you, okay? I forgive you. Please don't die. Please." She pleads, her voice was shaky and desperate as it finally cuts through with clarity. The pain stopped increasing, it was merely lingering in its height, but it was enough for me to get a hold of my surroundings better. 'What did you do?" I utter slowly, my words stammering as I struggle to get them out. She retracts one hand, slipping a gun from her belt and holding it up for me to see. We're not alone. There's a reason Lydia was able to a ord all she has; she's been working with HYDRA and this facility is crawling with agents. You need to hold onto this, okay? We're going to need it if we're going to make it out." She instructs, still crouched down in front of me as the rampant sound of footsteps echo on the other side of the door. For a second, I thought I was just delirious until her words fully sink into my brain. "Make it out?" I reiterate weakly, and Lara nods while she's peeking over the desk. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything, for hating you. I was... I couldn't live with the fact that you le me to go through all of it alone and hating you was easier than missing you. I'm sorry." She turns back to me, tears lingering in her eyes as I use whatever strength I could muster to wrap an arm around her neck and pull her into an embrace I wince at the contact, my body slowly coming down from the searing pain as Lara eventually hugs me back, pulling me impossibly close as her mu led sobs break between us. "We can make it out of this, Lexa. We can run, you and me. Just please, don't ever leave me again." She whispers, tears streaming down her face as we pull away. My shaky hands move up to cup her face, for the first time in years I could see her. I could see my sister. She was right there in front of me, and not just in fragments. Not fighting under the thick blanket of resentment, she was right there, in tears, still holding onto me. We were a little bit older, but god, it still felt like we were children. Like we were back in our own little bubble of us against this big scary world and maybe, maybe that was all I needed to pull through this nightmare. "I'm never going to leave you. Nothing will keep us apart ever again, I promise." I whisper, my voice still hoarse and weak, but I was able to say it with enough coherence for her to understand. "Okay, now we've got to go out there and kill a few people. Think you can handle that?" She asks, lips perking up into a small smirk as I roll my eyes "I've been doing this longer than you." I mumble, both of us getting on our feet. The pain was still apparent in my body, but it was significantly less than a few moments ago. It was almost enough to regain most of my mobility, though every movement still sent a jolt of pain through me, it was bearable enough. Plus, I didn't have much of a choice. I had just gotten Lara back, there was no way in hell I'd let her go out there alone. We burst through the doors, each of us facing opposite directions to fire at agents who were scrambling in search of us. Within seconds, the entire corridor was cleared, leaving Lara and I standing in silence as bodies littered the ground. Working together was something I never really imagined for us, especially in my profession but I had to admit I felt a certain sense of satisfaction knowing she had my back. "There's an exit right down there." Lara points, turning to me as we bolt down the corridor. We speed past a few more empty rooms, the distant sound of rumbling footsteps painting the air behind us as we tried to go as fast as our feet would let us, though for me, it wasn't exactly ideal. I could feel it, something had changed. I could sense it inside me, that even though I felt the pain slowly tapering o, it was taking something with it. A piece of me was fading and as much as it spiked my anxiety, kept it to myself. Lara didn't need to hear about my baseless paranoia in the middle of this chaos, we only needed to find a way out. When we get to the doors and we find, much to our disadvantage, that it was locked. Sparkling right at the front of it, secured by steel and bolts, was a bomb. It didn't look like an ordinary homemade explosive, either. The dark purple liquid was encased right in the center of it, split into three glass tubes surrounded by wires and a screen that was frozen on a ten-minute mark Until it begins counting down. "I know how to open these; I know where she controls it. The room behind the glass." Lara turns to me frantically, but before I could answer, the sound of footsteps drawing near spins us around and at the end of the short corridor, stood Estelle with dagger in her hand and a smirk on her lips. "Find it. I'll hold her o , just meet me outside." I whisper to Lara, my grip on the gun in my hand tightening as I stared Estelle down. I could feel Lara's reluctance to leave, her eyes glancing between Estelle and I before I finally break and turn to her. "Go! I can handle this!" I scream, and she nods We both speed down the corridor, Estelle's face flooding with hesitance as I go right for her, robbing her of the chance to head a er Lara. Lara breaks the corner as I land a stern kick to Estelle's chest, sending her stumbling back against the door behind her. The thud of laugh falls from her lips. "You're getting weaker, mon amour" She points out in betwee breathy chuckles, and it takes everything in me to keep a straight face. She noticed, which meant it wasn't in my head. "You don't have to do this." I say to her, my voice seeping between gritted teeth as she tilts her head for a daunting stretch. I can hear the distant sound of gunfire, and my stomach churns in hoping Lara was alright. "You really want to bargain for your life now?" She steps closer, her knuckles flushed white with how hard she was gripping the dagger as I took a few steps back, trying to keep my distance "I'm not bargaining for mine." I fire back, slowly inching closer back to where Lara and I stood as Estelle clicks her tongue, shaking her head almost as if she were scolding a child. "You think I don't know what's going on inside you?" She taunts, raising a brow as I subtly lead her back down the hallway, closer to the door. The farther I get her away from the corner, the less chance she had to go a er Lara "You're a puppet. You're her puppet. Don't you want something more? Don't you want a life for yourself?" I ask her, and though my motives were far from pure there was some truth to my curiosity. At the end of it all, we were just victims. Victims of greed, of lust for power and glory. She is too. "What life could there be for me out there? I know nothing but this. I was raised for this; I exist for this. If I don't do what I'm made to do, then what does that leave me? Useless, lame, pathetic. I refuse to be any of those things." She seethes, anger dripping from her tongue but I could see the cracks in her demeanor. I could see the pain she hid behind her resentment, the confusion and fear. "Finding a better life for yourself isn't pathetic. You can help us get out, and I can prove to you there's more than just this... this fucking mess." I try, successfully inching us closer that she was past the corner that turned down the corridor Lara sprinted down. "Just because you're stuck in your delusion, doesn't mean I am." She lunges at me, but I dodge her swing and get a hold of her shoulder,

switching our places as she pushed herself o of the door. "I'm going to end this here and now." She seethes, swinging at me again with the dagger. Maybe it was the adrenaline, maybe it was what was at stake but I was able to dodge most of it even when my body felt like it was running merely on reserved energy. Estelle lands a punch to my gut, and she takes the chance to deliver another to my jaw. She quickly places a leg in between my own, taking me down to the ground as she falls to her knees, straddling me. With the dagger in her hand, she takes another swing and I feel the burning sensation of the blade breaking skin on my cheekbone Estelle's eyes glimmer in awe, pinning both my hands down using her knees as she brings her finger up to caress the cut that was then drawing blood that trickled down the side of my face. "We don't have to do this. I don't want to fight you." I struggle under her grasp, the weight of her body crushing my wrists as she smiles back at me. She was too far gone, I could see it in her eyes. There was nothing I could say to make her see that she was nothing more than a vessel, that she was being manipulated. Estelle is going to kill me. "You don't want to fight me?" She reiterates mockingly, positioning the tip of the blade right in the center of my chest as I continue to squirm under her weight. My heart was thrashing, my blood pumping as I closed my eyes. All I can do now, is hope Lara can forgive me for what's about to happen.

pulling her with all my might as she slams against the locked exit,

"She doesn't, but I do.' My eyes shoot open at the familiar voice and before I could even move, I watch in surprise as Estelle quite literally is thrown o of me. She hits the wall with a thud, my stomach turning as my eyes meet cool green, peering down at me. It takes everything in me not to cry as she holds out a hand, a ghost of a smile on her lips as I reach up to take it. "You're here." I whisper as Wanda pulls me into her, arms wrapping around my neck like it was the most basic instinct we have, like we've done it for a lifetime I nuzzle my face into her hair, the smell of her shampoo filling my nose with every breath as she held on just as tight as she did the first time I was in her arms. Tears fill my eyes as I wire them shut, but the sound of Estelle's groans eventually pull us apart "Give me a second." Wanda says to me, her loving eyes turning dark in a split second as she diverts her attention to Estelle She reaches out, her crimson magic wisping between her fingertips as it simultaneously appears around Estelle's throat, slowly li ing her

up in the air until her feet are dangling and she's squirming under the pressure. I watch as Wanda takes a step forward, head tilting ever so slightly as her eyes went over every inch of the blonde in her magic's "You should have stayed dead." Wanda flatly remarks, the chilling coldness in her tone sending shivers down my spine as Estelle matches her sharp glare. You... will never... be good... enough." Estelle croaks out as Wanda raises her free hand, the dagger that laid on the floor floating up in mid air and stopping right at Estelle's chest "I already am." Wanda says and with the flick of her wrist, the blade buries into Estelle's heart as her eyes go wide and Wanda releases her grip Estelle's impaled body falls to the floor in a thud, blood beginning to seep out from the sides of the blade as she convulses. Wanda backs up until she's right next to me, slipping her hand in mine and intertwining our fingers as we watched Estelle become weaker with

There was a part of me that felt remorse, a part that wondered if she was capable of change. If I would have been able to save her, the way Natasha saved me. I couldn't bring myself to fully and completely despise her, now that I wasn't searing with pain and anger, I could see the bigger picture. I could see myself in her place, if only things hadn't gone the way they did there was a big possibility I'd be just as corrupted, just as desperate and hopeless.
"There was nothing you could have done." Wanda breaks the silence, turning to me as she brings a hand up to cup my cheek. Her eyes are going over my face, every inch of it like she's trying to take in my features, to get lost in them.
"I'm sorry." I mutter weakly, but she only shakes her head.

every passing second until eventually, she goes limp.

"I found your letter." She says, a sad smile on her lips as her thumb gently caresses my cheek. She was doing it again, holding me with so much tenderness it made my heart swell. "I had to." I whisper, tears trickling down my cheeks as she nods slightly. Eyes warm and somber, but still so vibrant. "I know. I know." She pulls me into her once again, arms encasing me like the safest serenity had finally wrapped around me. I melt into her

instantly, missing the feeling of our bodies fitting together like this, so perfectly. "Please don't leave me again." She whispers, I could tell she was crying too by the way her voice trembled distantly.

"I'm here. I'm real." I say so ly, the memories of those very same words falling from her lips flooding my mind as a small smile places itself onto my lips. We pull away, but she keeps her hands on my hips as her eyes go over my face again. I can see it slowly creeping over her features, like liquid pouring down. Her eyes widen slightly as she brings a hand up to my face, shakily going over the wound Estelle had caused. I wince slightly at her touch, the spot still sore from the deep cut as Wanda looks utterly horrified.

"You're not healing." It slips from her tongue in a quiet whisper, like she was telling herself more than me. My eyes drop from hers, looking away as she cups my face again. "What did they do to you?" She asks shakily, the devastation in her tone was so sharp, so evident that it made my stomach turn. I knew I had lost something when Lara carried me out of that room, I had always known but she just confirmed it, brought it to life.

"It's my mother. She... corrected me. She took back all the abilities that apparently, my father gave me and she's... it's a trap, Wanda. She wasn't only gunning for me; she wants to kill all of you." I reveal, my eyes glancing over her shoulder to see the timer had reduced to just shy of seven minutes and fi y-four seconds. Wanda turns to follow my gaze, realization sweeping her features as she turns back to me. "Who came?" I ask quickly, I could see the panic brewing in her eyes.

"Steve, Natasha and Sam. Nobody else knows we're here. We had our hands tied, they wouldn't let any of us go a er you until... until Nat got the video and we just... we couldn't watch you die. Icouldn't watch you die. "She says, the emotion seeping in her tone as I pull her

There was a feeling in my gut, one I didn't like, one I knew all too well so I took the moment for myself, just to feel her lips on mine again.

in to press my lips against hers as hungrily as I could.

She brings me so much peace, I wonder if she truly knew the extent. Her hand in mine, the feeling of her lips, even just knowing she was close could grant me serenity even in the most catastrophic places. Her mere existence was so heavenly, every bit of her sends my heart into an incontrollable spin and even amidst the severity of all we stood upon, I still felt like the world stopped only for us in that moment. "I love you. I'm in love with you, Wanda Maximo . Don't ever forget it." I whisper breathlessly as we pull away, dazed and delighted she pulls me in for another, much quicker kiss as a breath of satisfaction falls from her lips. "We have to find Lara." I say and without another word, she slips her hand in mine and we head down the corridor as fast as we could. the fact that I wasn't healing anymore made her paranoia go wild. She knew I was much more vulnerable, that things had shi ed irreversibly, and it wasn't in my favor "The doors were sealed the moment we entered, Steve and Sam were ambushed but they're okay, they're trying to hold o the agents. I haven't heard from Natasha yet. We all took separate entrances. Wanda quickly breaks the situation down for me as we reach the end of the corridor, stepping over the bodies Lara and I had taken down moments prior. It didn't exactly help that neither of us knew the place enough. I had only been there twice almost a decade ago and I couldn't trace back Lara's steps since she was practically lugging me on her shoulder in the dark. We were at a crossroads, two split corridors on either of our sides as Wanda and I try to decide where to go. When gunfire booms from the hall to our le, Wanda and I exchange a look and sprint that way "Wait, did you say your mother did this? She's The Corrector?" Wanda asks in a hu , both of us still bolting down the corrido "Yeah, and my father used me as a lab rat when I was born. Great family, huh?" I joke, trying to make light of the heavy situation as Wanda releases a so , airy chuckle. "Must be delightful at reunions." She feeds into the joke as we reach the corner. I go to take a peek, but Wanda's hand collides with my chest, holding me back with a stern look. "I can handle looking, Wanda." I argue in a whisper, but she keeps her hold. "And if you get shot? You don't heal anymore. You can't be reckless." She chastises. "Are you forgetting that I did do some training, right? Just because I'm not enhanced anymore doesn't mean I can't defend myself." I fire back, wrapping a hand around her wrist to pry her grip o of my chest, much to her irritation "Can you not be stubborn this time? I'm trying to protect you." She replies pointedly, her arm dropping to her side. "You're treating me like I'm fragile." I sharply return, and she closes her eyes like she's trying to hold her patience intact. "You can't treat me like I'm suddenly broken just because I'm di erent now. I can still-"I can't lose you again! If I lose you here, I lose you for good. Why can't you understand that?" She snaps, cutting me o as her eyes open to meet mine. Her words sink me into silence, as I watch her fear on full display. Her eyes were desperate, pleading for me and as I o er her a small nod. "Okay." I say so ly, watching her features subtly so en as she takes my hand and brings it up to her lips, kissing right above my knuckles. "I love you. We have to make it out of here, there's so much more for us out there, Lexa. I want you, I want to feel everything, see everything, do everything with you" She practically begs as my heart sinks to my gut. "Please." She whispers, so I cup her cheek and give her a nod. "Okay, have a look and we'll go if it's safe." I motion over to the corner, and Wanda gives me a thankful smile. She complies soon a er, the rampant gunfire and ruckus still peppering the air as I stay behind her, our fingers still intertwined as she moves back to look at me. "It's Steve. I think it's okay but watch your back, I can only protect you from the front." She says and I nod as we both step out from around the corner. I pick up a pistol o of one of the agents I'm assuming Steve had knocked down, watching as he takes down the last one in the hall with his shield. He hooks it back to his forearm, heaving as he stood there in his full get up, looking as heroic as ever while he scans the space and his eyes land on us. I know I should harbor some ill intent for his lies, but at that moment, with everything happening around us, I couldn't help but feel relieved to see him. "Wanda, Lexa." He breathes, jogging up to us as he strips o his headgear. "Steve, this place is rigged. There's a bomb in the north exit and I'm assuming it's not the only one." Wanda immediately speaks up, briefing him as he listened intently. "How long do we have?" He asks, eyes glancing over the two of us before I open my mouth to speak. "By now, I'd say around six minutes or less." I reply, watching the gears turn behind his blue eyes. "Lara le to the control room; she says she can unlock the doors. Where's Sam and Nat?" I ask, gaining Steve's attention. I don't miss the way his eyes so en when he looked at me, shining with guilt as he stammers for a reply. "They're looking for you. I'll call it in so we can regroup." He says, stepping away as he spoke into his device, assuming he did what he told us. "I'm not getting anything on Nat but Sam is on the way back here." Steve approaches again, worry hidden behind his stern tone as Wanda and I exchange knowing looks. This isn't sounding too good. You go look for Nat, we'll look for Lara. We can meet at the north exit." I reply, the reluctance on his features bleeding as he looked back at me. "Okay, sounds like a plan." He nods, and we both head down the corridor, stopping where the paths split into two separate directions. "Lexa..." Steve begins before heading down the le hallway, looking back at me with guilt filled agony as I shake my head. "I know. Steve. I know." I o er him a sad smile and he nods. taking a breath before we eventually part ways The moment Wanda and I take a few steps, I recognize the hall immediately. It was where my room was located, where Lara had retrieved me to go to the laboratory. Wanda picks up on my realization as we treaded down the path, looking at me curiously as she waited for me to speak "I was locked up here. At the end of the hall, to the right is the lab, there's a way to the control room from there. She should be there and... probably Lydia is too." I turn to Wanda, trying to keep a steady tone as she takes in my words. "Lydia... is your mom?" She clarifies as we continue our briskly pace, and I o er her a nod This is definitely not how I wanted the whole meeting the parents to go but then again, I had never been lucky in that department taking into account that I had a family of murderers and psychopaths. Including myself, of course. We continue down, following my directions until we reach the dreaded door that was already slightly agape. My heart was in my throat, with every passing second the feeling churning in my gut became stronger, crawling beneath my skin like an itch I couldn't relieve. Wanda was first to push the door open, readying herself for whatever would be in that room. The moment my eyes get a glimpse of feet, laying flat on the floor, I push past Wanda, ignoring her calls as I find Lara convulsing on the ground with a handful of empty syringes littered by her side. I fall to my knees, pulling her up to my chest as I tilt her face to look at me. I knew exactly what had been done to her, because it was what had been done to me not too long ago She was in transition 'You have to stay with me, okay? The pain will subside. Stay with me." I beg, watching as she wires her eyes shut, shaking in agony as I held her in my arms "What happened?" Wanda asks, rushing to my side as she takes in the sight of a jolting Lara, groaning in pain as I held her to my chest. "She's changing. She's changing. Fuck, this could kill her." I mutter, feeling entirely sick to my stomach at the thought, at the sight of my sister in so much pain. It was even worse that I knew exactly how she felt, I knew the extent of the torture going on inside her. "How do we stop it?" Wanda asks, just as frantic and horrified as I am. "You can't" I look at her, tears stinging my vision as Lara struggles to bring her hand up. She grabs me by my wrist, mumbling something under her breath like she was trying to find enough strength to give herself the volume "What? What is it?" I tilt her face up to look at me, her trembling lips trying to find coherency as she spits it out in a split-second moment of strength. "Trap." She says and as if on cue, a hissing sound begins to fill the room The door we came in through shuts violently, the sound of the lock clicking in place sending Wanda to her feet in a panic. She immediately tries to push it open, and when it doesn't work she tries to use her magic, but it was all to no avail. While Wanda was busy trying to get the door open, something catches my eye in the corner of the ceiling. Smoke It was seeping from the vents, a menacing yet familiar color of deep purple as my eyes go wide. Lara sees it too, moving closer against me almost in fear as I hold onto her, my mind taking a second to actually comprehend what was happening. It was like something had its grip around my throat, restricting the overflow of words begging to spill out. "Wanda! The vents!" I scream, and Wanda's head immediately snap up to the source of the smoke She rushes back to me, looking around the room when she spots the door next to the glass, she goes to try and open it but the smoke had already filled enough of the room to seep into our lungs with every breath. Slowly, I feel the distant searing pain begin to spike as Wanda begins to cough, backing away from the door until she lets out a frustrated hu , her magic spiking from her hands as it encases us in a bubble that repels the smoke, her crimson energy swarming around us like a dome "Are you okay?" I ask, watching her lips purse in focus as she sends me a quick nod. I know it probably wasn't a great moment, with my sister shaking in pain and us nearly dying several times but seeing her use her powers at that extent was undeniably attractive. "I can hear you." Wanda comments breathlessly, biting back a smile and wiring her eyes shut as she steadied her magic. "Sorry." I quickly mutter, shaking my head as I tend back to Lara who was beginning to calm down. "I- I un...locked t-the d-doors." Lara utters in between shaky breaths, and as much as it was great news, we were still in the middle of a situation. I dart my eyes around the room, trying to peek through the red tint of Wanda's magic as my attention lands on the door Wanda was going to open right before the smoke hit. "Can you move this?" I ask Wanda, who opens her eyes to look at me curiously. "This bubble. Can you move it?" I reiterate, motioning to the dome she had created around us with my free hand. "I think so, yeah. What's your plan?" She questions as I gently let Lara down, shi ing to get on my feet. "The door, get me close enough to break through. I think I can shut the vents down from there." I say to her, and she takes a moment to go over my words before eventually agreeing. I bend over to wrap my hands around Lara's upper arm, slowly dragging her closer to the door as Wanda carefully moves her magic along with us. When we're finally close enough, it takes me a few tries but I finally burst through the door, immediately pulling the gun from my waistband to point it at an empty control room, with another do swung wide open. Wanda moves enough for me to be able to step inside, getting to the panel which had a large screen dissected into squares that show footage from the halls To my horror, I realize the smoke was spilling everywhere. I watched as Natasha was on her knees, surrounded by agents slumped on the ground while Steve and Sam struggled too. I quickly loom my eyes over the buttons, finding the one for the vents and flicking it o . Soon enough the hissing begins to die down and Wanda takes it upon herself to relieve us from the dome and push the smoke back into the vents. "They're not looking so good." I say as Wanda joins me moments later, eyes scanning the screen and spotting the rest of the team. "We need to get out of here." She says, just as Lara weakly makes her way to stand, using the doorframe as leverage to get back on her feet. "Lydia can't get away, she'll never stop." Lara croaks out, heaving as she stood slumped against the frame. "We don't have time. We'll finish this when we're safe." I argue lightly, to which Lara agrees quietly. I go to slip an arm around Lara's waist, Wanda heading out to the door across us that led to another corrido and clearing as much smoke as she could while I kept a steady grip on my sister. "Does it still hurt?" I ask her, leading her to the door as she hooks an arm over my shoulder. "Like a bitch." She chuckles so ly, still trying to catch her breath as we join Wanda out by the hall. She's looking at me with hope in her eyes, like she's telling me we

we had been running an endless marathon and we could finally see where it led, just in the horizon, the life we never thought we could "You're going to be alright." I say to Lara, who still had trouble walking as she grabbed onto me a little tighter, wincing every few seconds. "I know. You too. Maybe... when we get out of here, you could make me mac and cheese again." She utters so ly, biting back a smile as she looked at me. I could practically see Wanda's delight at our conversation, walking alongside us with a smile plastered on her lips. "The boxed kind?" I hum in amusement, and Lara nods like it's the most obvious thing in the world. "The bestkind." Lara corrects, the same childlike sparkle in her eyes that made me want to cry because god, if she only knew how much I missed her. "That's so unhealthy." I comment lightly, shaking my head as Lara sco s "Like you're the poster child for fitness. You used to eat jars of peanut butter by itself." Lara comments, earning Wanda's attention. Lara nods at her, eagerly too, might I add. "Peanut butter?" Wanda asks, brows raised as she looks at me "It's good." I mumble in defense, both Lara and Wanda lightly sharing a laugh. It all felt like a dream, two of the most important people in my life having a genuine conversation. Never mind that it was at my expense, all I cared about was that I had Lara back, and a possibility of a future with Wanda. It was all I had ever wanted, all I had ever asked for But I should have known good things never last for me.

were finally going to make it. For a second, I really did believe it. For a second, with my arms around Lara and Wanda by my side, I felt hopeful. There was a feeling in my chest I couldn't make out, but as we treaded down the corridor, littered with agents who seemingly were knocked out by the gas, it felt like walking to the finish line. Like

Because mere seconds a er that, their laughter is halted by gunshots. It happens so quickly, almost in a blink. Wanda snapping back, her crimson magic booming to shield us before the agent who had fired the gun was tossed so harshly against the wall he loses consciousness. All of us were frozen, Wanda heaving as her powers settle and for a second, I don't feel it at all. "Lexa." Lara whispers, the horror in her tone was distant but it was there as the pain slowly makes itself present. I look down at my

stomach, watching as my blood begins to seep through the fabric of my shirt, painting it a deep red. "Oh." Is all that slips from my lips as I shakily bring my hand to the wound, my blood coating my fingertips as I only looked at it. It didn't

feel real at all, it almost took me a minute to fully comprehend that I had just been shot. "No. No. No- Steve! Nat!" Wanda immediately comes to my aid, the urgency of her screams shaking the walls as her hands linger inches from my wound. She didn't know what to do, I could see the desperation on her face, the sheer agony as the distant rumble of

footsteps begin to echo. "Wanda!" A scream radiates around us, but it wasn't Steve's, or Natasha's or even Sam's. It was Lara.

A scream followed by the sound of Wanda hitting the ground, then another gunshot. Both our heads snap to Lara, who had stepped in front of Wanda as her eyes widened and her shirt began to fill with red. My eyes lock with Lydia's, who was standing right behind her, just a few feet away holding up a pistol and wearing a smile. Without another thought, I grab the gun from my waistband and fire. Two shots.

It was all it took. One to the head and another to the heart. She fell to the ground in a thud, while Lara fell to her knees. I immediately go to catch her, my entire body going numb as we sink to the ground, Lara in my arms as her breaths began to get shorter and shorter. I finally get a good look at her shot, which had gone straight through her chest. Right at her heart.

"You're going to be okay. You're going to be okay. Just... we can fix this. We can." I mutter frantically, holding Lara up in my arms as blood continued to pour from her chest. By the time the rest had found us, most of my sister's shirt had already been drenched in blood.

"What... Lexa... Lara?" Natasha rushes to our side, Wanda knelt right by me with tears already streaming down her face as she watches the scene, horrified. "She saved me." Wanda utters shakily as Steve and Sam approach, both equally shocked at what was unfolding before them.

"You're going to be okay. We're going to get you out." I say through gritted teeth, fighting back the tears that were daring to spill. I was not going to cry, I refuse to cry. You only cry for people who are dying, and my sister is not dying. "No. No." Lara croaks out, her words mu led by the blood pooling in

her mouth as it spills down to the sides of her lips. "I'm sorry." Lara weakly mutters, tears filling her eyes as she shakily brings a hand up to my chest. She's not dying, I don't understand why she was crying, why everyone was looking at her like she was dying because she's not. She's going to be okay, she has to be okay. Lara's fingers press upon my chest, shakily tracing a flower before her arm falls back down to her side and she takes a deep breath. Her eyes never leave mine, not even when her head hang back, not even when

she goes limp, not even when she exhales weakly, her warm brown eyes stay on mine. I keep thinking I've felt the worst pain in the world, and every single time I'm proven wrong. "We have two minutes." Sam sadly states, knowing he had to say it but I don't move. I'm still looking at Lara, my brows furrowed as my eves loom over her face.

Everyone had that fucking look, that pitiful, sympathetic look on their faces and I just couldn't understand. She's not dead, she's okay. She's going to be alright; she has to be. We were going to make it; we were going to be happy. I was going to make her mac and cheese and we were going to make up for all the years we had lost so she couldn't

die here, she couldn't die. Why the fuck was everyone acting like she's dead. "We have to go." Steve speaks up, the heaviness in his tone was on full display as everything around me blurs. I can hear them talking, I can hear Wanda's stifled sobs, but it all sounds mu led. I was

underwater again. "Let's go." I say, getting on my feet but taking Lara with me. I had her in my arms, one slipped under her knees as the other was held behind her neck. They were looking at me again, dead silent like

nobody knew what to say.
"Lexa..." Natasha speaks up, I know that voice. I know that tone, she's
talking to me the way she talked to Martina when she came home all
bruised and bloodied. I was fine. Everything was fine.
"What? She's fine. She's okay! We have to go!" I snap at Natasha,
heaving as they all exchanged looks.
"Lexa... I'm sorry." Wanda tries, but I only look at her sharply. Why
was she apologizing? Nothing was wrong. Everything was okay. Lara's
not dead.

She's not dead. "There's nothing to be sorry about. She's fine. She's going to be okay. She'll wake up, you'll see. We just... we need to get her out. We need to go." I plead, my voice cracking as they eventually let up and we head down the corridor. I felt completely disconnected. Everything inside me was numb, my ears were ringing and my head was pounding. It felt like I was dreaming, even when I knew I wasn't. we finally get to the short flight of stairs that led up to the west exit, Sam taking the liberty of opening it as my eyes glance up at the numbers on the bomb. Maybe I was

dreaming. Maybe the numbers would jumble and I'd know, and I'd wake up and things would be okay. But it was clear. It was so painfully clear. A minute and fi een seconds le . It wasn't wildly changing. I wasn't dreaming. That's when it all hits me, like a switch had been flipped and my consciousness had returned it hits

the way she had gone pale. The way her warm skin turned grey, the way her eyes had darkened, the way her face held no emotion. It hits me harder than any dagger, than any poison that could ever course through my veins. Then the pain comes around, jolting in my abdomen as I fall to my knees, crashing to the ground with Lara still in my arms.

me. It hits me when I look down at Lara, when I look at her and notice

Everyone turns to look at me in surprise as I sat there, tears slowly streaming down, becoming a dam L couldn't repair as I look at Lara once again. She's not okay, she's not going to be okay. We weren't going to make it, we weren't going to be fine. She's gone. She's gone and she's still in my arms but she's not laughing, or calling me names or asking for pasta. She's just... there, limp, lifeless. "Hey, hey we have to go." Wanda rushes to me, falling to her knees as she cups my face. I can feel everything, but the pain of my wound could never amount to all I feel in my chest.

"I- She's gone. She's... she's not going to wake up, is she?" I look up at Wanda, completely and utterly shattered as tears in her eyes well up once again. She cups my face, holding me with the same tenderness she always has as she gives me a look that tells me all I need to know. And in that moment, I make another choice. One she doesn't notice this time, because if she did, she wouldn't be

holding me so gently. I give her a weak nod, slowly setting Lara down on the ground before getting up. My eyes meet Natasha's, and I realize that I wasn't as great as keeping secrets as I thought because she's looking at me like she knows. She's looking at me like she's begging for herself to be wrong, but we both know she isn't. I tread up the stairs, Wanda by my side as everyone makes their way out. I stop just before stepping out, glancing back at Lara who laid at the bottom of the steps before turning ahead to Wanda, who was already out.

Thirty seconds. That's all I had. That's all we had. I can see the wave of realization dawn on their faces, all except Wanda. Natasha had tears streaming down her face, even when she kept a collected expression. I looked over each of them, Steve staring back at me somberly, but I knew he

understood. Then there was Wanda, my Wanda who still looked at me expectantly, like she was just waiting for me to join them out there. "I'll find you in every lifetime, I promise." I o er her a weak smile as finally; realization hits her too. Before she could take another step, I shut the door and pull the manual lock. a I can hear her screams from the other side, and it breaks my heart as I made my way down the stairs, rejoining Lara on the ground. I sat with my back leaned up against the wall, pulling my sister up to my lap and holding her in my arms as I wired my eyes tightly shut. I press the tip of my finger into the palm of her hand, tracing a flower as I took a breath. I can hear the ticking get louder; I can hear everything. "We'll be alright." I whisper and for the first time in my life, I believe it. You see, I never understood humanity's fixation on defining good. a I used to think it meant the most mundane things, shallow, idiotic. I

used to think people only cared, or wanted to be good if it was for their own gratification but I was wrong. I never understood goodness, until I met her. Until I found someone who had seen all the evil the world had to o er and still, somehow, had a pure heart full of love. I never understood until we ran through New York City, until we danced in the middle of an empty bedroom, until she held me like I was the most prized jewel the universe had to o er. I found my own definition of good in the most unexpected places. I found it in a woman who had blood on her hands, who spent the rest of her life trying to wash it o and help a world that has never given

her anything in return. I found it in a man who carried the weight of the world on his shoulders, and fought demons much more terrifying than the ones he faced in battle. I found it in a little girl who was dealt the most unpleasant hand, but found humor and light in a life that was dead set on being bleak. I found It in my sister, who gave up her life to save the only person in

the universe who held my heart with such devotion, such tenderness. I found it in my sister, who never deserved to see the horrors this universe had to o er, but still found her way back to the same little girl I sat with in the living room, the girl who loved to draw and make others smile, make me smile. And somehow, I found it in myself too. And for the first time, it was enough.

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