

License to Kill

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License to Kill

by [thewritingblues](#)

Summary

Ava has been working for the Operative for about four years. They're a clandestine group of spies working as a part of MI6 to manage matters of country security. This is the only job Ava's ever known, and she's one of the best. Over the years Ava's heard the whispers of the League, a dangerous group of assassins that seem to run opposite the Operative in terms of goals and outcomes. What Ava never expected was that she might find herself closely tangling with one of the League's best, Sara Lance. They keep crossing paths, but then one day, Sara just disappears and goes dark. That is until she shows up in Ava's hotel room, suddenly needing Ava's help.

Day Nineteen — Spies and Assassins

Notes

So, is this a shameless excuse to write a spy fic really. But this is the AU that I have been dying to get to. Absolutely dying to get to. I was practically raised on spy movies like James Bond (which is where the title came from) and Mission Impossible so this outline was easily my favourite to make. I will say though, there are depictions of violence and I have

labeled it as such even though it's relatively mild. I've also made the rating explicit simply because I haven't decided how explicit the sex scenes will be (I don't think I'm much good with smut, so we'll see). This is set to be the longest AU in the collection, potentially upwards of 100,000 words by the time I'm through, but I'm not sure how many parts just yet. This initial chapter has a lot of the relevant background, so it's a bit slow moving but gives a glimpse into what it is Ava's doing.

General warnings for this, there are quite a few of them but, I never really like writing too much detail about injuries so, it's pretty mild but. Mentions of torture (not actually written out), injury descriptions, fights and death (not of legends characters), morally questionable decisions and actions, and then of course, the smut. I'll mention everything in each chapter at the beginning. If those things are not your cup of tea, this will be a hard fic to avoid reading them in as it's about spies and assassins. This chapter has some descriptions of blood and injuries and like, barely there references to smut.

As always, I love taking suggestions for the next AUs coming up. For anyone else who wants to look the outlines are [here](#) or there is a list of just the prompts themselves that can be found on the challenge page [here](#). Just let me know if there's one that you want to see next!

Part One

Chapter Notes

*** there is now a hyperlink after the second to last section in this chapter, and it leads to Sara's POV of their meeting in Moscow. This scene comes from the next part of the series. Each of the scenes from the continuation will be hyperlinked into this fic in chronological order

Minsk, Belarus — 09:45

With her nose tucked safely behind the confines of her scarf, Ava pushes open the heavy door that opens up to a narrow staircase running underground. It's still cold inside this passageway, though not nearly as cold as it currently is outside in the city this winter. Brushing flakes of fallen snow from her shoulders, Ava sets off down the steps, taking them one at a time and holding to the guardrail to avoid taking a tumble down the stairs as she nearly had upon her arrival into the city three days prior.

"Dmitriy," Ava calls out as she enters the little bunker down below, shoving her way into the room as she unwinds her scarf, "Henry is running hot this week, he has me shipping out again tomorrow." Ava pauses to scan the clustered counters inside the dimly lit cellar, stopping at the one nearest her and running her fingers over the crate of hand grenades there. "I know the original plan was to wait to gather supplies from you in a few days," Ava continues, looking around for the spectacled man that has been her contact in this city for two years now, "But I wanted to see if I could get those weapons in advance so I don't have to search for them when in my new city."

A mumbled reply comes from the back room, a room that Ava had learned to never enter long ago. Dmitriy dabbles in poisons and toxins, and Ava had nearly inhaled his latest project about a year ago when she went back there looking for him. Pulling her gloves from each hand and tucking them in her pocket, Ava finds the chair off to the side and takes a seat, waiting for her friend to come out to see her.

It's not often that Ava receives such an immediate request to relocate somewhere else for another job, but Henry has been running her everywhere these past few months so Ava really should have seen this coming. Henry Saunders has been Ava's handler in this business since she joined. He was the man who recruited her to the Operative when she was only twenty and Henry had personally placed her in the training program where Ava spent two years relearning everything she thought she once knew about the world and international affairs.

It's no secret to civilians that the government has ghost operations and agents moving in shadows who do things they do not wish to be known. However Ava had never known just how far these clandestine operations truly spread. The Operative is a collection of spies placed all over the globe, a group that was formed years before the Second World War by the MI6. While the Secret Intelligence Service does carry out jobs similar to the ones Ava runs, they do not do so in complete secrecy.

The jobs that Ava takes are always performed in the shadows; intelligence stolen from firms and organizations, contracted hits carried out and meant to either look as if they were an accident or performed by another competing group. It's a job that requires constant movement, and Henry had

chosen Ava soon after she entered university at Oxford because he saw that she would be a good fit. Since the death of her parents when she was young, Ava's never really been tied to anything, and she never had a true place that she believed felt like home.

By nature, that made her fit for recruitment, and she had come home to her flat one evening to find Henry sitting there on her couch, something that had all but terrified her until she learned the purpose of his visit. Ava never knew that her father had worked for MI5, nor did she know that Henry had personally known him and had been watching her for years. It had not been her father's wish that she follow in her footsteps, but in training Ava learned that she had a knack for this kind of job.

Even spies have rules, and Ava abides by each of them very carefully. Every job she takes has a complex plan as well as at least two backup plans that she makes the time to craft before even landing in the new city. This is now Ava's fourth year working for the Operative as a full agent, and she thinks that this life suits her. With the exception of longer jobs, Ava is in a new city each week which means that she has traveled to multiple countries in the past years of her life. Each job means reinventing herself to the best character suited to complete her task, and Ava places a lot of care in forming her different aliases.

There are of course a few that she cycles through, always careful to never let them be attached to the more dangerous cases where she's needed to take drastic measures. Her contact in the states, Gary Green, is a data analyst and self-proclaimed computer expert who helps Ava make sure that there is appropriate proof to back up each of her identities. He is one of her primary contacts, someone that he met by some stroke of luck in the States one year when she was based there for a month on a job. Since then he has been her go to man whenever she needs something decoded or dug into. Gary might be a bit nervous and overly eager to help her sometimes, but he never fails to get the job done.

Of course in this line of work, personal rules matter almost as much as professional ones. Ava has a set of them that she lives and breathes by, the very rules that are likely the reason that she's survived as long as she has with relatively few issues to speak of. The first rule is that Ava never backs down and never leaves a job before her task has been completed. Being thorough matters when dealing in the shadows. There is no backup, so if Ava neglects to take care of a loose thread, she could be putting herself in danger.

The second is to always have more than just one plan. Rarely do things go as they should when Ava is working a job, particularly when she's placed on a longer assignment. Backup plans have saved her life at times. This rule of course comes with the requisite that Ava know as much as she can at all times. Letting her guard down is not an option, and Ava never goes into a job without knowing the full background of her target as well as any potential threats that could come up on the job. Her technology skills might be limited, but Ava always completes thorough searches before ever entering the field.

And the third and most important rule is that Ava must trust no one. This organization was built on secrecy, and there are still things that not even Ava has knowledge of when it comes to the Operative. She's on her own out here in the field, always on the move, and stopping to trust someone could put her life in danger. As much as Ava relies on Gary for information and alias creation, she does not trust him. Even Henry, her handler, is someone that Ava has always regarded with a healthy level of suspicion.

Never once does Ava let anyone know her location when she's in the field, and everything that she plans on a job is planned by her. The Operative has contacts in every city, and while Ava does use them from time to time, she's long preferred to create her own network of weapons supplies and

forgers around the globe. It's taken time, but after four years consistently working in the field, Ava's built up a close web that she utilizes more often than she does the Operative's network.

This means sometimes coming into contact with some less savory people, but Ava will take that over the Operative knowing her every move and plan. Dmitriy is one of her personal contact, though despite the fact that nearly everything down in this shop is entirely illegal, he is a very good man. Ava met him two years ago when she was in this very city to take out an informant for the Operative that had been telling their secrets to others. Dmitriy happened to be present on that evening, walking his dog along the same pathway in Victory Park where Ava had shot the informant.

All these years and he never once turned her in, though even if he tried, he wouldn't know how to report her seeing as he only knows her first name. Every aspect of Ava's original identity has been wiped from existence. According to any formal records, Ava Sharpe does not and never did exist. But Ava's learned that Dmitriy has no desire to turn her in, and should Ava be the kind of person to trust others, he might be the person she would consider placing her faith in.

"Ava," Dmitriy speaks, a wide smile on his face as he emerges from the backroom, a mask shoved down near his neck. Standing up, Ava offers him a smile in return, placing her hands on his arms as he leans in to kiss her cheek. Ava's never been one for much physical affection after so long spent on her own, but this has been how Dmitriy has greeted her for over a year now. "Leaving again so soon?" he asks, stepping backwards and moving to a bench that contains several handguns and magazines of ammunition, "When we spoke last you said it would be a week before you departed."

They spoke last not even three days ago, but that's how quickly things change in Ava's line of work. "Henry has me on a flight at five in the morning heading to a city in Italy," Ava explains, walking over to the counter when Dmitriy waves for her to follow, "Evidently whatever is there can't wait, so it was crucial that I get there as soon as I can."

Ava's actually almost relieved to be heading to Italy. The police force here in Minsk has never been a group that Ava has enjoyed having to work around, nor is it fun avoiding the local Interpol office when she's been here on more violent jobs. "You should turn it down to remain here and rest," Dmitriy pushes on, packing a small case there to the side, the contents containing the hand grenades and rifle that Ava had requested, "Alina and Darya would be pleased to see you again, and I have a brand new bottle of vodka, the nice kind."

Alina is Dmitriy's wife, a woman who had apparently learned the truth of how Ava and Dmitriy met and did not seem to care that Ava and Dmitriy both partake in illegal activities. Darya is their now eight year old daughter, a rather small and somber little girl with her mother's dark brown hair and her father's green eyes. Normally Ava does not like children, but she had made an exception when she met Darya who was far more interested in the book she was reading than she was in the adults around her.

Whenever Ava is in the city, Dmitriy always manages to persuade her to go to dinner with them, though Ava never accepts the offer to go to their home. "It might have to wait for another time," Ava replies, giving Dmitriy an apologetic look when he turns to her in disapproval, "I have plans to make before I touch down tomorrow morning, and I do always hate flying so early."

Really Ava hates flying in general, particularly when she flies using Operative contacts. Usually Ava will take her own commercial flight, but this time around she'll be carrying weapons that certainly will not make it through security checks. "Everything is in here," Dmitriy closes up the case before handing it to Ava, "And I have something extra for you, wait here a moment." When

Ava takes the case, Dmitriy shuffles off to the side, digging through a drawer there that contains several files and folders before shifting to the drawer below

Ava already gets the feeling that she knows what he's about to give her. Each time she comes, Dmitriy offers her some local treat when it's time for Ava to leave the city. "Candies from the store, the ones that you liked the last time," he speaks, turning around with a small bag in hand, "Alina picked these up for me the other day, but I can spare them for you."

They're some of her favourites, a little bar of fondant made of condensed milk all wrapped in chocolate and containing a liqueur filling. "Thank you," Ava smiles, taking the little bag and tucking it away in the shoulder bag she has slung over her arm, "I imagine these will all be gone by the end of my flight, I never have had much self-control when it comes to the sweets from the places I visit."

That is the one thing Ava has loved in her time traveling, the opportunity to experience so many different cultures, languages, cities, customs, and cuisines. Knowing common languages is so crucial in her line of work, and over time Ava has come to speak more than just a few of them with relative fluency. "Be safe, wherever you are sneaking around next," Dmitriy jests kindly, already leaning in for another embrace, his lips never really meeting her cheek, "Send word when you're here next so we can share that vodka, you know Alina won't go near it."

With a small smile, Ava bids Dmitriy goodbye and sets off up the stairs with the case in hand. The door closes behind her and Ava wraps her scarf back around her neck, ready to go back out into the cold winds that are passing through the city. There's no telling what awaits for her in Milan, but it's one of Ava's favourite locations in Italy where she has utilizes the flat of one of her local contacts who is never truly in the city. At the top of the step, Ava braces herself for the cold, and pushes open the door.

Bordeaux, France — 11:31

Pushing her sunglasses further up her face, Ava takes in the civilians surrounding her as she sits at her little table. The park here is always filled with families and children, even when it is as chilly as it is today. A group of schoolchildren are playing a game of football on the field here, kicking the ball back and forth to one another, each of them shrieking with laughter from time to time when the ball leaves the bounds of the little ring they've created with bundles of rope.

Another city means another mission, and as of two days ago Ava had finished her job here where she was working to steal and erase data from a technology firm that had come across something they shouldn't. The Operative keeps close tabs on any kind of intelligence information, and the moment some group stumbles into something on accident, an agent is deployed to handle the matter.

It had been a relatively simple task, almost boring by the standard of Ava's usual jobs. Not that Ava will complain, this job has offered her the chance to take a small rest in between her constant travels over the past month. Henry has had Ava on the move, cleaning up some of the damage left behind by a competing organization that is constantly getting in the way of the Operative.

Roughly three years ago is when Ava first learned of the League. They're another clandestine operations group, however they're far less reserved in making efforts to keep their jobs in the shadows. Civilians might not recognize the work of the League, but the Operative is well aware of their work, and Ava has become all too accustomed with how bold the League is. Too many times Ava has taken on a job only to find that her target has either been killed or apprehended by the

League, never to be seen again.

They're far from subtle, and Ava has come to learn that clandestine has a very different meaning to some people. It has become easy for her to recognize the League signature and attribute kills and kidnappings to them. Unlike the Operative, they do not deal in information, but rather they work as a rather skilled group of assassins. Their kills are brutal and bloody, and are nearly always incredibly public. While Ava goes after analysts, CEOs, and the occasional gang leader, the League seems to be targeting political powers in certain regions.

But it's been nearly impossible to determine the goal of the League seeing as they've been tangling closely with the Operative's business for quite some time now. That and Ava has never once written anything down regarding the organization. It's well known by agents in the Operative that the League is ruthless, and to collect intel on them would be to sign a death wish. Instead, Ava has been mentally keeping track of everything, monitoring the news as well as memorizing the details where the League gets far too close to her own work.

Something strikes Ava's leg, pulling her from her thoughts and she turns to find a young boy coming towards her. It's a football at her feet, resting there in the grass where it had apparently been kicked rather far out of bounds of the game. "I'm sorry ma'am," the boy speaks in soft French while Ava bends down to remove the ball from the ground, "We were not trying to disturb you."

"It's alright," Ava replies, giving him a small smile as she tosses the ball back, "Accidents happen." He gives her a little toothy grin, catching the ball in his hands before yelling another apology over his shoulder as he runs back to the group, already calling out new commands to his teammates.

People watching is one of Ava's favourite things to do in different cities, and today has been no exception. Sometimes she watches and wonders what it would be like to just be another civilian walking through here, having no knowledge of all the foreign matter Ava has learned of in her time working as a spy. Or she watches the children, wondering what it might have been like for her if they had remained in just one place when she was younger. At the time Ava never knew that they moved as often as they did because he was really an MI5 agent, but now it makes far more sense.

As hard as it was to never be tied down even as a kid, that is what had prepared her for this line of work. Ava's used to constant movement, and it's all she's ever really known. "Adorable aren't they," a voice speaks from the side. Ava glances up to find Henry there, his glasses fixed firmly over his eyes, his cane in his hand. He's late, at least ten minutes so, and Ava has to fight to keep the disapproving frown off her face. "Ever thought about it?" Henry takes a seat opposite Ava, motioning to the children with his cane, "Having kids?"

"Kids aren't something I ever see in my future," Ava shakes her head, folding one leg over another and glancing to the newspaper that Henry has laid over the table. It likely contains the date file for her next job, the very reason she's here in the park to meet with him today. "I didn't think they were something you wanted either," Ava comments, removing her sunglasses from her face and folding them neatly on the table, "Having children means actually settling down."

Henry moves around just as much as Ava does. He's a rather public figure of MI6, working as consultant who frequently travels to other countries where he works alongside Interpol and other organizations. "No, they're not in my future either," Henry remarks, already smiling as he nudges the paper across the small circular table, "Your next job, out in Russia this time." With a small sigh, Ava takes the paper, never eager to head into Russia in the dead of winter. "There's a local mob member there who has gotten his hands on some intel," Henry explains as Ava shakes the

date drive from the paper and pockets it, "We'd prefer that he lose that intel, quickly."

Everything Ava needs to know will be inside the data drive, and she hums quietly, wondering why she's being sent out to Russia when there must be others who are closer. Though she doesn't bother to ask this question, she already knows that Henry won't answer it. "Acquisition only?" Ava inquires, glancing around their surroundings, always checking over her shoulder.

"Free reign on this one," Henry replies, something that draws Ava's attention back to him as she raises her brows in surprise, "The Operative has yet to disapprove of your methods. You're a legacy member here and everyone has been impressed with your work over the years." It's praise, and Ava doesn't really want it. She never quite knows what to do in these cases where someone is complimenting her work. "You judge the situation when you get out there. If he seems persistent, make sure he stops," Henry shrugs, pursing his lips, "Permanently if you have to."

It's not often that Ava is given free reign and total control over how she handles a job. Anytime that order comes down, it means that the Operative anticipates problems with the task and drastic measures are expected to be taken. Sometimes, Ava's job does in fact mean killing her targets. While the Operative calls themselves a group of spies, they all have different roles to play, and Ava's focuses primarily on protecting information at all costs.

Ava does not enjoy killing though, so she does her best to make it quick and painless when she can. Part of her job means making every death appear to be an accident or the responsibility of another group, and undoubtedly that is what Henry is asking her to do here. "Russia," Ava hums, thinking back to some of the foreign news reports she's been tracking through Interpol records online, "There's a possibility I might have some company there, the League has been operating near my past three missions."

The League is just as aware of the Operative, and Ava knows that there is a long-running rivalry between the two groups seeing as they're often at conflict with targets. The League commonly kills the individuals that the Operative needs to gain information from, and sometimes it's the other way around. "Well, we do have a basic non-verbal agreement with the League to stay out of each other's affairs, but there is always bound to be conflicts of interest," Henry comments, turning his face towards the field, "I recommend you stay far from their path should you encounter one of their members."

Ava's certainly not scared of their assassins. From what she has seen so far, their kills are sloppy, overly public and overly bloody. Not even two weeks ago there had been a murder in Prague of a political runner, and he had been killed quite brutally on the local train. The only thing Ava admires about the League is the sheer ability of their members to avoid detection and arrest when they're as bold and reckless as they are. "I'm not concerned with crossing paths," Ava tells him, shaking her head with a sigh, "I'm concerned about them reaching my target before I can."

It's happened before. There is one assassin in particular that Ava keeps crossing paths with, and she is tired of finding her targets dead upon her arrival. "It would be good for you to have a healthy amount of fear," Henry reminds her, sliding his glasses from his face and looking to her with those pale eyes, "The League would not hesitate to take you out if you were to get in their way, I would know."

Latticed scars map over the skin around Henry's eyes, his cornea pale and clouded. Five years before he recruited Ava, Henry had gotten too close for the League's comfort and one of their members had blinded him by throwing acid in his face. It was a horrific way to injure someone, and it had robbed Henry of nearly all his sight. Henry had been cocky back then, too sure of himself as he was digging into the League's mentions around the globe, searching for this base of

operations.

Ava is not cocky in that respect, and she does not dig into the League at all. She truly doesn't believe there's a reason for her to fear the League, she simply does not want to come across one of their assassins while doing her time in Russia. "Okay," Ava nods her head in agreement, not about to voice her thoughts to Henry, "When am I meant to be shipping out? I'll need a few days based there to formulate a plan due to the extreme weather in the region."

"We're sending you in two months time," Henry replies, once more surprising Ava because she assumed that she was needed out there immediately, "Right now he's on a watch order. This meeting was simply to notify you that you could be asked to leave a job at the last minute should something come up. The real job is in Brussels, and it's on the file there as well." Henry stands, folding the paper up and tucking it under his arm as he reaches for his cane, "A research firm is digging into one of our allies, make sure you shut down the search. Free reign."

Humming quietly, Ava taps her coat pocket that contains the drive as Henry nudges his chair in. "Give my best to Irene," Ava remarks as Henry is about to walk away, "I appreciate her sending that dress when I was in London, it was a last minute lifesaver for the unexpected gala I was required to attend for the job." Henry only gives her a small nod in response before walking away.

Ava watches him go, silently thinking about the upcoming missions. It is not common for her to be given advance warning about a job. It's even more uncommon for Ava to be given free reign like this when it comes to a research firm. This is going to be something she'll look into in her free time, but for now Ava leans back in her chair, content to people watch for a bit longer before returning to the local hotel.

Brussels, Belgium — 14:32

Packing has always been Ava's least favourite part of traveling, and she inevitably forgets something behind each time. This most recent mission she had in fact come here to Brussels to tackle the research firm, though as it turns out, all she had needed to do was just wipe their servers. No violence had been needed, and after a day of staking the place out and following one of the employees, Ava had gained access to the building through a stolen key card.

From there it was a simple matter of hiding out inside while she waited for everything to close down. Once everyone was gone, Ava had wiped the servers using a disk that contains a rather nasty virus Gary had given her for this kind of work. Every trail they had regarding the Operative's ally was erased, and Ava knows there would be no coming back from that. The job was finished in three days time, and Ava had a two day layover here before her next job that's taking her all the way to Singapore.

Such a quick turnaround meant that Ava was not able to return to her home base, a safe house located on the outskirts of Zadar, Croatia. All of her passports are there for her different aliases, and Ava had not prepared for a job right after this one. This means going to her local contact here, a forger that goes only by the codename Blade. His real name is James Banker, an American that moved to Belgium approximately five years ago and set up shop here creating false documents for some rather foul clients.

However he is the best at what he does, and Ava needs a new passport quickly so she can leave. It's cold here in the city, and Ava's never much liked coming out here to Anneessens because she once had a job here that had nearly gone very south very quickly. That was only a street over, an evening where Ava's target had noticed her sitting outside his business. Walking along the street,

Ava peeks down the nearest alley and can see the very storefront she had sat outside that evening.

Bundling her jacket further around her neck to keep the cold out, Ava continues walking down the road, her hands shoved in her pockets. James' place is only a block ahead, tucked in the very back of a little pawn shop here along the streets. Hardly anyone is out today, only a few people milling around on the streets, all bustling towards different locations while wrapped up in warm clothing. Ava prefers the streets be empty though, makes it less likely that she be detected when entering the shop.

When Ava opens the little door, the bell chimes merrily above her while she pulls it shut and flips the lock. "Blade, I'm here to pick up that passport I spoke to you about on the phone," Ava calls to the back, taking in the crowded shelves around her, each one filled with various little trinkets and knickknacks. James never kept this place neat, but Ava never once minded it because the clutter blocks the windows. There's a security camera facing the door, but Ava knows it doesn't work. Only the one in the back of the shop does, where James keeps all of his equipment.

There's no response, so Ava walks further into the store, unbuttoning the top buttons of her coat seeing as it's decently warm in the shop. Dodging some of the items that jut out into the barely formed rows, Ava can see the back window and counter from here, and there is no sign of James anywhere. With a frown, Ava gets closer, her movements slow and her hand shifting to her hip where her gun rests under her jacket.

Brushing the fabric to the side, Ava removes the gun from her holster, clicks the safety off and holds it out in front of her. James should be in right now, and the fact that he hasn't answered her is not making Ava feel very comfortable right now. With very slow and precise movements, Ava makes her way to the side door, taking in a deep breath before placing one hand on the knob. The moment she opens the door, her gun leveled around the room, Ava spots the issue and clicks her tongue, letting out a quiet sigh.

"Damn it James," Ava mutters, holstering her weapon again and taking in the scene in front of her, "I told you to keep guns around here for your safety." James is still sitting in his chair, his head down against the table as he faces her, his eyes already blank and glazed over. Nearly all of the blood in his body has poured out at his feet, a result of the gash cut along his throat. There's a wound on his hand, one that almost appears as if he's been stabbed.

Shaking her head, Ava comes over and carefully lifts his hand up, examining the wound. Whoever killed him was here recently—his body is still warm. There's no noise or movement in the shop, and there isn't a single back door here so Ava knows that the killer is likely already long gone. James entertains a wide variety of dangerous contacts in the city, so there's no telling who did this to him.

But this wound is a strange one, almost curved at the top, not caused by a traditional knife or dagger. After placing his hand down, Ava looks around the room. There's no point in lingering around here, and surely he's finished her passport, so it's just a matter of locating it. Behind Ava is the workbench, and there's something sitting right in the center of it, laid neatly over a little green towel.

It's Ava's passport, that much is clear to see when she opens the inside and finds her photo there with her most recent alias, Ava Short. But there's something else tucked just inside the passport, a folded piece of paper that Ava carefully undoes. Someone wrote on this, and it wasn't James. His handwriting resembles chicken scratch, but this is something close to calligraphy, all neat and looping lines of letters. "*Sorry to take your forger, but he crossed someone he shouldn't have. Until next time,*" it reads, something that instantly has Ava letting out an impatient sigh.

From the League, there is exactly one assassin that would be stupid enough to leave behind a calling card in the form of a note and a red lipstick stamp pressed to the corner. There's nothing Ava hates more than codenames, but nearly every League assassin goes by one. The assassin that has been taken pleasure in fucking with Ava recently goes by the name the Canary. It wasn't until now that Ava has realized the Canary is a woman rather than a man.

Whoever she is, she's one of the League's best and Ava's learned her signature by now. This woman never uses anything other than knives or swords for her kills, something that has become rather easy to recognize in Interpol reports. So far, no foreign offices have picked up on the fact that all of these murders are not isolated, but Ava's strung together a rough pattern of her victims. Nearly everyone the Canary goes after is male, someone with a rather ugly criminal record. She's cold and ruthless in her kills, and she is the one Ava believes is been responsible for the murder of the political runner in Prague.

Folding the note back up, Ava slips it and her passport into her pocket. She would be worried about the Canary now having her name, but Ava knows there is virtually no way for the woman to track her. All this means is she'll have to take a rather complicated route home to assure that she has not be tailed. As for James, it's not as if Ava's going to miss him per say. He didn't deserve to die but, Ava understands that he was a nasty piece of work, so it's not exactly surprising that the League had targeted him. Though she is curious to know who James could have wronged seeing as all he does is run paper forgeries, hardly something worthy of the League's attention.

The League is usually very careful in everything they do, but still, Ava checks the security cameras that survey the outside of the shop. As expected, there is nothing there inside the tape deck. Clearly the Canary had at least thought to cover her tracks. But Ava knows that the League are trained as assassins primarily, and they were never shown the tricks that Ava herself had been taught as a spy.

When Ava glances to the top shelf right above James' desk, she finds what she was looking for. "Assassins," Ava scoffs, reaching up for the object, "Murdering first, thinking later." Between a set of books and a rather old looking vase, James keeps a small camera obscured in a jar of coins. There's a wire coming from a hole in the bottom, the power source threaded through the base and plugged into the wall. When Ava shakes the jar, the coins shift enough for her to see that the camera is in fact still inside. Not even bothering to dig for the camera now, Ava just places the entire jar and cord into her bag to go through later.

That had been a mistake, because if the Canary entered the camera's view, Ava can have Gary find her identity in under an hour. The only trouble here is going to be actually getting the footage off the camera because Ava does not have the equipment required and she is far too busy to pass this off to one of her contacts for the time being. That is going to have be a task for later. With one last look cast at James, Ava just shakes her head before heading from the back room and walking to the front of the store.

Unlocking the door, Ava brings her coat around her and pulls her burner phone from her pocket as she pushes outside to the cold air once more. "Hello," Ava speaks into the phone after dialing the authorities, "Yes I'd like to report a disturbance I heard at the pawn shop along Rue des Foulons, I believe someone there has been killed."

Tanjong Pagar, Singapore — 20:04

Angrily slamming the door of her car, Ava takes in the scene outside the warehouse here in Singapore down by the Straight. Already she can see the dead bodies laying on the ground by the

entrance, each of them with red stains covering their white shirt. It's been two weeks since Ava was in Brussels where she had come across a scene much like this one, and she doesn't have to guess to think what she might find inside.

Ava had been at a nearby airstrip, waiting near the hangars for her local arms dealer to make contact with her. Her job here has been a tricky one, and what Ava needed was an EMP, something that Lim said he had plenty of. The plan was to meet there a half hour ago, but instead Ava had stood there in the rain with her umbrella for about ten minutes when she had received the text from Lim's phone. All it said was, "*Sorry again babe*".

Instantly Ava knew what had happened, but she needed to come here and see it for herself. And now she can. All of Lim's group of eight men, two out here, and likely more inside—dead. This is beginning to feel a bit personal at this point, and Ava is nothing but pissed. With her gun in hand, she sets off through the rain, not caring how wet her clothing gets as she approaches the front of the building.

Both men are laid out on their backs, their eyes open as they stare blankly towards the sky, blood mixing with rain among the ground. It's completely sloppy work, and from the looks of it, they had at least tried to put up a fight. If Ava had been taking on a warehouse of this size with an unknown number of combatants inside, she would have chosen a rifle with a silencer to take out the outside men before moving in. Clearly the Canary has no such regards for any kind of planning of that sort.

Bending down, Ava surveys the wounds, using the tip of her own knife that she slides from her vest pocket to shift their shirts to the side. Same as last time, the entry points are curved in that same fashion she found in James' hand. Each man was then stabbed in the heart, a different and straighter blade used for that. Clicking her tongue, Ava slips her knife away before pushing off the ground to her feet again.

Right now she should be finding her way into the technology institute thirty minutes from here, ready to set off her EMP to stop her target from delving into the Operative's financial records. But instead, now Ava has to go inside this damn warehouse and track down Lim and her weapons. Never before has Ava had this much trouble from the League, and should she ever find the Canary, Ava will not hesitate to return this little favour that she seems to have done Ava. Taking out someone's contacts in the field is a massive foul play in this business, and Ava is beginning to think that she's being toyed with.

Rather than being scared, Ava's filled with anger while she walks inside the building and takes in all of the bodies there. There's no way the Canary stayed around for the aftermath of Ava's arrival, but just in case, Ava keeps her gun out. It's a good thing she was prepared for this, already dressed in all black with her tactical vest and belt secured tightly around her body. Her target this time around is a rather dangerous man who keeps even more dangerous company so Ava wasn't taking any chances of leaving her weapons behind.

Now she has to use them for a different reason. Stepping to the side, Ava snaps a picture of the two new bodies that she finds at the base of the stairs, bringing her current count up to six men found. "Did you have to kill them all?" Ava fires the text and the photo off to Lim's phone, sure that the Canary either kept it with her or tossed it. Ava really shouldn't have contacted her like that, but this is overkill, without a single doubt.

Slowly moving up the stairs, Ava finds the final two men there outside the office. However, there's a knife still embedded in one of their sides. Squatting down, Ava removes a little cloth from her belt before wrapping it around the knife and giving it a sharp tug. It comes free from the man's side, half of the blade covered in blood. This is not a tradition knife, it's a throwing star. Ava never

sees these kinds of weapons used anymore, but it might explain how the Canary was able to incapacitate the men before killing them.

Throwing knives like that takes a considerable amount of skill, and Ava's sure it was done from a distance. Silently, she can't help but respect the Canary for that, Ava certainly can't throw knives with this kind of accuracy. Knives are largely impractical in Ava's opinion, which is why she nearly always opts for a gun. But from what she's learned of the Canary, it's not often that she uses bullets, always preferring these kinds of knives. Still, Ava could potentially track her using this, so she wraps it in the cloth before pocketing the throwing star.

There's blood sprayed over the window of the office, so Ava already knows what she's going to find as she opens the door. Sure enough, there's Lim, sitting in his chair leaning back with his head tipped to the ceiling. The room is a complete disaster, covered in blood and Ava turns around to find a few spare bullets in the wall near the door. A gun sits on the ground just below Lim's chair, likely where it fell from his hands. Papers are scattered all over the office and Ava sighs, shaking her head.

Really it's a wonder the League hasn't drawn more attention doing something like this out here. This is going to gain the attention of the local authorities seeing as Lim is a wanted man and has been hunted across a few continents the past few years for his penchant of selling weapons to dangerous bidders. The only reason Ava chose him as her contact is because it was easy for her name to get lost in his large list of clients. That and he always manages to have exactly what she needs.

Her phone chimes and Ava removes it from her pocket before reading the message there, *"You know we really do have to stop meeting like this. It's not my fault you keep bad company, but I was feeling kind this evening so I left your toys behind."* The final lines of the message tells her to check under the desk. Nudging Lim and the chair to the side, Ava reaches under the desk to find a black case there. It's relatively heavy as she lifts it to the desk before flipping the switches and glancing inside.

Nestled inside the case are four EMPs, far more than she asked for. There's also a few microphones and small cameras, something Ava had asked Lim to throw in for her. But tucked in the very bottom is a long range rifle, Ava's favourite kind. It's a Ruger precision rifle, already equipped with everything Ava needs. There's ammo rounds tucked inside as well, resting right next to it, and a small note taped to the top of the case. Ava rips it off, still so angry that the Canary is playing games with her. *"Nice choice in rifle, found your old requests in his files and threw it in. See you next time darling!"*, Ava reads the note before crumbling it up and pocketing it so it won't be found.

Again there's next to no concern that the Canary will find her from her file here, though Ava does move over to the cabinets so she can remove it before the authorities arrive here. It's there near the front, clearly having been gone through. Ava nearly expects to find another little note inside, but instead there's nothing. With an angry sigh, she tucks the file under her arm before going back to the case and snapping it shut.

This is not going to be something Ava tells Henry about. If he finds out that she's made contact with a League member, he will undoubtedly pull her from active duty for some time. The last time Ava had been pulled was eight months ago after a sniper on a more complicated mission in Bangladesh had caught her off-guard. Recover had been hell and sometimes Ava's hip still aches from where the bullet pierced through muscle and skin right along the bone. But even worse had been all that time spent doing nothing because Henry had been concerned that she had been outed seeing as she never caught that damn sniper.

With the case in hand, Ava leaves the office and makes her way back down the stairs and towards the pouring rain outside. Unable to stop herself, she removes her phone from her pocket and sends of a quick text to the number, wanting to get in the last word before the Canary disconnects the line. “Nine men dead is likely to get the attention of the locals here,” Ava replies to the previous text, “Murdering them all was not necessary.”

For all Ava knows, some of these people could have been good men who got mixed up in bad things. As a rule of thumb, Ava never kills someone without looking into their background extensively. The exception to that is in a life or death situation where she’s taking fire. But the League must operate along different morals, that much is becoming increasingly clear.

Swiping the water from her eyes that’s dripping down from her hair, Ava lifts the trunk of her car before situating the case inside. She lays the file off to the side, something that she’ll burn later in her hotel room. Ava removes the throwing star from her belt, as well as the note the Canary had left behind. Once everything is squared away, she closes the trunk once more and gets into the drivers seat.

It’s far too late for her to go to the tech institute now, so Ava’s going to have to go back to her own place and make a new plan for tomorrow. Hopefully that doesn’t set her back on her timeline. Just as she’s about to put the car in drive to leave, another text comes through, her phone chiming. Groaning, Ava shifts sideways in her seat so she can get it from her pocket. “*Please, save the moral outcry for someone who doesn’t know your body count,*” the texts reads, something that has Ava humming in surprise, “*Until next time.*”

There’s another lipstick emoji there along with the disconnection notification. Ava just scoffs before ripping the SIM card from the burner and tossing the burner out the window. This has been a revelation though, the Canary clearly is tracking her, or at the very least has been keeping tabs on Ava’s work. Instead of feeling worried, Ava’s just irritated. It would be virtually impossible for the Canary to know Ava’s body count seeing as even Ava herself takes painstaking lengths to make sure her kills are unrecognizable.

While Ava does prefer poison as a weapon of choice, or something as simple as a syringe of air to the bloodstream to induce a heart attack, she does switch it up. Bombs are always good choices, as are staging shootings that look like they occurred in crime infested areas. Never once does Ava repeat a method twice in a row, and she even is careful to randomly assign murder methods to each case where she is given free reign so she never risks forming a pattern. Ava has been trained to be paranoid, it’s something she’s quite good at.

The Canary is fucking with her, and Ava is not going to let it get to her. She’ll allow herself this car ride to be pissed off, but when she arrives back at the hotel it’s time to move on. There are bigger issues to handle other than the Canary right now.

Moscow, Russia — 22:45

Ava hates coming to Russia, that’s the simple truth of it all. Being here is never pleasant with all the violence in that is constantly happening within the country, and she always makes a conscious effort to stay off the beaten path whenever she’s in town. Moscow is not a safe place for spies, not even in the slightest. Everywhere in this country is dangerous for a spy to be, but this city in particular comes with so many risks.

Outside of the dangers, Ava hates the weather here, and she truly did not want to come to this country in the middle of winter. Moscow is of course a beautiful city, Ava can appreciate that.

What she cannot appreciate is the fact that it's below freezing outside and the ground is covered with about seven inches of snow already and the forecast has more arriving overnight. This is undoubtedly the worst time to be here for a mission that requires Ava getting in and out of cities quickly, but there was little other choice.

Henry had called her only two days after Ava had wrapped up in Singapore with the institute there. She had been about to board her plane back to Europe when her phone was going off and she had to find a pay phone to place the call in to Henry. It was then that he let her know it was time to come here to take on the job that had been brought to her about a month ago. So Ava had changed her plans last minute.

Now she's here, sitting in a rundown bar just outside the main part of the city, sipping Stolichka vodka martinis as she waits for the call that should be coming into the bar payphone anytime now. The bartender has been paying her no mind, something that Ava appreciates because it has allowed her to go over the information sat in front of her. Everything in the file is written out in French, something that Ava would be surprised to learn any of the patrons here spoke so she's safe to have it laid out here.

Henry had been wrong about the target being a mob leader, though he rarely actually checks the targets, instead focusing on the reason they're being sought after. Instead the man here is a media mogul here, someone who is trying to rise to fame. Apparently the way he wishes to do that is by exposing information that he has no idea is tied to the Operative. From what Ava has read, this man hardly has enough information to really bring down the Operative, but it would cause a significant dent should someone from the outside hear his reports and look into it.

So tomorrow Ava begins tailing him to find out not only what he knows, but who he might have told about this. Given the tense political situation here with the government and the media, it really won't take much to make his murder appear as if it happened at the hands of local government officials. Before Ava jumps to murder, she will of course see if this situation can be remedied with more subtle measures. Usually a good server wipe does the trick, even if all Ava removes is information relative to the Operative.

The seat next to Ava is pulled out, and she turns her head in surprise. There are countless other empty seats along the bar, and yet this woman has chosen to sit right near Ava. Closing the file, Ava takes her in from the corner of her eye while the woman converses with the bartender in Russian. The woman is wearing a warm looking quilted forest green coat that wraps around her body, a pair of heeled boots on her feet. There's nothing particularly practical about her outfit when the weather is this cold.

Objectively, the woman is rather pretty, certainly someone that Ava would go for if she weren't here on official business. Soft blonde waves fall around the woman's shoulders, brushing over the top of her coat as she shakes her head at something the bartender says. She's wearing a light amount of makeup, but dark red lipstick colors her lips that pull back to reveal a pretty smile when the woman laughs. "I'll have a vodka martini, extra dirty, stirred," the woman orders with in Russian with an accent that lets Ava know she isn't from here, "Actually make that two."

Raising her brows, Ava glances to the woman's face, finding a pair of sparkling blue eyes looking back at her. There's an amused smile pulling at the woman's lips, and Ava tilts her head to the side, waiting for the woman to speak. "I make try not to make a habit of drinking alone," the woman says by way of explanation, still smiling at Ava as she settles her head in her hand, her elbow propped on the counter.

Had this been any other city on any other day, Ava might be inclined to flirt back. But there is

really no time for that. She's here to take a phone call and then get back to her room where she'll spend the evening crafting tomorrow's plans. "That's a pity," Ava hums, watching as the woman's head tips to the side, "I do." When the woman's lips only curve into a wider smile, Ava glances to the drinks that have been pushed towards them. "Not shaken?" Ava prompts, nodding to the glass there.

"Not with the day I've had," the woman replies, shrugging off her coat and draping it over the back of her chair as she lifts her shoulder, "If I had it my way, I'd drink straight from the bottle, but that tends to be frowned upon." Against her will, Ava feels her own lips tugging upwards, something she rapidly corrects as the woman looks to her once more. "Share with me?" she asks again, nudging the second glass towards Ava, "Make the day a little less terrible?"

Pursing her lips, Ava silently regards the woman. She really shouldn't. One martini had been enough and Ava does have a lot to do. But Ava's always had a pretty high tolerance, so surely this can't hurt. And having a drink with a beautiful woman when the weather is this shitty might actually improve Ava's day. This particular woman is very pretty, and Ava glances down to her outfit that has now been revealed without the coat.

It's an even more impractical choice than the boots. A silky looking red dress drapes from the woman's body, going about three quarters of the way down her calves. The front plunges down low enough that Ava can see plenty of bare and freckled skin, and loose sleeves drift down to the woman's wrists where golden bands adorn her arms. "You might be overdressed for an evening in a dingy bar," Ava replies, looking up to find the woman is already looking back at her with a raised brow.

"You could fix that," the woman fires back, a smirk curving across her lips, "If you wanted to."

With her tongue pressed to the roof of her mouth, Ava raises her brows and brings the drink to her lips, doing her best to hide her smile. This woman is nothing but forwards, and Ava doesn't entirely hate it. The thing about this job is that she always meets the most interesting people when she's in foreign cities. She does her best not to have personal relations in the middle of a job, it's hardly professional. That being said, there have been times where Ava has broken that rule, and there certainly have been times where she's slept with women for the job.

This could have the potential to make her stay in Moscow just a little bit better. But Ava just hums, shaking her head as she lowers her drink down again. "I'm here on business," Ava replies, placing her glass along the counter and tapping the top of her closed file, "It's going to be a busy trip for me, and I don't mix business with pleasure."

A hum falls from the woman beside her and Ava turns to regard her, watching as the woman sips her own drink. "That's a shame," the woman speaks, her lips lifted at the corners as she tilts her head, her mouth still pressed to her glass, "I almost exclusively do exactly that." Ava wishes that she weren't as interested in this woman as she is, it would make it a lot easier to turn her away right now. But Ava's already drawn in, and she knows this is going to take self-control to navigate through. "Sara Lawrence," the woman speaks, offering her hand out.

Her gaze flickering between Sara's hand and her face, Ava purses her lips before exhaling quietly. "American then," Ava remarks, taking Sara's hand and shaking it lightly, doing her best to contain her smile when Sara skims her fingers along Ava's wrist as she pulls away, "Ava Shaw."

That's the alias Ava is using while she's here, an American media correspondent here to work alongside the same firm as the man she's targeting. In two days time is when she is meant to officially arrive and report to the media station to collect her access badges. Ava Shaw is only staying here a week, but Ava Sharpe will be present for about a week and a half while she assesses

damage control after the job is over. “Also American,” Sara remarks, leaning back in her chair.

“French actually,” Ava replies, sipping from her drink as Sara raises her brows, “I moved around a lot when I was younger. Landed in the states, but France is home.” Or at least that’s what her cover says. While Ava’s family is actually from France, it was only home until she was about four, and she hardly remembers anything from there other than how to speak the language.

Sara remains leaned back in her chair, her eyes scanning Ava from head to toe and Ava almost wishes that she had put something on other than the plain pair of warm black pants and her grey overcoat. “Well,” Sara raises her glass up, her arm reaching over in Ava’s space, “To business,” Sara’s lips lift once more, her voice lowering, “And maybe just a little bit of pleasure.”

Not removing her eyes from Sara’s own, Ava taps her glass along the one sitting in front of her. She’s still watching Sara’s lips now as they both drink from their glasses, both of them sizing the other up. There’s something thrilling about Sara, Ava knows that even just from this contact. One more glance into those blue eyes and that smirk resting around the rim of her glass and Ava already knows, she’s going to break her rule tonight.

Salzburg, Austria — 23:22

Standing in front of her wall, Ava quietly scans all of the information that she has tacked up as she eats from a bowl containing box mac and cheese. This placement is long term, potentially upwards of a month, so Ava had found a place here in the city to rent out. It’s a modest little flat that has been laid out studio style, and Ava had taken down all of the cheesy framed photos that adorned the wall so she could instead hang details prevalent to her job here.

This time Ava is here to get into the computer of a business executive, and it’s not going to be an easy task. The woman owns a dating company, something Ava had laughed at when she read the file because she found it hard to believe that a dating company could somehow be tangled up in foreign matters. As it turns out though, this woman really is a piece of work. Her name is Gabriella Hoffman and she’s an American originally who moved here to Austria to establish this company with her husband who is a local.

As it turns out, her husband is a rather prolific hacker and had accidentally stumbled onto some stolen files from the U.S. Embassy in Vienna. Hidden somewhere in those files is a report from the Operative Commissioner that had been sent to the Head of the CIA. It’s imperative that Ava gain access to those files seeing as Gabriella has plans to utilize them as some kind of blackmail against the American and British Governments.

What makes this tricky is that Gabrielle is not a very trusting person, and there are a plethora of security protocols set up in place in the massive twenty-three story building that belongs to the company. These files are saved on her personal computer, something that Ava has to get access to. But getting access to the computer means getting access to the penthouse apartment that contains at least three access doors, all with different keys and passcode combinations. This is easily the most complex job that Ava’s been on in some time.

So she’s taped the blueprints and schematics of the building to her walls along with every detail she’s collected on Gabrielle and her husband Emil. Humming quietly, Ava steps closer to the wall as she brings her spoon to her lips with another scoop of mac and cheese. This isn’t her go to meal, but Ava had been so busy making this wall that she had forgotten to get dinner for herself before it was too late. So it had been boxed food and nice bottle of Zirbenz, an Austrian liqueur that Henry had sent her as a job well done in Russia.

In Moscow, Ava had managed to delete any relevant information about the Operative from the media mogul's computer. It had taken nearly her entire time there to do so, but he hadn't deserved to die. He wasn't a bad man, just an overly ambitious one who had gotten mixed up in something he didn't understand. Granted, there's only a matter of time before the Russian government descends on him in full force, so maybe all Ava did was just postpone his inevitable death. Whichever case, there was no blood on her hands and it had been a painless mission.

Not to mention Ava had gotten something out of it. She had broken her rule, and it had been nothing but worth it. After Ava's phone call came in, a quick confirmation of the job details, she had returned to the bar where she and Sara had a few more drinks together. It had been good practice for Ava to rehearse the details of her cover, though that hadn't been the excuse that led to her following Sara back to her hotel room that evening.

Neither of them had been sober and neither of them had cared. It had been some of the best sex Ava's had in a while, because as it turns out, Sara was just as much of a tease in bed as she had been in the bar. But to Ava's surprise, Sara hadn't wanted anything in return. In fact they hadn't even reached the bed at all. The furthest they got was Sara pressing her against the door and slipping her hand right past Ava's pants and underwear and fucking her as they stood. Afterwards, it had been a clear dismissal when Sara had simply said she was tired, and Ava had left feeling nothing but confused. She never saw Sara around the city after that.

But that's in the past, and now Ava has to regroup and refocus. With a small sigh, she looks up to the blueprints, her eyes scanning all the different entry points to the top floor. Ava is nothing but convinced that the Canary could potentially show up here. There's been silence from her since the warehouse in Singapore, and Ava just has a feeling that she hasn't seen the last of the infuriating assassin. This particular dating site, as it turns out, does have ties with a known benefactor of the League, so Ava wouldn't be surprised to come across the Canary here.

With any luck though, Ava pulls this off without a hitch. Her plan here is seduction rather than infiltration. As paranoid as Gabrielle is, there's no way Ava manages to worm her way to the top of the company without being noticed as a new employee. However, Gabrielle and Emil are well known for their open marriage, something Gabrielle cited in a recent media article as the source of their successful relationship. Ava had decided that would be here in, she has just has to find the right time to intercept Gabrielle in a way that appears natural.

Once Ava gets access to the penthouse, it's only a matter of drugging Gabrielle's wine to make her sleep before taking the information she needs and wiping everything from the security cameras. She'll just have to be careful here seeing as she is risking her identity more than she normally might. To the side, Ava's computer chimes and she instantly turns around, spotting a new email there on the screen.

Placing her bowl down on the nightstand, Ava picks her way across the bags of her clothing and cases containing weaponry so she can reach the desk. This is what Ava has been waiting up for tonight. She had dropped James' camera off at with her local tech contact in Croatia when she stopped there to set off for this job after Russia. Her contact told her it would only take a day or two to pull everything and Ava's pleased to see that it is in fact the camera footage sitting in her inbox.

There's about twenty-four hours there on the roll, but Ava moves the progress button to about an hour before she arrived in the shop. The image shows James moving around the office, putting the finishing touches on Ava's passport at the workbench. No audio accompanies the video, but Ava never expected there to be any seeing as James shoved it in a jar of coins. The side of the camera is only slightly covered by something, but Ava can still see nearly all of the front desk there as well

as some of the space outside the little window that is inside the main shop.

Scrubbing forwards a few minutes at a time, Ava stops when James comes forwards to the front window and appears to be talking there. Along the floor, Ava can see a pair of boots and just the pant legs of the customer, but there's no way to tell who it is yet. James' hand sits on the desk, and Ava hums when she watches a knife be jammed straight through James' hand. The Canary. Ava's got her.

The feet disappear from view, walking towards the side door that leads into the back room. Leaning in, Ava waits for the door to open, wanting to see the identity of the Canary for the first time. The handle twists, and when the door falls open, Ava watches as a woman with soft blonde hair and a wicked smile on her face enters the office. In disbelief, Ava stares at the video, her eyes rapidly scanning over the film. The Canary approaches James and says something to him before pressing her blade to his throat.

When he's dead, Ava watches as the woman leaves. The woman with the same blonde hair that Ava ran her fingers through as Sara was thrusting into her against the door, the same blue eyes that Ava had stared into as she fell apart against Sara's hand for the second time that evening. Ava has just slept with the enemy. And not just any enemy, the very assassin that has been slowly undermining the Operative over the years and has now personally placed herself right in Ava's path. "Wonderful," Ava mutters, leaning back in her chair and letting out an angry laugh, "You have got to be fucking kidding me."

Part Two

Chapter Summary

Now that Ava knows who the Canary is, it seems that she just can't get rid of her. Sara is nothing but infuriating and maddening and Ava is over how she is constantly getting in the way of her jobs. When she finally gets tired of Sara having the upper hand, Ava decides to take matters in her own hands for once.

Chapter Notes

So here is part two for this, and again, no idea how long it's going to be. Nearly all of this chapter has been added in in the last two days for the story so, we'll see where it goes from here. I won't lie, the plot on this one, it's not really existent until the latter half. the first half is just the background leading to it.

Rather than listing out all the TW, it's probably safe to assume that every chapter has something that was warned in the beginning. So those are the warnings for violence, smut, injuries, morally questionable decisions, etc.

But here is part two, and I do hope you enjoy!

***There is a hyperlink placed between sections 2 and 3 that lead to a new scene from the continuation from Sara's POV.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Salzburg, Austria — 08:35

“So, don’t be angry, but her name is not Sara Lawrence,” Gary’s voice comes through from the other side of the phone and Ava just lets out a frustrated laugh because of course it isn’t, “Her name is Sara Lance, and trust me, there is a story there with where she came from.”

Right now, Ava doesn't give a damn about the story. She wants to know why Sara is fucking with her and why she took it upon herself to not only introduce herself into Ava's life, but to let Ava think that she was just some stranger. Ava's even angrier that she can't even regret the sex, it had been that good. But that doesn't change the fact that she is pissed Sara somehow managed to know something about her before Ava knew who Sara even was.

“Tell me what you have on her,” Ava snaps, cutting Gary off where he had been about to ramble on about whatever story there is behind Sara's sudden appearance as an assassin, “I want to know how she joined the League and where she came from. People as skilled as she is don't just appear from thin air.”

On the other side of the line, Ava listens as Gary stammers nervously, followed by the sound of rapid fingers flying over keys. With a small sigh, Ava takes a look around her, scanning her surroundings for any signs of danger. Currently Ava's sitting on a bench just outside a coffee shop

she knows that Gabrielle frequents. The plan is to stage a convenient encounter today where Ava intends on bumping into Gabrielle and spilling her coffee on her. It's always a memorable moment when something like that happens, and in two days Ava will be here again to apologize.

Over the past three days, Ava has spent her time tailing Gabrielle and learning everything that she likes and does in her free time. Apparently the woman has a fondness for the local bakeries as well as tends to frequent the pub across the street from her office building. That's something Ava can work with, and after a significant amount of snooping through Gabrielle's online interactions, she learned what shows the woman likes as well as her favourite books. Tomorrow Ava will go out to secure a copy of one of Gabrielle's most read novels from her Goodreads list with the intention of carrying it with her to the apology. Common interests are good conversation starters.

With any hope, in a week's time, she'll have 'accidentally' bumped into Gabrielle enough times to have formed a rapport and ask her on a date. That's where the job really begins, struggling to earn Gabrielle's trust in a relatively short amount of time so she can get to her secure server. This should be interesting because there are times where Ava struggles with personal relationships, so this is going to put her acting to the test.

Easily one of the things Ava is not looking forward to is her meeting with Emil. According to the article she read on their relationship, Emil and Gabrielle have an open relationship but they always meet each other's outside partners to keep everything open and honest. That is going to be quite awkward on Ava's behalf, explaining to an outsider what her intentions are when her intention is to essentially steal information and business plans from Gabrielle as she goes along.

"So, apparently she's dead?" Gary asks rather than says on the other side of the phone and Ava frowns, unsure what the hell he means by that, *"I'm looking at an article right now from the funeral her family held for her in Star City five years ago. She apparently drowned with an Oliver Queen in a shipwreck when she was twenty and nobody ever heard from her after that. This is actually really sad—I'm sending this to you."*

Rolling her eyes, Ava shifts her phone to the other ear before opening the tablet there in her lap and quickly swipes through to the email account she has set up for her correspondence with Gary. Sitting there on the front page of the article is an image of the younger Sara Lance that Ava met in the bar. "Well she's not dead," Ava counters, staring at the freckled face that she had come across in Russia, "This is very much the same Sara Lawrence that I met that night, I'm sure of it."

Ava would know those eyes anywhere. She's never seen blue eyes that bright, light enough that Ava could make out each and every detail of them when their foreheads were pressed together and Ava was panting heavily as Sara continued moving her fingers inside her. But Ava does not confess this to Gary. She is never going to tell anyone what she did that night in the hotel with Sara. Without a single doubt, Henry would pull her indefinitely and Ava would receive one of his infamous lectures.

Scrolling down the article, Ava takes in the information there. Sara had been only nineteen that evening of the boating accident, sinking somewhere in deep waters due to some undetermined malfunction. With a hum, Ava reads the details there that came from Sara's family. She left behind a mother, father, and an older sister who has apparently made quite the name for herself in Star City. If this article is correct, then Oliver Queen also never died in the accident seeing as he's apparently made a return to the city since his supposed death.

But none of this tells Ava what happened afterwards, and she prompts Gary to continue with what he's found. *"There's hardly anything here about her, it's like she's a ghost,"* Gary speaks, and Ava swears she hears a note of awe present in his tone. Grumbling in annoyance, Ava checks down

the street, just now catching sight of Gabrielle walking into the coffee shop. *“The most I have is some reported sighting of her nearly three years back, but it’s vague,”* Gary hums and Ava listens as he types, *“She doesn’t exist anymore, wiped from everything just like you.”*

Ava supposes this should be expected. Just like the Operative, the League is thorough when it comes to the protection and privacy of their members. Living as a ghost can be a lonely life, but once someone is in, there’s really no getting out without a struggle. “Just,” Ava sighs, pressing her fingers to the bridge of her nose and silently reminding herself that it is not Gary’s fault he can’t find something, “Dig up what you can. Search Interpol records for suspects matching her description, she’s well traveled and well trained, but she’s reckless. Somewhere out there she made a mistake and someone caught it. I want you to find it.”

On the other end of the line, Gary mutters something incomprehensible but Ava’s barely paying attention. She needs to get a move on if she’s going to successfully orchestrate this little meeting today. Coffee in hand, Ava stands from the bench and balances her phone on her shoulder as she packs her tablet and bag up. “Just do what you can Gary,” Ava mumbles, zipping everything away, “And don’t call me this time, I’ll call you.”

With that Ava hangs up, silently mumbling to herself. Gary is a good man, but there are times where Ava wonders if she made the right choice in research analysts seeing as Gary always forgets their rules. Like for example, the rule to never email or call Ava first. He has no idea that he could be putting her in danger by doing that, Ava knows this, but she needs him to understand that there are in fact boundaries that he can’t cross.

Her mind still rolling through everything she’s since learned about Sara Lance as the Canary, Ava moves to stand just near the door to the shop, keeping her eyes on the door. She spots the stripes along Gabrielle’s bag first and instantly steps into motion. The moment Gabrielle is outside, Ava collides into her, making sure to keep the splash of cold coffee away from both of their skin. “Oh my gosh,” Ava rushes out, schooling her features into a look of shock and surprise as Gabrielle stares at her shirt, “I’m so sorry, I knew I should have been watching where I was going.”

For a moment, Gabrielle keeps her eyes on the ground, but then they lift to Ava’s own. Normally, Ava is not a makeup kind of person, but today she put a bit of extra effort into her appearance. Clearly, it’s done the trick as Gabrielle’s gaze moves over the length of Ava’s body. “That’s okay, these things happen,” Gabrielle replies good-naturedly, “Though, if you wanted, you could make it up to me—buy me a new one?”

Silently smiling inside, Ava hums quietly and nods her head, “I think that can be arranged.”

Salzburg, Austria — 20:34

Ava is running late for her date due to a calculation error on her behalf. For some reason she was under the impression that she would be able to take the bus and be able to get here in time, but she had failed to account for the differences that the frequent stops would make for her arrival time. While she’s only behind by about four minutes, it’s enough to annoy her slightly.

This is not any date, this is Ava’s date with Gabrielle, the evening that she is meant to be taking everything from the secure server in the private office here. Tonight the only weapons Ava has with her are a pair of blades resting in a holster along her back. They’re tucked away under the blazer that she has on, obscured from sight. Other than those twin daggers, Ava has the toxin in her pocket that should be enough to make Gabrielle sleep while she accesses the office. There’s no lasting effects of the drug, only mild disorientation when the victim wakes, as if they were coming

out of a rather deep sleep.

Peeking in the mirror of the elevator as she ascends, Ava clears her throat and straightens out the light brown blazer she has on over a baby blue shirt. It's been a while since she's been on a date, not that this counts. If Ava were to try and think back, she's not sure she would be able to really recall a time in the past six years where she's been on a date that is solely one of her choosing and not related to her job in any way.

Ava's spent the past three weeks with Gabrielle, gaining her trust and slowly worming her way into the woman's good graces. After countless nights spent eating out, they're finally having dinner here in the penthouse, something that Ava is glad is happening. Pretending to gain someone's affections like this never feels quite right to her, but it is part of the job and at times it's far more effective than trying to place herself into an organization as a new hire. Certainly it's faster.

The elevator lurches slightly and Ava glances to the number displayed at the top. She's not yet to the penthouse, which begs the question who else might be trying to arrive to the top floor tonight. Instinctively, Ava reaches for her daggers right as the doors open. "God, I am so glad I caught you on the right floor," a voice speaks jovially as Ava tenses, holding her blades by her sides, "Do you know how long I stared out that window over there waiting for you to walk into the lobby?"

This is not the night for something like this, and Ava stares Sara down, not so much as reacting as she steps off the elevator and allows the doors to close behind her. Clearly Sara understands that Ava knows who she is now, something that Ava will question how she knew later. "You're going to make me late," Ava retorts, taking in Sara's all black outfit and the countless pockets lining the vest she has on, "If there is one thing I hate most, it's tardiness on the job—makes it harder to gain someone's trust and respect."

Ava is carefully eyeing Sara, watching the rather nonchalant way that she's leaning against the wall there. They're on the records floor if Ava's blueprints are correct, a narrow hallway that leads down two separate corridors near the elevator. Movement catches her eye, and the moment Sara leans forwards, Ava has her knife out in front of her. It doesn't remain in her hand long though, swiftly kicked from her grasp by the hilt. Sara's faster than Ava anticipated, but Ava's been trained for this.

Not even hesitating, Ava rushes forwards and pins Sara to the wall, catching Sara's wrist where it was moving towards her vest, likely going for a weapon of her own. "This really is not the best way to greet an old friend," Sara tilts, her body pushing off the wall and pressing into Ava's own, her face mere inches from Ava's, "Unless of course you're here to repay the favour from Moscow. Couldn't let you see me naked you see, the scars give away the career."

They certainly do, and Ava really is never going to forgive herself for not questioning that evening more. If she hadn't been so distracted by Sara in that dress and the things she could do with her fingers, Ava might have been a bit more suspicious. "We are not friends," Ava tells her, bringing Sara's other hand up to the wall as well, not about to give her any chances to escape, "And clearly I know what you meant about your own business in the city, I'm going to assume that the dead politician found in the hotel downtown was you?"

"Guilty as charged. Are you a fan?" Sara tilts her head to the side, that disarming smile still stretching over her face as Ava once more puts space between their bodies, ignoring the way she seems to be reacting to Sara's close proximity. Rather than answering Sara's question, Ava levels her with a glare instead. "Though I have to say," Sara continues on, her lips lifting once more, "I've been impressed with your work before. Mafia leader in Sochi this time last year, killed with a gas leak in his office. You're going to have to share with me how you isolated that."

The comment is more than just troubling. That really had been Ava's kill, and she has no idea how Sara knew to attribute it to her. But before Ava has time to think and process the fact that she let Sara distract her, a head slams right into Ava's face, catching her in the lip. The sting burns there along her mouth, and Ava just barely recovers in time to block the swing coming at her face next.

Not wanting to give Sara time to go for her weapons, Ava launches into the offensive. Sara is good, really good actually. She's far better than Ava gave her credit for. Based on what she's seen, Ava knew that Sara's skilled with knives and weapons, but it appears the League doesn't skip out on hand to hand skills either. By the time Sara's blow catches her in the ribs for the second time, Ava is already slightly out of breath because Sara packs a surprising amount of force.

When Sara is recovering from Ava kicking her in the thigh, Ava strikes out towards her again, only for Sara to catch her by the arm to throw her to the side. But that's what Ava wanted, and she clips Sara in the jaw with her elbow before shoving Sara away from her body. Sara backs up, her tongue pressed to the corner of her mouth as she spits blood to the ground. "That was a cheap shot," Sara tells her, clearly already bracing for another attack.

"You split my lip," Ava counters, motioning to her face while keeping an eye on Sara, waiting for her to come at Ava again, "How do I explain this now, I'm meant to be upstairs right now, and this is going to raise questions."

"Easy," Sara replies, drawing a knife from her vest, the metal glinting in the harsh hallway lights, "You don't meet with your client, I do. Problem's solved." Ava hardly has time to so much as roll her eyes before Sara is coming toward her again, this time with a renewed vengeance.

But as well trained as Sara is, Ava's just as skilled. She spent two years learning from the best of MI5 and MI6, and Ava's never shied away from a fist fight. When Sara lashes out with the knife, Ava sidesteps her hand before striking the knife. Similar to Ava's own knife, it flies from Sara's hand and clatters to the ground nearby. However it doesn't seem to matter, because Sara has another one in her hand in seconds. "Seriously," Ava scoffs, watching as Sara only shrugs before attacking again.

They're evenly matched in the fight, and it's clear that Sara's not actually trying to kill Ava right now. At least Ava thinks that she isn't. She's seen Sara's work, taking down grown men in broad daylight even in front of their security teams, surely Sara is holding back—Ava knows that she herself is. But Ava's running thing on patience, so when Sara strikes out again, Ava catches her arm and draws her in close before pressing Sara against the wall, this time flattening against her so every line of their bodies are pressed together. "I'll admit, this is what I wanted in Moscow," Sara taunts even as Ava jerks the knife from her hand, still pinning both Sara's wrists above her head.

"If you bring up Moscow one more time I swear to god I will stab you right now," Ava threatens, using her right hand to press the tip of her blade right into the exposed skin along Sara's side where the vest doesn't cover her ribs, "As it stands, you're lucky I'm not a killer. I thought the League was supposed to be harder to pin down."

"We make exceptions for very angry but very beautiful women," Sara replies, her lips quirking up in that same smirk, clearly not able to take a damn thing seriously. Scoffing, Ava rolls her eyes before running her hands along Sara's body, searching for any more weapons that might be hiding on her person. "Do continue," Sara says when Ava skims her hand along Sara's thigh. Ava glances up in annoyance to find Sara is watching her with unblinking eyes and that unwavering smile.

Ava thought that Sara was infuriating when they were only contacting each other through those damned notes and texts, but clearly nothing compares to the full force of Sara's impishness in person. "Stop. Talking," Ava threatens again, tapping the knife at Sara's side as a reminder. Sara's

lips press together in a tight line, but she's still smiling all the same. Discarding knife after knife, Ava strips Sara of her weapons until she's satisfied there's nothing left on her being.

After shoving off the wall and away from Sara, Ava throws all of those knives down the hallway, far from Sara's reach. "Hands off my target," Ava warns her, leveling the blade in her hand Sara's direction as she retreats into towards the elevator, hearing it open behind her, "You can do whatever you want with her tomorrow, but tonight I need her alive enough to give me the information that I need."

Now leaning against the wall, Sara has her hands tucked behind her, her head tilted to the side, those blue eyes sparkling with mirth as she looks back to Ava. "And what makes you assumed that I'm here to kill her, maybe I'm the protective duty," Sara challenges. Pursing her lips, Ava looks pointedly to the discarded weapons down the hall before dragging her gaze back to Sara who just laughs and holds her hands up. "Alright, you got me," Sara speaks, nodding her head with a shrug, "I was going to kill her."

This was never what Ava expected from the League. Sara's treating work as if it's a joke. Clearly she's far more reckless than Ava ever imagined, and that's what makes her dangerous. There's enough danger in Ava's life as it is, she doesn't need Sara Lance crash landing into her affairs again. "Well postpone your plans," Ava replies, stepping backwards so she's now standing in the elevator, "If you so much as come near that penthouse, I won't hesitate to kill you."

"God you're fun," Sara shakes her head with another laugh as Ava jabs the top button with her thumb, nothing but annoyed right now, "I'll wait until you're gone, only because I like you."

"Fuck off Lance," Ava retorts. She hadn't meant to give away the fact that she knows Sara's name, but it's worth it to see the reaction her words cause. As the elevator doors close, Ava catches just the parting glimpse of Sara's smile that's been wiped from her face and the slight widening of her eyes. The doors now closed, Ava turns to the mirror and goes over the damage. Her lip is definitely split and there's a small tear in her blazer jacket from Sara's blade. There's a chance Ava can pass this off as an incident in the streets, but it won't be easy. With a quiet sigh, Ava tilts her head to the side, listening to the crack of the joint before looking to herself again, "Shit."

Stuttgart, Germany — 11:45

The moment Ava spots Sara walking into the very building Ava is meant to be heading into, she knows that there is bound to be another confrontation. Since Austria, it seems as if Ava cannot quite shake Sara off her tail. Ava has had eight jobs since then, and for four of them Sara had been present as the opposition. It's baffling really, how they seem to be colliding on the job over and over now that they've met, and their last encounter in Madrid, Ava had accused Sara of targeting her. "Oh don't flatter yourself," Sara had scoffed, even as her foot made contact with Ava's ribs, "If the League wanted you dead I would have killed you in Moscow."

Neither of them are really trying to kill the other, though Ava had been particularly pleased during her last job to see that Sara had in fact scarred from the knife Ava had slashed just above Sara's left eyebrow in Madrid. The mark will likely be gone in another month, but it more than made up for the bruised ribs Sara left Ava with in Greece. It's been about four months since Ava found Sara that evening when she was on the elevator, and Ava is nothing but furious to see Sara here yet again. Somehow she's not even surprised at this point. Seeing as there appears to be a fifty-fifty chance that Sara might show up on the job, Ava's just resigned herself to it by now.

The only thing that appears to have changed is that Sara is no longer going after Ava's contacts,

something she greatly appreciates seeing as Ava rarely keeps two in the same region. Each time they meet though, Sara is there with that overly flirtatious attitude and that never failing smirk. Ava really hates that it gets to her. She hates that she sees that look on Sara's face and can't help but think about Moscow, something that Sara has not brought up since Ava threatened her in Madrid.

But today Ava is here for a job, so she shoves all of that from her mind before stepping out from under the awning and heading towards the building. The man Ava's here for today is the CEO of this security company and he has information regarding a secret collaboration between MI6 and Scotland Yard. So far, he's kept it to himself, only having gained the information through word of mouth. However his company is vast and expansive, and with the resources he has at his disposal, this could quickly get out of hand.

So Ava's here to kill him. She did of course try threats first, but those hadn't worked. Seeing as the more tame options failed, Ava's brought along one of her favourite subtle weapons of choice. It's an umbrella that contains a needle tip at the very point. This had been a gift from Henry when Ava graduated from training. Just a single prick from the needle and twelve hours later, Peter Bauer will be in a form of cardiac arrest that he won't be able to recover from.

Watching on as Sara and Peter enter the building together, Ava slides her sunglasses back up her nose before carefully crossing the street. She can see them both through the glass doors, standing there just outside the elevator. This time around Ava has no idea what Sara is doing or what her play is, but Ava came here to do this job and she is not going to let Sara win. Inside the lobby, Ava lingers to the side as they step onto the elevator, the doors sliding shut behind them.

With her umbrella tucked under her arm, Ava keeps an eye on the floor number displayed above the doors. The elevator stops on the twelfth floor, and Ava hums to herself before making her way to the stairway. She will not be caught by Sara in another damn elevator, not after what happened two months ago in London where they had fought each other while actively going up the lift. Sara had been there to kill Ava's target once again, and thankfully Ava had won that round.

Inside the stair well, there are two heavily armed guards that stand just at the base of the steps. Seeing as this is a security company, Ava has to be careful here and she knows it. "You cannot be here ma'am," the closest guard tells her, his hand already resting on the gun at his hip, "This stairwell is for employees only."

That's something Ava already knew. She went over the building blueprints extensively over the past few days, memorizing every route in and out. "Oh I'm sorry," Ava lets out a false careless laugh, shaking her head as she reaches for the little arm bag she brought with her, "I must have forgotten my badge." The moment her hands close around the small pistol tucked inside the bag pocket, Ava pulls it out and fires two shots, catching both men in the sides of the neck.

It was just a paralytic so they'll both be fine in a few hours, but Ava pauses by their bodies to carefully remove each of the darts. She has a Dmitriy to thank for this little gun as well as the steps to create the neurotoxin. This little gun serves her well on jobs like this where firing a real gun in an enclosed stairwell is simply not an option. Delicately stepping over both the men, Ava sheds her jacket and rests it over the railing there, revealing the vest she has underneath, the vest worn on the off chance she should encounter trouble here.

Neither of the men says anything, already too far asleep to even notice as Ava begins her ascent up the stairs. It's tiring, taking twelve flights up, but if Ava's calculation of Peter's schedule is right, he should be in this meeting for about two hours, so it's not as if there's a need to rush. In fact, taking her time gives Ava a moment to come up with a game plan on how to distract Sara.

There's a real gun with real bullets resting along the holster at Ava's hip, but she would prefer to

not have to use it today. The last thing Ava wants is to gain attention in a building filled with arm guards and personal security teams. This would all be a lot easier if Sara would just stay out of Ava's way as she has repeatedly warned Sara over and over. But true to form, Sara never once listens, and Ava is getting quite tired of fighting her at every given turn.

At the top of the stairwell, Ava draws her gun, not wanting to take any chances today. Slowly bringing the door open, Ava moves around the doorway quickly, but she instantly stops because this is not what she expected to find up here. Tarps and hanging sheets of plastic cover stripped walls in the area, forming a maze of half done construction. This was not on Ava's blueprints that she had found, and this floor should be a fully formed bullpen.

"Ava," Sara calls her tone as cheerful and grating as always, something that doesn't fail to illicit a rather long sigh from Ava. Coming around the half demolished wall in front of her, Ava's eyes fall to Sara where she sits on a small pile of construction materials in the center of the tarp covered space. Sara has on a black suit, a pressed white shirt underneath, looking every bit the professional Ava knows she isn't. "Well isn't this a surprise," Sara tilts her head, three knives already there in her hand, dangling from her fingers, "I never expected to see you here of all places."

It's bullshit and they both know it. "Security cameras outside?" Ava asks, figuring that is the only way Sara would have known she was in town. Ava had of course checked for them herself, but she hadn't seen anything. Still, Sara nods so Ava knows they have to have been there. "And then coming here with the elevator was a ploy," Ava continues on as Sara makes a rather fake looking sympathetic expression and nods, "You knew I was coming and wanted me here so Peter could get away."

The frustrating part about all of this is that it's clever. More than clever really. Sara had used Ava's tactics against her and Ava already knows that there is no chance she's winning this little encounter today, but she'll be damned if she doesn't try. "You spies are so predictable, it's as if you just operate off the same manual, always using identical methods," Sara shakes her head with a little laugh, "Though the stun-gun in the stairwell, that one was new, and very impressive."

Maybe if her tone wasn't so sarcastic, Ava might believe her. "Well then I suppose you know why I'm here," Ava states, coming a bit closer into the room, never once taking her eyes from Sara or those knives that are delicately balancing between her fingers, "So you know you have the usual option to stand down or we can fight this out—again."

Already Ava knows what Sara is going to choose. There's no way either of them would even so much as consider stepping down from something like this. At the end of the day, this is a job they're both here to do. "I'm here for protection this time, so I'm going to assume you're here to kill him?" Sara muses, twirling a knife around her fingers, a deft motion that draws Ava's attention as she nods, "Well you know I can't let you have him. The League needs Peter for official business."

That sparks a note of interest as Ava steps a bit closer, moving tentatively this time. So far, this is the most she and Sara have actually talked rather than fighting with one another. "The League needs the CEO of a security company who is currently about to go bankrupt?" Ava challenges incredulously, not understanding how Peter could possibly be this important, "How does that work out?"

When Sara shrugs and purses her lips, Ava comes forward once more, her feet causing the tarp under her to crinkle quietly. "We have friends of all different backgrounds," Sara replies and Ava just snorts, her fingers never once leaving the trigger of her gun as she keeps it leveled towards the ground, "But, I'm telling you right now you're not taking him. So it's my turn to ask you, are you

going to stand down, or are we going to do this the hard way?" Not even reacting in the slightest, Ava switches the safety off her gun. "Ava," Sara sighs quietly, "I was really hoping you'd say we could come to an agreement."

The knife is already coming through the air before Sara finishes her sentence, but Ava saw that coming and swiftly ducks out of the way. Firing her gun twice near the tarp that Sara has disappeared behind, Ava backs up, scanning her surroundings and searching for the wayward assassin. The tarp is fluttering there, a result of Sara slipping behind it, but there's not enough room behind the opaque plastic for Ava to see where she has gone. "I don't want to kill you," Ava calls out, walking backwards towards the side alley where materials line the wall.

"That's good," Sara's voice calls from the opposite side of the room and Ava whirls around, her gun leveled at nothing, "You never will succeed even if you tried." Before Ava can reply, she hears rustling again and looks up just in time to get out of the way of another knife coming her way. But as Ava's standing, something slams into her and she hits the ground hard. Ava's spine aches at the way she struck concrete and she swears under her breath because this makes twice now that Sara is going to leave her covered in bruises.

Sara is on top of Ava now, smirking down at her as Ava tries to suck air back into her lungs. "We need to stop meeting like this" Sara lilts, her voice low and suggestive, her finger playfully trailing down the side of Ava's cheek. Annoyance flares in Ava's chest and she locks Sara's arm against her chest, lifting her hips up to bridge Sara up and over her body, effectively swapping their positions.

With Sara now on her back, Ava takes in the way Sara's pupils are blown and her lips are slightly parted. Even with all of that anger and frustration burning through her, Ava could easily just lean down and kiss Sara. It certainly would shut Sara up, and Ava might be able to use it as enough of a distraction to get away from this building and find Peter before Sara can get to him. But she doesn't do that, instead Ava shoves off the ground, lifting up off her legs that had been trapping Sara's body between them.

Ava's gun is just to the side, and she reaches down for it, standing up in time to dodge the third and final knife that Sara had there in her hand. A slight sting forms in her arm, and Ava glances down to find that Sara did manage to cut her, a barely there mark that's already forming beads of blood along her bare skin. "That was a weak throw," Ava snorts, taking in Sara as she kneels on the ground, her hands on her thighs.

"Was it?" Sara tilts her head. Seconds after the words leave her mouth, alarms sound in the building and jets of water come down from the ceiling. It's freezing cold and Ava is only in her tank and vest standing under the spray. When Ava looks over her shoulder, Sara's knife has lodged in the fire alarm there, something that is going to lead to the evacuation of the entire building and a missed opportunity to kill Peter. "Come on," Sara pushes off the ground, wincing a bit as she stands, "Give it up Sharpe."

That certainly gains Ava's attention, and she turns to Sara in surprise, finding a pleased smirk resting there on Sara's lips. "You're not the only one who keeps tabs," Sara explains as Ava purses her lips, not sure how to feel about Sara knowing her real name. On one hand, Ava's pissed Sara somehow managed to find out. But on the other, there really is no risk seeing as everything that once existed about Ava Sharpe has been burned and purged from existence. Not even Gary could find a single thing about Ava's life before recruitment when she made him try.

"I don't keep tabs, not physical ones anyways," Ava retorts, slipping her gun back into the holster because fighting isn't of any use here today, "As for Peter, I am going to take him down, that's not

a question here.” It means another fight between them, and honestly, Ava’s growing just a bit tired of Sara’s constant need to get in her way. “He has information on my organization, surely you know I can’t just walk away,” Ava tries reasoning with Sara who just regards her silently, “So either you make sure he never talks, or I come back tomorrow with a bigger gun.”

Ava’s well aware that she is telling Sara that the choices are to either kill Peter, or she comes back and kills him. But this is just the way things go, and she knows that Sara has to understand that. “See, this is why I like you,” Sara laughs, pointing her finger Ava’s direction as she collects the knife near her from the ground, “All the other spies are so boring, but not you. You make threats that you can’t keep.”

No, Ava will keep it. This is what she does, and backing down is not an option. “I will come back until he’s dead,” Ava replies, swiping wet hair from her face and brushing droplets off her cheeks, “That or I hunt down wherever it is you’re planning on hiding him away. Either way, you take this deal to make sure he never speaks a word of this information, or I make your life a living hell until I kill him.”

If Sara thinks she knows spy tactics, she hasn’t seen anything yet. Ava will unleash her full arsenal of tricks if she has too, no hesitation required. “Fine,” Sara sighs dramatically, tucking the knives away in her vest, “You have your deal, but only because I’m on a short leash after that stunt you pulled in Madrid. Forcing me to kill my client in broad daylight was uncalled for.”

It really wasn’t. And it had been all too fun to see Sara’s look of disbelief when she realized what Ava had done when Ava fired that gun to alert those around them to the danger. “I keep a drop location in the park just a block from here, you know the one?” Ava asks, straightening out her vest and once more swiping the water that’s still running down her face as Sara nods her head, “There’s a park bench closest to the entrance. Leave word there when you’ve held up your end of the deal, and don’t think I won’t double check whatever you do.”

“Park bench, leave word, don’t lie, got it,” Sara mutters and then she points over Ava’s shoulder, “Care to kindly throw that back to me?” She’s speaking of the knife still embedded in the alarm and Ava just scoffs before shaking her head and turning around as she makes her way back to the door. Behind her, she can hear the sound of Sara’s laughter ringing through the half empty floor as Ava scoops up her umbrella from where she had tossed it near the door.

Without a single look back, Ava heads down the stairs, making her way back down the twelve flights. Her shirt and pants are soaked through, her hair still dripping water down her back. At the bottom of the stairs, Ava slips her jacket back around her body and does her best to straighten out her hair. “Well,” Ava sighs as she steps over the still prone bodies of the guards, “Pleasure doing business with you boys.” Walking from the building with her umbrella in hand, Ava wonders just how much faith she should place in Sara.

Several hours later, Ava returns to her flat after getting food from a nearby restaurant and finds a package there on her doorstep. Not thinking much of it, she brings it inside and warms her food on a plate before taking a knife from the counter and breaking through the seal. Inside there is a plastic bag containing what Ava knows to be a human tongue. “A deal’s a deal, not that you had this in mind about preventing him talking,” the message inside reads, complete with Sara’s signature lipstick print near the edge, “Hope you don’t mind I left this here, the park was simply too far.”

Maybe if Ava wasn’t leaving tomorrow she might be a bit more unnerved about the fact that Sara knows where she’s staying. But this time tomorrow evening, Ava will be in Paris, hopefully far away from Sara. Pinching the disgusting present between her fingers, Ava tosses it to the open

trash bin laid to the side before washing her hands and pulling out her phone to let Henry know that the issue here has been dealt with. Ava glances at the trashcan and sighs quietly, it's been dealt with more or less.

Budapest, Hungary — 14:30

Around Ava, agents are milling to and fro, each one hustling by with files and tablets in hand, undoubtedly handling the latest crisis of the day. Hardly anyone has paid her much attention, something that Ava appreciates because she truly does not wish to be here right now. Sitting in the waiting area outside Henry's office feels something like sitting outside the principal's office did when Ava was just a kid.

The only time that Ava has ever been called into Henry's field office is when either something has gone drastically wrong and she's been called in for cleanup, or she is the one who has somehow done something wrong. Judging by the way Henry is still inside his office and Ava is out here, she is going to choose to interpret it as the latter. Ava already has a feeling she knows what this is about, and the evidence of her mistake is something that earned her quite a few sideways glances as she had made her way into the building.

Not even two days ago, Ava had fought it out with Sara in the middle of a very public area and Sara had managed to catch Ava off guard. There wasn't even a moment where Ava saw the fist coming before it connected with the side of her face, and she thinks that even Sara had been surprised she didn't block it. Ava had been livid in the moment and had definitely released some of her self control as she stopped playing nice for a moment and had shoved Sara roughly through the doors they were standing nearby.

But now Ava is even more livid because the blow resulted in some pretty colorful bruising that sits just along her jaw, a reminder that she had nearly failed in her job yesterday because she had been distracted. They were in Bucharest, Romania, a city that Ava does not associate with good memories after nearly losing her life in a bombing there only just months into her time as a member of the Operative. Being there in the city once more had not been fun, and it was Ava's first time back since the accident.

"Ava," Henry speaks, startling her a bit because she never heard him open the door to his office, "Come on in, we have a lot to discuss." That does not sound good, and Ava makes a small face before pushing out of her chair, bringing her discarded bag with her that contains several stashed away weapons. Inside the office, everything is laid out just as Ava remembered it the last time she was here. Though that time she had been called in to fix another agent's mistake, an undertaking that took her several weeks spent in a tiny town in Sweden where the target had fled to.

Henry's chair squeaks as he sits in it, and Ava takes a seat in one of the dark green leather chairs that rests in front of the desk. With his hands already folded over his chest, Henry leans back, sunglasses perched on his face as he looks her direction. "So," Henry clears his throat as Ava folds one leg over another and does her best to relax, "It's come to my attention that you were engaged in a rather public fight with an unknown individual in the metros of Bucharest this week."

This is just what Ava imagines landed her here, but she's fairly confident that Henry has no idea the kind of contact Ava's had with Sara. If he knew the full impact here, surely Henry wouldn't have called her in, he would have just benched her instead. "Yes," Ava clears her throat as she grimaces, preparing a lie, "There was some unexpected resistance that I encountered in the field, though it was handled appropriately at the time and the job was completed."

That is a bit of an understatement in terms of the resistance. Sara had showed up fully armed and had not hesitated to make a very public scene of their fight across the metro car that Ava was boarding to get to her target so she could take his phone to clone it for the next stage of the job. “Hopefully not League activity?” Henry muses, his brows coming down near the tops of his glasses, “I’m always scanning reports here and I heard no mentions of anything that could have been them in the city.”

The only reason for that is because Ava had managed to subdue Sara and shove her from the metro when it came to the next stop. If she hadn’t done that, Sara very likely would have killed her target right then and there on the train. “Just some interferences from target security teams,” Ava lies smoothly, lifting her shoulder slightly and glancing to the data drive and envelope on the desk, “Nothing I couldn’t handle. I got the intel we needed and already took care of the target.”

By that Ava means she found some rather unsavory material on his computer after she broke in and anonymously tipped off the local police so they’d come to take in him. Though, if Ava’s been following the reports correctly, the target later died in custody so she has no doubt that Sara got to him in the end. “Yes I received your report this morning,” Henry hums quietly and Ava looks to him, trying to remember if she wrote Sara off as a security team in her report or not.

“I’ll confess to being concerned about the League’s increased presence near some of our operatives,” Henry continues on, a frown forming on his face, “They’ve been taking out some troubling targets as of late, bigger political leaders than they’ve gone after in the past.” For someone who says that he doesn’t track the League, it seems as if Henry pays quite a bit of attention to them. Ava for the most part just scans records once she’s in the city to know what kind of trouble she should be anticipating. “Recently, they’ve taken out one of our own,” Henry pushes on, something that instantly makes Ava look up.

This is not part of the League and Operative agreement. While there is nothing in this unspoken rule to stay out of each other’s way that says they can’t fight with each other along the way, there is this understanding that neither side is to take out one of the others with no reason. That and it’s hard to determine who is the League and who is the Operative. Everyone is good at hiding their identities for a reason, so for an assassin to target a spy, well it’s troubling. It certainly does not bode well for Ava seeing as she’s tangled up so heavily with Sara right now.

“One of our own?” Ava echoes and Henry hums and nods his head slowly, his frown only deepening. Ava’s eyes fall to the envelope there on the desk, and now she thinks she understand the real reason that she’s been pulled in here today. “Damage control,” Ava murmurs, not even needing to look at Henry as he nods once more, “You need me to go out and make sure everything has been settled now that they’re dead.”

It’s rare that a spy die in this way, usually Ava and the others are really good at staying out of the limelight. But from time to time someone will die in a rather public manner, and Ava’s going to assume that’s what happened to this operative. If Henry is asking her to do this, he’s asking her to go out there and cover the real reason behind the death as well to take care of any investigations that might be launched into the matter. “It’s a long job,” Henry remarks, nudging the drive and envelope to Ava, “Upwards of a month in Istanbul.”

Ava likes Istanbul enough, it’s a beautiful city and has one of her favourite cuisines. But these jobs are bothersome and exhausting. They almost always involve getting very close and personal with the local police, breaking into their servers and destroying hard copies of any details they might have collected. “Parameters?” Ava sighs, drawing the envelope close to her and pocketing the drive as she uses her thumb to open the paper slip. Inside are her tickets and what is presumably a key to the local Operative safe house that she likely will not be using.

“Free reign, no limits,” Henry replies, and Ava leans back, eyeing her mentor carefully. This is now the sixth time in Ava’s past few jobs where she has been given full permission to do anything she sees fit in the field. Usually each job comes with very explicit instructions to either engage or not engage the target, as well as orders on how far an operative can push their target if needed. Those instructions almost always include either a kill order, or a no-kill order.

“Sir,” Ava begins, pausing when Henry purses her lips and she sighs, “Henry, not that I am questioning the instructions of the Operative, but this is not normal. So many orders in a row where I’m allowed to follow through as I deem appropriate, I’m curious to know the reason behind that.”

Part of being a spy for the Operative means not really knowing what’s happening in the upper ranks. As it stands, Ava hardly even knows the chain of command in the organization. She’s never once questioned orders, but this time around, things seem to be changing. “It has nothing to do with the Operative and everything to do with you,” Henry replies, folding his hands over his chest once more, “You’ve long been a strong and powerful member of this organization, and those above me trust your discretion in these matters, as do I.” Ava remains quiet, thinking this through and Henry smiles at her, “This is a good thing Ava.”

It’s not as if Ava doesn’t do ample research when she’s given free reign to determine the risk of the target, it’s that she’s still not convinced that her having this new lack of limitations is a good thing. If the Operative is just allowing their agents to determine when someone should live or die, then suddenly it’s as if they’re really no different from the League or other government contract-kill agencies. Ava’s primary job is meant to be the protection of information, not the murder of her targets.

Something about this doesn’t strike a positive note with Ava, though she may just be being paranoid about it all. “Is the Canary still bothering you in the field?” Henry inquires as Ava glances back up to him, still thumbing at the pages inside the envelope, “We know very little about individual League members, but I’ve heard that he has the tendency to be quite the handful in the field.”

That would be an understatement of massive proportions. Sara has been nothing but a pain in the ass since Ava first learned of her. However, as far as Ava can tell, she’s relatively harmless when it comes to the threat she poses to Ava’s own safety. “He’s been problematic,” Ava replies diplomatically, not letting her tone convey anything, “However he is nothing that I can’t handle. It appears that we share some targets in common unfortunately, but I believe that I’ve found ways to get to them before he can.”

It’s a lie, but Henry doesn’t need to know that. In reality, Ava has no idea how Sara sometimes beats her to a target when Ava goes there as soon as she’s given the task. Though Sara certainly has less reservations about simply jumping right in on a job. Ava prefers a slow approach but she has yet to see Sara actually take that option. “Good,” Henry hums, seemingly pleased with what Ava’s said, “Well I won’t keep you, that plane leaves in three hours and I imagine you’re going to want to gather your things before going. Though you can help yourself to collections downstairs if you’d like.”

Nodding her head, Ava stands from her chair and slips the envelope into her bag. “Collections would be easier than finding my contact here in the city in three hours,” Ava muses, watching on as Henry smiles back at her, “I’ll send word when I’m settled.” All Henry does is nod his head and Ava silently slips from the office. It’s about to be a long month in Istanbul, and all Ava can do is hope Sara won’t show up to get in her way this time around. Cleaning up and covering deaths is never an easy task and Ava certainly doesn’t need another metro or elevator fight to complicate matters.

Cascais, Portugal 22:23

If there's one thing Ava hates more than anything when it comes to this job, it's blending in at parties as large as this one. Currently Ava is standing near the small bar that's off to the side of the rather massive gala happening in a private mansion here outside the city limits. It's one being held for prominent figures in the arms-trade race, and Ava is surrounded by people who would kill her without a single ounce of hesitation if they knew who she really is and what she's really here to do.

Officially, Ava's cover has placed her here as a buyer wanting to get in on the bidding war that is set to take place at the end of the evening. Ava Summers is an American who works for an arms-dealer in Brooklyn who was not able to attend himself tonight. Unofficially, Ava is here to kill the wife of the man who is hosting this party. While neither half of the couple are good people, it's Eva Almeida who has been selling information online and some of the most recent information contains details of the Operatives involvement in a heist that occurred not even two years ago.

Neither Eva nor her husband Davi are easy to get to, so this gala had been Ava's only option. The only upside is that the primary concern this evening appears to be protecting the anonymity of others, so it was marked as a masked gala. Once Ava was able to get her hands on building blueprints and carefully timed an outside alert that should draw both husband and wife from the party, it was easy getting in here to wait out the moment to strike.

In about a half hour, someone from the back security room should be calling in about the police raid that is going to occur in one of the Almeida's warehouses not even fifteen miles from here. Ava had carefully placed that tip in, timing the arrival of the email so she has time to catch the couple while they're isolated from the party and occupied with their troubles. Poison is the way to go tonight, just one small bump into Eva should do the trick. It's the same toxin Ava had intended to use on Peter in Germany but never had the chance.

This is Ava's second week here, and she had tried everything else to stop Eva from digging into more records, but nothing had worked. Threatening a prominent arms dealer and his wife would not have been a very good call on Ava's part, so this is her last resort option. It will be a painless death though, and it's not as if Eva is a very good person at all, so Ava's not terribly troubled by her decision this evening.

Currently the couple is dancing on the floor in front of Ava, clueless to the troubles about to come in a few minutes time. Ava never much was one to wear dresses, so instead she's in a forest green three-piece suit with a vest. This was more for practical reasons seeing as the vest and blazer allowed her to obscure weapons from view. A black mask rests over her eyes, making it just a bit harder to really scan the area as it blocks some of her peripheral vision.

Raising her glass to her lips, Ava sips from the water inside. It was meant to be a martini but she had switched the liquid out, not wanting to be anything but sober for this job. "May I have this dance," an all too familiar voice says from Ava's side and she nearly chokes on her drink, glaring to the side in annoyance.

Sara is there and really Ava wants to know how she got in here when it took ages for Ava to manage her way in with her cover. "What'd you do, kill the guards to get in?" Ava asks, setting her glass down and scanning her eyes over Sara. This evening Sara is in another dress, a black dress that's made of slippery looking silk. Like in Russia, the sleeves billow near her wrists but the neckline is far more modest than the dipping plunge of the dress Ava first met her in.

Around Sara's face is a white mask, one that only serves to bring out the stark blue color of her

eyes. Each strand of Sara's hair has been meticulously curled and styled and she has that same red lipstick on her mouth. "Believe it or not, I was invited," Sara retorts and Ava levels her with a glare, not believing that for a second, "Or Sasha Dupree was invited, and I killed her because she was selling guns to dictators, then I took her invitation."

That's more like it. Ava scoffs quietly and returns her eyes to the dance floor, not letting Sara distract her from this job for even a single second. "What are you doing here?" Ava mutters, keeping her hand over the knife under her blazer just in case Sara gets any thoughts about trying to fight her again here, "I swear if you tell me you're here to protect Eva, I am going to be more than just pissed off."

A laugh tumbles from Sara's lips as she takes the drink from the counter Ava had been sipping at moments before. Not even bothering to stop her because it will only encourage Sara more, Ava rolls her eyes and returns her attention to the couple in the middle of the floor. "I'm actually here for her husband this time around, he's pissed off some powerful people in Munich," Sara replies and Ava actually does feel a bit of relief cutting through her, "So I guess it looks like we're on the same team tonight." Ava's eyes cut over to Sara, taking in the amused lift to her lips, "Team take out the bad guys."

"Do you ever take anything seriously," Ava grumbles, already knowing the answer before Sara just laughs beside her, "We are not on the same team." A snort comes from Sara and Ava opts to ignore it. Tonight they might not be fighting against each other in any real sense, but Ava is determined not to let Sara get under her skin. To the side, Sara shifts, turning around so she's arm to arm with Ava as they both look out the floor. Warmth radiates from Sara's skin and Ava clenches her jaw and shifts a single step to the side.

All that comes is another amused chuckle from Sara while Ava sucks in a deep breath through her nose and reminds herself quietly that she cannot make a scene here, no matter how badly she wants to tell Sara off. On the dance floor, Eva and Davi are mixed in with the other couples there, and they're beginning to move a bit further from Ava's sight than she's comfortable with. "Dance with me," Sara speaks and Ava turns to find a hand there in front of her. She's tempted to slap it away, but that would be childish. "Come on," Sara wiggles her fingers with a smile, "We'll both have better sights on them if we're closer."

She's right and Ava does not want to admit that. Right now the best place to view the couple that isn't the dance floor is to stand along the wall across the room. But that's not an option because the bidding area has been set up there and is currently blocked off by several armed men in suits. "Say a single word while we're out there and I will blow your cover," Ava threatens as she places her hand in Sara's own, ignoring the warmth that floods her stomach when Sara swipes a thumb over her pulse-point and laughs.

The music in the room is something between a fast tempo and a slow one, not the kind of music that Ava wants to be caught dancing to with Sara. Leading them to the floor, Ava finds a place at a respectable distance from the couple of the evening, eyeing them from the corner of her view as she draws Sara in. Hands land on her waist and Ava swiftly knocks them away, nudging Sara's arms to her shoulders instead. "I lead," Ava tells her, leveling Sara with a look as Sara's grin widens, "One innuendo, go ahead and do it—see what happens."

Thankfully Sara decides that this is the time to take her threats seriously so she keeps her mouth shut. With a small sigh, Ava places her hand along the side of Sara's waist, her mind jumping back to the way she had tangled her fingers in the side of Sara's dress in Moscow as Sara sucked open-mouthed kisses down the side of her neck. Shaking that thought from her head, Ava takes Sara's other hand and begins leading them around.

This is really hardly a dance and more of just stepping in various circles. Ava wasn't exactly trained in how to dance, but Sara might have a bit more experience here than she does. Tension is forming along all of Ava's spine and shoulders—she's not used to being in the middle of everything like this. Surrounded by this many people, pressed against the chest and stomach of an assassin that might one day want her dead, well it's nothing but risky. And Ava really does not do risky.

The hand along her shoulder squeezes the tight muscle there and Ava drags her eyes away from the couple to find Sara's blue eyes twinkling with mirth in front of her. "You're dancing as if you're made of wood," Sara teases as Ava purses her lips, "Feel the music, try to relax babe."

That nickname floods Ava's chest and stomach with red-hot annoyance and she tightens her grip around Sara's hand slightly. "Call me that one more time and I swear to god I will break at least one of your fingers right here and now," Ava tells her in a low tone, watching as Sara's smile widens. For a moment Ava thinks that she saw Sara's pupils darken, but she tears her attention away from Sara and returns it to the couple once more.

The call should come through any minute now, and that's when the couple will leave down the back hallway to the room down the side. Once they're in there, there's no guards posted outside so it's a simple matter of waiting in the halls for them to leave once more and bumping into Eva as Ava fakes heading to the bathroom. Ideally Ava would have had her drink glass in hand. The cold of the water usually does the trick in masking the small sting of the needle sitting just inside Ava's suit pocket.

"So what's your game plan tonight?" Sara lilts and Ava snorts, sure that Sara knows she is not going to tell her, "I could make a guess, based on your lack of gun this evening." Ava's eyes flicker back to Sara, regarding her suspiciously. "I'm going to say either by knife, though you don't seem like the kind of person to want to make a scene—spies and their shadows," Sara teases as Ava purses her lips, "So I'm going to say that you've brought another poison of some kind with you. Maybe hidden somewhere in here."

Her hand slides down Ava's side, grazing the pocket and Ava instantly catches her by the wrist and brings Sara's hand back to her shoulder with an even glare. "And I'm going to assume that you don't really have a set plan, you're just going to kill him however you see fit in the moment," Ava retorts, scoffing quietly when Sara simply shrugs, "I much prefer the shadows over making a public scene everywhere I go."

There's more Ava has to say about that, but movement down the hallway gains her attention. A very worried looking guard is headed towards the dance floor and Ava angles her body so she can watch, ready for the moment it's time to make her move. Eva and Davi both walk to the side with the man, and Ava watches on, pleased when the anger passes over both of their features and they start down the back hall as a group.

Releasing Sara's hand and waist, Ava begins heading that way, pausing only when she realizes that she's being followed. "No," Ava turns around, coming face to face with Sara and her very fake innocent expression, "You are not coming with me, you can take him out after I get to her, but not before. I will not be here for your bloodbath."

"Oh please," Sara snorts, rolling her eyes as she shoves past Ava, "It's hardly going to be a bloodbath." Anger flares and rises in Ava's chest as she sucks in a slow and deep breath and follows after Sara. Sara's steps are sure and purposeful as she strides down the hall, turning down the very corner that leads to the side room that Ava knows Eva and Davi have been pulled into. Ava remains very close on her heels.

They're getting too close to the door and Ava realizes just what it is that Sara is about to do. Snagging her by the wrist, Ava halts her in her tracks. "Absolutely not," Ava whispers in a hushed tone, glancing over her shoulder as she checks for danger, "You are not just bursting in there and killing them on the spot. That would be a mistake because there is no other way out of that room and guards would be on you in seconds."

Blue eyes scan Ava's face seconds before Sara slips her mask from her face and lets it rest around her neck. "You realize that I kill people for a living right?" Sara responds, nodding her head towards the far door, "There's only three people in that room and when I get in there they'll all be dead before one of them can even think to call for help." Ava is seconds from saying something about that when she hears the sound of a door opening down the hall. Turning over her shoulder, Ava spots a guard backing out of the security room, neatly closing the door there. "Here," Sara says in a rushed tone, her hands shoving on Ava, "Get in here, now."

There's no time for Ava to say anything before she's being pushed through the now open door that had been along the hallway near them. If Ava had known what Sara was about to do, she would have stopped her, but it's too late and Sara is silently closing the door and Ava stands there, seething quietly as Sara presses her ear to the wood. "You are so unbelievably idiotic," Ava hisses when Sara backs up, her eyes scanning Ava in confusion, "Try opening that door again."

Ava already knows what's going to happen before Sara places her hand on the knob and gives it an experimental twist. But nothing happens. The knob doesn't budge and the door doesn't open. Letting out a silent angry laugh, Ava shakes her head and stares at Sara incredulously. "Do you know where we are right now?" Ava asks as Sara purses her lips, her hand falling from the doorknob, "This is a panic room, designed to not let anyone out or in once it's been opened initially and closed again. Not until someone enters a code right there."

Pointing to the panel right near the door, Ava waits for Sara to glance there. If Sara had even had the inkling to think ahead and check the property blueprints she would have known something like this. Ava certainly checked, and she knew that this was a no-go room. And now they're stuck here. "How was I supposed to know?" Sara asks, her tone hushed as she waves to the door, "I was trying to save us from being shot." With a scoff, Ava begins unbuttoning the bottom of her blazer, suddenly hot in this room. "Do spies not thank people for saving their lives?" Sara continues on.

The buttons now undone, Ava sheds the blazer from her shoulders and places it over the small desk that sits there to the side. Sara's eyes are scanning her, her mouth falling shut and Ava just exhales quietly with a small groan. "Do you know how hard it is to get to that couple," Ava demands, not letting her voice get loud, not wanting to get caught here like this, "This was my shot, and now I have to wait for the power to cut off and move to plan B." Sara's eyes narrow slightly as Ava strips her mask from her face with a scoff, "Yeah, some of us plan ahead Sara—spies and their shadows."

It's childish to throw Sara's words back at her but Ava can't help it. Looking around the room, Ava surveys the small space to give herself just a moment to think and calm down. There's not much in here, just the little couch to the side and a few bookshelves along with the desk. In the very corner of the room is a tall cabinet that contains a lock on it, likely one that stores weapons. "I have an automatic switch on both generators outside," Ava sighs, turning back around to face Sara and raising her watch where she can see it, "It should take another ten minutes, so there's nothing to do but wait."

Ava had thankfully anticipated having some problems here. There's no way to exactly predict the behaviour of others so she had planned to cut the power on the off chance that she wasn't able to prick Eva initially. The plan was for her to jab Eva again on her way to this very room. Now Ava's stuck in here, and she's going to have to come up with another plan once she gets out of here. All

because of Sara.

“I knew this room was here,” Sara speaks, and Ava looks up in surprise, watching as Sara moves to the very locked cabinet in the corner, “I didn’t know the door was going to lock once it was closed though, that was a new piece of information.” Hand slipping under the slit in her dress, Sara takes something there from along her thigh before bringing her hand back out, a key caught between her fingers. “Swiped this off Davi on my way in,” Sara’s lips are curved up in that same smirk, “You’re not the only one who plans ahead.”

When Sara fits the key in the lock and twists it, Ava walks over closer, taking a look at all of the guns stacked inside. There’s everything from revolvers to hand guns to two rifles stacked inside, more than enough to get the job done, albeit far messier than Ava originally planned. Still, it’s something more than Ava had seconds ago. To the side, Ava looks up and finds Sara already looking at her, her eyes scanning the length of Ava’s body. “A suit,” Sara muses as Ava’s eyes flicker over her face, taking in the curiosity there on Sara’s features, “Not a dress?”

“Not really a dress kind of person,” Ava replies, leaning against the desk behind her and tucking her hands in her pockets, “That and dresses are impractical in the field, they hardly allow you to hide any weapons.”

“I don’t know about that,” Sara replies, stepping a bit closer, eliminating the space between them, “I certainly never had any issues.” It feels like an insult, and Ava bristles slightly, annoyance tumbling warmly in her stomach. Sara takes another step forwards and Ava removes her hands from her pant pockets, bracing for whatever Sara’s planning on doing. But there’s no blow, rather Sara’s fingers pull Ava’s black tie from under her neatly pressed vest and Ava pauses, not sure what to do.

Ava does not trust Sara, not even remotely, and tension curls in her body as Sara takes that final step forwards, bringing them a mere inch from touching. “In terms of the wait, I think I know what we could do,” Sara speaks, her voice low, her fingers toying with Ava’s tie as Ava’s eyes fly all over her face, trying to read her, “Sometimes I think about the city-that-must-not-be-named.” Instantly annoyance and frustration builds in Ava once more as she glares back at Sara because she told her to never mention this again.

Just as Ava’s about to say something, Sara tugs lightly on the tie, the action surprising Ava enough that their bodies finally touch. Ava can feel the warm press of Sara’s stomach and breasts through the thin fabric of her dress and her tongue flickers out across her lips, a motion that Sara’s eyes fall to. “I can’t say it out loud seeing as you treat that city as if it’s Voldemort and you might die if I do,” Sara teases as Ava glares back at her. A hum falls from Sara’s lips as she releases the tie, her eyes coming to meet Ava’s own, her pupils dark as she smirks, “Though I do seem to remember just how much you liked that evening.”

Normally, Ava is a very patient person. Normally, she would not allow someone to get under her skin like this. Normally, ten minutes in a room with someone would not be that big of a deal. But this is Sara Lance, so it is a very big deal because Ava gets the feeling that Sara has no plans on shutting up for a single moment they’re stuck in here. In the interest of not getting so angry at Sara that she draws attention to their hiding place, Ava decides to shut Sara up herself. All self-control and composure flies out the window as Ava brings both her hands to Sara’s face and draws her in, kissing her roughly.

A small gasp tumbles from Sara’s lips, one that Ava eagerly catches in her own mouth before tugging Sara in by the hip and flipping their positions. With Sara now braced against the desk, Ava leans over her, a single hand along her jaw, the other squeezing Sara’s hip. Sara’s mouth opens and

Ava can hear her inhale, the beginning of Sara about to say something but she stops her, biting at Sara's lower lip and drawing a sound from the back of Sara's throat as fingers dig into Ava's upper arms.

Ava should not be doing this. She should not be willingly kissing the enemy like this. Last time around it was different, Ava didn't know. Back then Sara was a charming stranger in a bar with devastatingly quick wit that night they shared in the hotel room. Now Sara is the one person who manages to break Ava's demeanor and resolve. But Sara's kisses are hard and hungry as she licks her way into Ava's mouth, like she might want this too. Ava shouldn't want this, that is the simple truth—but god she does. Sara seems determined to fuck her over so Ava may as well return the favour.

As Ava's lips travel to Sara's neck, sucking roughly at her pulse point and tasting some kind of sweetness on Sara's skin, a single hand slips into her hair, tugging gently near the nape of her neck. That only serves to spurn Ava on as she sinks her teeth into the soft and tender flesh of Sara's neck, determined to take her revenge for the bruising Sara left on her jaw back in Bucharest. A thigh slips between Ava's own, but she refuses to grind down on it like she wants to, not willing to give Sara the satisfaction of her own pleasure, not willing to let Sara win.

Instead Ava pushes Sara's leg to the side so she's now standing between her hips. Kissing her way back up Sara's neck, Ava captures her lips once more, never slowing down. With a single hand, Ava reaches for the side of Sara's dress, tugging it upwards as hands along her back pull her in even closer. "As always, we're in this because of you," Ava mutters between kisses, ignoring Sara's hums of ascent, "Because you can't just think before you fucking act."

The dress now up near Sara's hips, Ava's hand meets the smooth warm skin of Sara's thigh, a holster strapped there that she unclips with deft fingers, letting it clatter to the ground with the knives still inside. "God I love pissing you off," Sara sighs, her head tipping back as Ava goes for her neck once more, this time biting down harshly in response for that little comment. Fingers close around her tie, pulling her up and bringing her back to Sara's mouth, something that Ava doesn't fight when Sara kisses her, hard.

Skimming her hand along Sara's thigh, Ava brings it between their bodies and lets her hand drift downwards along Sara's stomach. Sara is all soft skin and hard lines of muscle, something that has head building in Ava's abdomen, wanting to drag her lips down Sara's skin. But now is not the time, now is time to finally take her revenge on Sara, and Ava slides her hand between the fabric of Sara's underwear and her hips. Below the fabric, Ava's fingers meet no resistance, instead finding warm and slick skin. "Fuck," Ava mutters against Sara's lips as Sara bites back a quiet moan, "You're so wet."

"Amazing right," Sara breathes out, her eyes dark, her pupils blown and her lipstick already smudged when Ava backs up, "A goddamn miracle if you ask me, after all your bitching this evening."

Pleasure curling deep and low between her own legs, Ava lets her fingers drift experimentally through Sara, finding more silken wetness there. Sara's jaw clenches, her breath stuttering and Ava loves this, she loves finally being the one with the upper hand, the one who has Sara right where she wants her. "I don't know," Ava muses, leaning in, bringing their faces close together, "This certainly seems like maybe you have a thing for my bitching."

Without warning, Ava moves two fingers into Sara, already knowing that she can in fact take it. Whatever words Sara had been forming as a retort melt into something that sounds like a whine—the sound of an assassin caving right in front of a spy. Inside, Sara is velvety soft and warm, her

arousal already coating Ava's knuckles where they rest against her. "The next time you shove me into a room and we get locked in," Ava begins, pausing her kisses even as she begins thrusting inside Sara, "I swear to god I will kill you."

Sara's eyes are closed, her head tipped backwards and her fingers digging into the thin material of Ava's shirt. "Promises promises," Sara teases, though she sounds a bit breathless as Ava adjusts the angle of her hand and finds Sara's clit, brushing it with her thumb. A sound tumbles from Sara's lips and Ava is quick to lean in and swallow it, biting down on Sara's lip in warning because they have to be quiet.

With her free hand, Ava brings Sara's thigh up around her waist, giving her better access as she moves in and out of Sara in rough movements. Sara's hips are grinding against her hand, never once stopping as she drags Ava in by the tie once more and Ava feels teeth sinking into her lip hard enough to draw blood. But that does nothing but ignite the fire building in Ava's stomach as she continues her pace, never once slowing, now moving her thumb around Sara in small tight circles.

Ava should not be doing this and she knows it. This has to be against the unspoken agreement between the Operative and the League. But right now Ava can't bring herself to give a damn because for the first time since Ava's met Sara, she's finally not making those snarky and flirtatious little comments. Other than the soft moans that rise from Sara when Ava drags her fingers along her walls, Sara's not making any sounds at all. Sara is maddening and infuriating and problematic. But she is also thrilling and fascinating and Ava cannot stop watching as Sara comes apart against her.

Ava's enjoying this just a little too much. Every little stuttered gasp or quiet moan that falls from Sara's lips is absolutely intoxicating. Her hips join perfectly with Ava's fingers each time Ava thrusts in, relishing in the way Sara moves against her. All of that pent up frustration and anger, finally redirected and controlled with the task of ruining Sara. It's a kinder form of payback than Sara deserves after everything she's done to mess with Ava's job, but Ava's got a plan here.

As Sara begins reaching the peak of her climax, Ava speeds up her motions, committed to bringing Sara just to the brink. Sara's eyes are closed and her kisses have grown uncoordinated and sloppy, their breath mingling between them as Ava captures her lips once again, hungry for more. Fingers are still digging into Ava's skin through her shirt, still holding Ava close by the tie. Against Ava's hand, Sara's hips are rolling with no particular pattern and Ava can feel the way her walls are fluttering around her fingers.

"I should," Sara stutters out, pausing with her fingers tightening on Ava's arm as Ava thumbs her clit once more, "I should piss you off more often—if this is what it leads to."

Drifting her lips down along Sara's neck, Ava nips the skin there, drawing a breathy sound from Sara's mouth as she soothes the skin with her tongue. "You really shouldn't," Ava replies before drawing skin between her teeth and lips once more, sucking harshly.

The very second Ava feels the pace of Sara's hips speeding up, the tremble in the leg wrapped around her waist, she swiftly removes her fingers from inside Sara and withdraws her hand from her underwear. Sara's dress falls back down as Ava takes a step back, taking in the scene before her. Sara's lipstick is smudged and the beginnings of bruises are forming along the column of her neck. Her hair is mussed and she looks completely disheveled and disappointed.

But Ava is nothing but pleased as she adjusts her tie, ignoring her own arousal and the fire licking through her lower abdomen. Sara's chest is flushed and heaving, her hands shoving her dress down before she braces herself on the desk. "What the fuck Ava," Sara demands as Ava finds a small cloth in the weapons closet to clean her hand on, tossing it to the trash afterwards.

“Don’t start,” Ava begins, swiftly taking her jacket from the desk beside Sara, ignoring her glare as she slips it on her arms, “Next time, don’t interrupt my mission, and maybe I’ll let you come.” Ava’s cheeks heat briefly at the accidental mention of a next time. There shouldn’t really be a next time, because with any luck Ava won’t see Sara again. This was fun, but Ava’s not about to make a habit of it. With swift fingers, Ava does up the lower buttons and checks the pocket to make sure the poison is still there.

Sara is staring back at her, her cheeks still flushed, her breathing uneven as Ava walks to the weapons closet once more and surveys her choices. “You’re kidding,” Sara says, scoffing in disbelief, “I did not interrupt your mission, I was here on business too. You’re really going to punish me for doing my job.”

A handgun might be a good choice for this evening, so Ava secures it in her hand before checking the magazine, satisfied that it’s full. Tucking another round in her pocket, Ava checks her watch before humming and heading to the door. “Yes, I really am,” Ava retorts, laying her hand on the knob and mentally counting down the seconds. Only five more pass before the lights cut out, the red emergency lights in the room flickering on as Ava cracks the door open and turns her head back towards Sara, “Finish off yourself. Babe.” Without another word, Ava slips from the room and into the chaos outside, ready to finish this damn job and get the hell out of here.

Chapter End Notes

I really am not the best smut writer. It makes me quite nervous to write but, we gave it a shot here. Also, I can’t write a fight scene to save my life so, ignore those bits, they took me ages to work out and I’m still not pleased with it. As always, thank you to everyone reading along and feel free to let me know what you think either here or on tumblr @legendssoftomorrow!

Part Three

Chapter Summary

As nice as it would be if Sara would stay out of Ava's business after Portugal, things never really change and Ava keeps bumping into her. As always, Sara cannot seem to keep her hands off Ava's targets, something that pisses Ava off to no end. However not everything about their initial meeting in Moscow is as it seems, and Ava learns some potentially troubling information about the League and the Operative's coordination.

Chapter Notes

Here we are with part three of this fic, and the chapter moves a little slower than some of the others. Same warnings as previous chapters apply here. I've been trying to nail down how many chapters there will be in total but I can't seem to stop adding things in as I go, but it's definitely more than 10, each about the length as they've been before. This fic is divided into two main sections, I think there should be somewhere between 3-5 chapters before I get to that second section which is planned out to be longer than the first. I try to plan it out and update here because I always like knowing the length of things when I'm reading along. But anyways, here is part three and I hope you enjoy!

***the additional scene from the continuation is now hyperlinked to the spacers between sections

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Minsk, Belarus — 23:45

Ava places the bottle down on the table and lets out a quiet sigh as the liquor burns down her throat. Dmitriy is sitting across from her, his work coat on that he uses to protect him from the chemicals, a shot glass in his hand that he fills with the bottle he takes from the table. "So," Dmitriy muses as Ava leans back in her chair, already knowing what's coming next, "You slept with her, twice."

Talking to Dmitriy isn't the reason Ava's here in town, but she came by to fulfill his request to share drinks and catch up. Ava's lived nearly sixteen years of her life without a father, and sometimes she's convinced that Dmitriy is trying to fill that role for her in small ways. Today when she showed up, he had food that Alina had made for her. Those empty containers now sit abandoned off to the side now that the vodka has been broken out. And Ava really needed it after a day like today.

Ava spent nearly her entire morning tailing her target around the city, and never once did they slow down. She's been on edge since Portugal, always looking over her shoulder, waiting for Sara to appear and somehow manage to muddle everything up again. But Sara never appeared, and seeing

as it's been about a month since the gala, Ava's wondering if she did manage to either shake Sara off or piss her off enough that she's going to leave her alone for now.

The past few minutes have been spent filling Dmitriy in on everything that's happened since Ava was here a few months ago. He had listened on, though Ava had of course redacted all real details. Mainly this was a retelling of Sara and everything that she has done since Ava's met her. Much to Ava's chagrin, Dmitriy appears to almost think that Sara is funny, calling her "charismatic" at one point; something that had made Ava scoff because if anything the correct word is problematic.

Since Portugal, Ava's had Gary attempt to dig into Sara, however he was correct in stating there was absolutely nothing to be found on her in any system. Ever since that boat went down years ago, Sara Lance has ceased to exist. It's endlessly frustrating that there is nothing, because Sara appears to know Ava's previous jobs and she has been able to find her location within a city on multiple occasions. That makes Sara dangerous, so Ava is determined to keep her at arm's length. At least in some sense of that phrase.

"Yes," Ava mutters, taking the bottle back and lifting it to her lips, content to get as drunk as she wants this evening seeing as she has a five minute walk to her flat and no plans in the morning, "We had sex, twice." Humming quietly, Ava takes in the surroundings of the room and the case of weapons that Dmitriy has once more carefully laid out for her. "Sex is the only time she shuts her mouth," Ava explains, pointing the bottle Dmitriy's way as he laughs, "You have no idea just what a pain in the ass she is capable of being when she really puts her mind to it."

Placing the bottle back down, Ava tips her head towards the ceiling and lets the room spin. Today marks the anniversary of her parent's death all those years ago, something that Ava chose not to disclose when she arrived here. For better or for worse, it's what drastically shifted the events of her life. Ava went from the ten year old who lived with her parents in various cities across Europe to the child who was suddenly moving in with her aunt in the states. Everything changed that evening of the car accident that claimed their lives, and it's not fair, but sometimes Ava blames them for not being careful.

She was told it was raining that night, that her father had lost sight of the road for a split second and never even saw the tree until it was too late. She was told that her father had been so tired that evening, fresh of a twelve hour flight and had such extreme jetlag. The truth is that they never should have been on the road at all that night but for some reason, they chose to get in the car and drive, and there are times where Ava doesn't forgive them for making that decision that ended in them leaving her here alone.

Dmitriy makes a sound and Ava looks to him, taking in the flash of concern that appears along his features before it's gone. "Alina and I were not fond of each other when we met, have I ever told you that?" he asks and Ava shakes her head, resting her arms across her body and tipping her head to the side, "We fought in the beginning, over flowers of all things." When he pauses to laugh, Ava finds herself smiling as he shakes his head, "I thought that I had really messed up, she was supposed to be my date to the wedding of a friend and she just hated me."

Because Ava's met Alina, she knows that the woman is not the kind of person someone wants to be out of favour with. It's because Alina holds quite a grudge that Ava admires her and her stubbornness. "We spent so long arguing with one another, until our friends were sick of us," Dmitriy continues on as Ava lets out an amused exhale, "But as it turns out, it is quite easy to misinterpret lust for anger."

Now Ava gets where he's going with this story, and she rolls her eyes before reaching for the bottle, only to find that he's moved it from her reach. Leveling Dmitriy with a look, Ava keeps her

hand there, waiting expectantly. He does pass it back and she hums, taking it from him before taking a sip, her lips burning as she misses her mouth slightly. “Sara and I aren’t some kind of star-crossed lovers from distant sides of an ongoing rivalry,” Ava reminds him, though they are on different sides in reality, “She is everything that I am not. The sex with her was good, that’s not a lie, but I’m done with that. One and done, just as a distraction and to let off steam.”

At least that’s what Ava has said to herself. She’s not sure what might happen if Sara gets in her face and tugs on her clothing like she did the last time. Ava can’t lie to herself and say she isn’t attracted to Sara, of course she is. The problem is that this cannot keep happening because Sara is a distraction, and sex is only going to make her more of one. “Well,” Dmitriy hums, holding his glass out to Ava, “Here’s to one and done.”

A smile tugging at her lips, Ava reaches forwards and taps her glass with his own before bringing the bottle to her mouth and taking a burning sip of the vodka. With her head facing upwards again, Ava stares at the blank ceiling and contemplates her next move for her case tomorrow afternoon.

Warsaw, Poland — 19:34

This is an unmitigated disaster. Ava has only just walked into the door, and the first thing she came across was the dead body that nearly prevented her from opening it. Ava was on her way up here to ask the CEO of a data company here to come with her, faking an urgent call when her intent was to swipe his phone to get access from his office. And now here he is, resting right at her feet, a dagger in the center of his chest. “Are you serious?” Ava asks, bending down and removing the knife from the body and pointing it at the other party in the room, “What is wrong with you?”

“If you’d been here a few minutes earlier I would have let you in on the fun,” Sara taunts, a blade in her hand that she is neatly wiping on the tie of the man she’s standing over. Ava thinks he might actually still be alive, but he surely won’t be for long. A small pool of blood rests under his body, running right into the neat black boots Sara has on her feet. “I had no idea you were in the city this time so this is a pleasant surprise,” Sara continues on, stepping over the man and scuffing her feet on the carpet, leaving streaks of red behind.

Ava remains there in the doorframe for a second longer before glancing down the hall to make certain that nobody else is here. When she determines that she and Sara are alone, Ava closes the door and neatly steps over the body at her feet. “Have you lost your mind?” Ava speaks, frustration already burning through her body as she points to the bodies around the room, “Every single one of these men has a security team downstairs that could have come up here if they had even caught a hint that there might be danger present.”

It had been quite a challenge to sneak past them pretending to be the night receptionist, and Ava had kept her hand on the gun at her side the entire time. Surely those men are going to raise hell when they find their bosses here in this room, each of them dead or near dead. There is one near the door, the other where Sara had just been, and a third sitting in a chair, a dagger embedded right in his eye and a red stain on his chest near his heart. “You are so reckless,” Ava spits out, coming further into the room as Sara tilts her head to the side and smiles, “One of these days, you’re going to get caught. That or I’m going to turn you in.”

“What?” Sara draws out in a mocking tone, her hand pressed to her chest, “Why are you being so mean, I would kill for you Ava Sharpe.” Ava purses her lips, glaring at Sara as Sara turns over to the desk and removes the tablet from the center. “I did kill for you, look,” Sara continues on, passing Ava the tablet. Not moving, Ava glances down to the screen in Sara’s hands, taking in the image of herself on the elevator there on her way up. “That one there was going to kill you,” Sara

uses her blade to point to the man on the ground, “He realized you weren’t the usual night receptionist.”

Ava hadn’t known that he was going to be tracking the elevators, and she swears silently before reaching out and jerking the tablet from Sara’s hands. With quick fingers, Ava pulls up the security tapes there and wipes every single moment from the second she set foot into the building. “I doubt your actions had anything to do with my safety,” Ava retorts, pressing the button to delete even the backup footage file, “And even if they did, I could have handled it myself. I never asked you to kill them.”

In front of her Sara simply shrugs as Ava leans around her to place the tablet back down once more. “It would have been hot if you did,” Sara replies, that smirk still in place along her lips, her blue eyes lit up with a challenge.

“Murder gets you hot?” Ava fires back, looking around the room to the mess surrounding them, already dreading how she’s going to explain this one to Henry, “This is what does it for you? Three dead CEOs currently bleeding all over tacky synthetic fiber carpeting?”

“No,” Sara lilts, her voice dropping as she steps closer to Ava, her fingers tugging gently at the beige jacket Ava has tucked around her body, “Women who need me get me hot.” Sara hums quietly and Ava should step back, she really should. But she’s stuck in place as Sara uses her jacket lapels to pull herself closer, bringing their bodies flush together. “And I like you needy,” Sara murmurs, her eyes scanning Ava’s face as Ava sucks in a quiet breath.

It’s a ridiculous statement, and Ava scoffs, knocking Sara’s hands away from her and backing up, putting some much needed space between their bodies. Swallowing before shaking her head, Ava returns her eyes back to Sara’s own, letting the frustration win out over her desire to do something stupid. “You’ve never seen me needy,” Ava shoots back, watching as Sara raises just a single brow, her lips twitching upwards, “And you never will.”

Ava should leave now. She should walk over to the CEO, take his phone, and get to his office to take what she needs before the security teams wisen up to the fact that their bosses are dead up here. That is the job, that is what she is required to do. “I’ve never seen you needy?” Sara replies, her eyes piercing right through Ava as that wicked grin curves over her lips, “So then tell me what that was back in Portugal. You could have just ignored me, nobody made you have sex with me.”

Right now, Ava’s not sure that she would call it having sex. “That was simply an outlet so I didn’t kill you,” Ava waves her hand in the air, not willing to cave to Sara, not willing to give her any kind of satisfaction, “In terms of ignoring you, how do you suggest I do that when everywhere I turn, there you are, murdering my clients and making a mess as you do so?” Sara says nothing, just purses her lips, her eyes glinting back at Ava. “What I want,” Ava challenges, stepping closer to Sara, pleased when she hears Sara’s breathing catch and eyes fly upwards to meet her own, “What I want is for you to leave me alone and stay out of my way.”

At a certain point, it’s going to get hard to keep explaining these things to Henry. As it stands she thinks he might be getting suspicious. “No, you don’t,” Sara shakes her head, and just like that hands are curling around Ava’s lapels again, a position she put herself in this time, “Not when I’m in your way like this.” No sooner than the words leave Sara’s mouth are her lips pushing up into Ava’s own. Sara’s hands pull her in and Ava finds Sara’s jaw with her palm, drawing her in roughly, deepening the kiss.

Heat builds and forms in Ava’s abdomen again, just the mere action of kissing Sara is enough to bring back those memories of Moscow and Portugal that Ava has been working very hard to put behind her. Sara still kisses her hard, her teeth sinking down into Ava’s bottom lip as Ava lets out a

sharp exhale when the pain smarts. It's the good kind of pain though, the kind that increases her desire and makes Ava want to break her self-imposed rules over and over. "No," Ava resists as she breaks their lips apart, pushing Sara away and shaking her head, "Not again, I am not doing this with you again."

"Is it the room of dead bodies, because that was really killing my mood too," Sara teases and Ava lets out a long and heavy sigh. "There's a perfectly good office down the hall," Sara suggests, her eyes moving to the door before flickering back to Ava, "Though I'm assuming you came here for something."

The phone. Ava had nearly forgotten about the phone. Snagging the knife from her pocket that she had taken from the CEO's chest, Ava walks to his prone body and carefully kneels near him, not wanting to bloody her nice brown linen pants. A careful pat down reveals that the phone was in his blazer pocket and Ava places it to the side before reaching for his right hand and laying the knife to the base of the inside of his thumb. "Hey," Sara calls from behind her and Ava turns around, "Before you go all 'Face Off' on his finger, maybe try some tape first?"

Not understanding the reference, Ava's brows furrow as she sets the knife down on her leg and stares at Sara. "'Face Off'?" Ava parrots back as Sara nods her head as if this is the most obvious thing and Ava's just completely missing it.

"The movie with Nicholas Cage where they do the super inaccurate face swap?" Sara explains, walking over with the roll of tape as Ava shakes her head because she doesn't exactly have a lot of time to just sit around and watch movies. "It's pretty good," Sara shrugs, passing Ava the tape roll, "Figured I'd interrupt you before you do some postmortem torture over here, not that I'm judging."

Really Sara has no right to judge and Ava snatches the tape away from her before turning back to the CEO. "You sent me a tongue in a box," Ava mutters, tearing a piece off and pressing it to the very thumb print she was just going to cut off, "I feel like you lost your right to judge a long time ago when you pulled that little stunt." It had been something Ava had to absolutely bury in the trash before carrying it far from her flat so it had no chance of being discovered anywhere near where she had stayed.

The thumbprint successfully recovered, Ava holds it to the light and decides that it will do. Pressing it over another piece of tape to close off the sticky side, Ava stands to her feet once more, taking both the phone and the knife with her. After opening the door, Ava heads to the halls, walking down the side that she knows will lead to his office. As expected, Sara is right on her heels, humming a little tune that sounds a lot like a Rhianna song. "Can you not?" Ava whispers in a hushed tone, whipping around in the middle of the hallway as Sara nearly bumps into her, "If you're going to insist on following me, then I have to insist you be quiet."

Sara's response is that same cheeky smile and Ava just exhales angrily before turning around and walking to the dark brown door at the end of the hall. A key panel and thumb scanner sits there. Laying the print carefully over her own thumb, Ava lays it along the glass there and tucks the knife and phone to her pocket for a moment. "The code is 052303," Sara speaks and Ava glances just to over her shoulder to find a very smug looking Sara there, "The day he started this company."

All Ava does is let out a quiet sigh because she already knew that. It's a terrible choice for a passcode in her opinion, horribly predictable. But regardless, Ava keys in the code as the lock clicks open and she pushes her way into the office. Lights immediately flicker on, illuminating the desk there that sits just in front of already closed shades. There'll be no need to wipe cameras in this office seeing as there aren't any, so Ava doesn't try to shield her face from the corners of the room, she just heads to the computer.

As she sits, the chair squeaks and Ava looks over to find Sara poking around the tall wooden shelf that sits in the corner, filled with books and a few scattered photo frames. Ignoring her for now, Ava uses the passcode to enter into the computer before removing a cord she brought with her and plugging it into both the computer and phone. This particular CEO, David Nowak, had been siphoning funds from a company in the Czech Republic and in doing so had found a number of accounts owned and operated by the MI5 and MI6.

He of course never knew it, but anyone having that information is dangerous, so Ava's here to make sure it disappears. Typically anyone who comes across something belonging to either of those organizations has no idea what it is they've discovered. But the right people would know what those accounts are, and Ava's here to make sure it never falls into those hands. "His wife is pretty," Sara remarks and Ava keeps her face towards the screen, her eyes cutting over to where Sara stands with a photo frame in her hand.

"Developing a conscious over there," Ava muses, keying into David's email as she brings up the right reports and carefully deletes them from both his phone and computer at the same time, "Regretting your decision to kill him?"

"Hardly," Sara snorts and Ava just hums, going through the computer files now and digging out the file labels that she's searching for. They lapse back into silence as Ava deletes line after line of information and does a basic search on the computer to see if there is anywhere else David might have copied the information to. "He was a terrible man," Sara continues on, the frame now abandoned as she comes to the desk, standing just a bit too close to Ava, "Do you know how many mistresses he had?"

The mistresses were hardly the tip of the iceberg when it came to David Nowak's affairs. He was dabbling in just about everything, from adultery to trading data with dangerous companies in foreign countries. By the time Ava had finished digging through his life, she found at least eleven instances of treason in just the past five years alone. "Five," Ava replies, answering Sara's question and gaining a curious look that makes her roll her eyes, "I told you before, I actually do my research."

All that comes from Sara is a quiet and almost thoughtful sounding hum. But then she's leaning in close, close enough that Ava can smell the faint floral scent of the perfume Sara must have on, a different kind from the gala. This one almost smells of lavender and lemon. When a hand slides along Ava's arm with walking fingers, Ava instantly removes it, pressing Sara's palm to the desk before going back to the computer, never once taking her eyes from the screen. "You know," Sara lilts, her voice right by Ava's ear, her breath ghosting over Ava's neck, "I did lock the door when we came in."

Ava had noticed that, but she doesn't reply, instead she finishes taking the last bit of information she needed and then removes the cord from both computer and phone and powers them off. "I am not having sex with you again," Ava states, turning around in the chair, the arm bumping into Sara and making her back up. But she's not far enough, and Ava can still see that challenge sparkling in Sara's eyes. "You're reckless, and your kills are sloppy," Ava continues on while Sara's smile grows, "It's as if you want to be caught and that makes you dangerous to someone in my line of work."

"Spies and their shadows," Sara teases, her voice low, her fingers walking from Ava's wrist up to her elbow as Ava remains in the chair, her resolve wavering. "And what would you say if maybe I'm just doing all this so I get caught by one person?" Sara tilts her head to the side, pushing Ava's legs apart and coming between that space, her hand now on Ava's thigh, brushing slowly upwards as heat coils in Ava's abdomen, "Maybe I like it when you lecture me, hate sex is very therapeutic

you know.”

It's not. But Ava doesn't give a damn as she drags Sara in by the shirt and clashes their lips together. There's only a certain amount of self-control that Ava can exercise in one night. There's only so long she can go before her frustration and anger at Sara's actions needs an appropriate outlet. This might be giving Sara exactly what she wants but Ava doesn't care, she wants it to. “I cannot stand you,” Ava mutters out between kisses, pressing to her feet and backing Sara towards the desk once more, pleased when Sara's breathing falters as her hips meet the edge.

“Feeling is mutual,” Sara replies, pulling away before lips meet the side of Ava's neck, sucking roughly enough to leave a mark. Sara is all teeth and lips as she moves down Ava's skin while Ava digs her fingers into Sara's hips, her heart picking up in her chest as Sara bites down on the edge of her collarbone.

Everything in Ava's self-made list of rules is telling her to stop this right now, to get out of here and go somewhere else, to not let Sara drag her into this right now. But really, Sara's not even doing that much dragging because Ava just jumped right on over the edge with her. Desire burns through Ava's body as she places her hand under Sara's jaw, bringing their lips back together before sliding down Sara's body and working to unfasten the belt at her waist. “Pull that stunt from Portugal again and I will stab you,” Sara threatens, her eyes a deep and dark blue color when she backs up.

Somehow, Ava thinks she means it and she responds by flicking open the tab of the belt before removing it from Sara's waist in one motion. The pants Sara has on are undoubtedly the same pair of tactical pants Ava's seen on her before, the kind that are meant to be more resistant to knife slashes. They also have an unfortunate amount of buttons, and Ava groans impatiently into Sara's mouth as she tugs her zipper down abruptly. “So many fucking buttons,” Ava complains as Sara jerks the silk shirt from Ava's pants, her hands skimming along Ava's abdomen and back.

With the last button undone, Ava wastes no pretenses before slipping her hand between the fabric and letting her fingers find their way to already slick skin. “Say one word,” Sara threatens as Ava smirks against her lips. But Ava doesn't threaten her, instead she brings her hand lower, adjusting their angle so Sara's thigh is between her own as she slips inside with two fingers. “Fuck,” Sara exhales sharply, her mouth breaking from Ava's own.

That's something Ava won't get tired of, listening to the sound of her winning something over from Sara, a surrender of sorts that Sara never offers her when they fight. “I'll pretend that you didn't kill my target here tonight and not make this a repeat of Portugal if you can do one thing,” Ava taunts, already moving inside Sara, pausing for a moment to make Sara look at her, “For at least a month, stay out of my way or at the very least do not kill my targets until I get what I need from them.”

Sara resists, something that Ava expected, so she presses her hand against Sara so the base of her palm strikes her clit. A quiet moan bubbles up from Sara's throat as her eyes close, her fingers digging into the sensitive skin of Ava's ribcage. “Fine,” Sara caves, sounding none too happy about their little deal, “But when the month is over, things go back to the way they were before. Whoever gets there first, gets the target.”

“May the best operative win,” Ava agrees before leaning down and pulling Sara back into another bruising kiss. Fingers rake down Ava's stomach and she bites back her own moan, picking up her pace inside of Sara instead, wanting to make this quick lest they get caught here. This is not something Ava would care to explain the security teams. When a hand attempts to pass between Ava's stomach and her pants, she catches Sara and shoves her away, pinning that same hand to the

desk as she continues her thrusts into Sara.

The thigh between her own presses upwards and in a moment of weakness Ava grinds down, the friction cutting through her desire in the most perfect way. Swallowing back the sound that threatened to rise from her throat, Ava lifts up and away from Sara's leg, not letting herself cave in the way she so desperately wants. As it is, Ava is painfully aware of her own arousal and the way her underwear are sticking to her, but she won't let herself go there with Sara.

When Sara's kisses grow sloppy and the other hand along Ava's stomach resorts to tracing fumbling patterns over her hip, Ava doubles down on her thrusts, matching the rapid pace of Sara's rolling hips. Teeth sink into Ava's bottom lip, the pain nothing but pleasurable as she feels the peak of Sara's climax arriving in the fluttering of her walls and the loosening grip of her hand along Ava's side. Sara's head tips backwards, her face towards the ceiling and Ava takes that as an invitation to attach her lips to Sara's neck, finding her pulse point there.

Sara's skin tastes faintly of sweat when Ava drags her tongue along it before nipping right near her jaw. No words are spoken and the only sound in the room is the rustling of Sara's pants and the sound of her heavy breathing. Just as Sara's hips spasm, Ava backs away, taking in the tension in Sara's body that has finally snapped. Her arms are braced on the desk behind her now, her hand under Ava's own forming a tight fist. Sara's chest is heaving and Ava slows her fingers inside Sara, bringing her back down before stopping entirely and withdrawing her hand.

After wiping her fingers on Sara's pants, Ava sets to tucking her shirt back in her own. "Seriously," Sara exhales, still sounding a little breathless as she looks to her pant leg, "There's tissues right there."

Ava looks to where Sara is pointing over her shoulder and finds that Sara's right. "Didn't see them," Ava shrugs, bringing her hands to the back of her pants and tucking her shirt there as well, "You're really going to complain?" When she looks back to Sara she arches a single brow and Sara purses her lips before hooking a single foot around Ava's knees and drawing her back in. It was a rough motion and Ava has to brace herself on either side of Sara's body to keep herself from falling into Sara completely.

"Don't you want something too?" Sara asks, her brows still raised, her lips forming that same smirk as she tucks her fingers in the front of Ava's pants, "I'd hate to miss out on the feeling of you coming apart against my fingers again."

If Ava's being honest, she does want that too, desperately. But Sara has done nothing to earn honesty here. "No," Ava replies curtly, backing away after shoving Sara's leg from her body, "With you, I don't want anything."

Snagging the phone and the knife from the desk, Ava tucks the chair back in and brushes past Sara, ignoring the sound of her laugh that fills the room. "See you next time Sharpe," Sara calls as Ava rolls her eyes, "Don't kill anyone I wouldn't." Ava gets the feeling that's a rather short list, and she just scoffs before leaving the room and heading to the halls. Time to replace the phone back with David and get the hell out of here before the security teams find the bodies.

Cleveland, USA — 12:56

Shifting in the chair she's sitting in, Ava scans the shopping plaza just in front of her and leans backwards against the metal chair backing. For the first time in quite a few months, Ava is not here on a job and she is not here to track a target. This is not a break that Ava wanted, nor one that she

welcomes, but the bullet that was shot through her shoulder brought it on anyways. Now Ava's two weeks into her recovery and she's no less bored and pissed off than she was when she had first been pulled from the field by Henry.

He said that she had been pushing too hard and needed some time to take a break. Ava had done her best to fight him, but he hadn't meant it as a choice in the first place. Apparently being caught in a shoot-off between her target and another League member warranted a rest, though Ava would love nothing more than to get back out there and get to work. Resting is not something Ava does well or willingly.

The wound itself was hardly bad and Ava hadn't needed surgery to remove it or repair anything. She had patched herself up the best she could with her basic kit that she keeps in her travel bag at all times. What had been worse was the hit she took to her pride because she had never seen the shooter coming until it was too late. It was an embarrassment to be caught off guard like that, and Ava firmly believes that is the real reason Henry had benched her, not the injury itself. The look of disapproval on his face had all but said exactly that.

So now Ava's here in the US where she had been when everything went south. Cleveland has never been a city that Ava found personally impressive, but moving to a new location hadn't been worth it. Here she can go to the physical therapy clinic that Henry found for her under the guise that she works for a personal protection agency. It's been helpful, though Ava hasn't always appreciated the patronizing words of her particular therapist while they're working together. This is far from the first time Ava's been shot and she sincerely doubts that it will be the last.

Still, Ava goes in because she knows how important regaining mobility is after an injury like that. Another two weeks and she should be fine enough to go back into work, though she doubts Henry will place her on anything requiring actual violence for a while. There's nothing Ava hates quite like she hates Henry's version of probation—not that he calls it that, but that's what it is.

A group of teens across the street erupt into laughter and Ava watches them curiously. They're all close to college age, not much older than Ava is herself. Ava's only twenty-six, though sometimes she feels much older than that. Certainly she looks a bit older, something that bodes well for her in her line of work. But the group across the street all appear young and youthful, each of them laughing as they crowd around a boy in the center who is holding a phone out for the others to see.

As much as Ava loves people watching, sometimes it doesn't do good things for her state of mind. Anytime she sees a group like that, she wonders what things would have been like for her if she hadn't joined the Operative. Ava wonders if she would be like the girl to the very side who is glancing at the others but is more interested in the work she's doing with her textbook propped open. She wonders if she would have a group of people like that where she could go out and just laugh with them, never having to wonder about someone following her or gunning for her life.

It's not that Ava doesn't enjoy her job, she does in a way. But there are always times where her mind slips away from her and she can't help but think of how different her life would be right now if she had kicked Henry out that evening in her flat six years ago instead of letting him stay. Certainly she wouldn't be grounded here in Cleveland with a whiny physical therapist and nothing to do all day but sit in boring cafes and soak in the lives of others.

Metal grates roughly over concrete, the sound assaulting Ava's ears as she winces and turns to the source of the noise. A familiar and already smiling face is staring down at her and Ava scowls before shaking her head and adjusting her sunglasses on her face. "Damn it Lance," Ava swears as Sara takes the seat beside her, not even asking if Ava wants company, "The moment I think I get a breather from seeing you, here you are. After three weeks of nothing I had hoped you were out of

my hair.”

Ava largely suspects that Sara had only stayed clear in honor of their little deal that she remove herself from Ava’s business. Of course this injury has cheated Ava out of two weeks of peace from Sara, and she’s not happy about that. “I always adore how sweet and charming you are,” Sara scoffs, her blonde hair whipping around her face as the wind blows, her eyes obscured behind a pair of shades as well, “It never fails to warm my heart.”

“What heart?” Ava mutters, folding her arms over her chest, well aware that she’s being petulant right now but she can’t bring herself to care. Ava is jealous of Sara Lance, something she didn’t think was possible. But Sara is here, likely on a job, and Ava is going to be stuck here still, staring at strangers and later tonight getting caught up on the movies tucked in her watch list. Part of Ava is almost tempted to dig into what Sara’s doing here just so she can live vicariously through the details.

The cup in front of Ava is stolen away by Sara, but she says nothing because there’s not a point and Ava does not feel like making a scene here. Beside, her tea had gone cold about a half hour ago due to the rather unforgiving wind that has been blowing through these streets. “So,” Sara draws out as Ava turns to her, watching as Sara reclines in her chair with one leg folded over the other, “Who’s the target? One of those kids over there?”

“I don’t target people under twenty-five,” Ava grumbles, dragging her eyes away from Sara and the way her lips are pursed around the cup rim, “And there is no target. I’ve been benched due to injury.” A snort falls from Sara’s lips and Ava turns to her with a glare as Sara holds a single hand up in mock surrender, something that only makes Ava’s frustration build more. “It was one of you that did this,” Ava tells her, tugging her shirt to the side so Sara can see the still healing wound there along her skin, “Whoever it was had terrible aim.”

That does make Sara laugh, a jovial sound that cuts through the volume of the wind blowing through the trees. “Ventured too far from your shadow did you?” Sara teases and Ava clicks her tongue, already over the reused jokes. Silence resumes between them once more, something Ava is relieved to hear. Today’s really not the kind of day where Ava’s up for much of Sara’s usual teasing and sarcastic comments. Though they’ve started to annoy her a bit less, seeing as this has been her usual for some time now when it comes to Sara. Almost as if she’s worn Ava down.

“So,” Ava hums, reaching out and taking her cup back from Sara’s hands, ignoring her mumbled complaint, “Where’s your target here? Some CEO downtown that pissed the League off doing something they shouldn’t have?” Ava wants the details, she wants to hear all about the job even though she knows Sara won’t tell her. Or maybe Sara would, but Ava knows that she doesn’t willingly give away those kinds of things when their work doesn’t intersect with each other.

Sara leans back in her chair, her loose black silk shirt fluttering in the breeze where it’s tucked neatly into pressed brown slacks. This is arguably the most formal that Ava’s seen Sara dress, no longer in something impractical or her usual all black outfit. “The target is actually in the city over, about forty-five minutes from here but this is where I flew in,” Sara divulges before nodding across the street, “I was on my way over there to get more details about the job when I saw you here, figured I’d stop to catch up.”

It’s interesting to know that the League does drops just like the Operative does. Ava’s heard bits and pieces about some secret location all the assassins are based out of, some kind of a base of operations. Before Sara said this, Ava had assumed that she would simply travel back there between jobs to get her next target information. “There is no catching up,” Ava replies curtly, sipping from her tea, making a face because it’s far colder than she expected it to be.

A laugh falls from Sara's lips, a smile there on her face when Ava turns to her. "I was actually thinking a different kind of catching up," Sara continues on, her voice lowering, her hand laying just over the inside of Ava's thigh, "The more non-verbal kind." With her hand, Ava swats Sara away before moving her leg so it's no longer in Sara's space. "There's a storage closet somewhere in the back of this place," Sara murmurs, her eyes piercing straight through Ava's own, "And coincidentally I happen to have my lock-picking kit with me."

With a light scoff Ava just shakes her head, shoving down the first licks of heat that begin forming in her stomach at the suggestion. Sara would be an interesting distraction from Ava's benching, but Ava has sworn off sex with Sara again. She's already broken her rule three times for the assassin and she's not about to do it again. "No," Ava shakes her head, listening as Sara clicks her tongue but leans back all the same, "I want to know something from you instead, something I've wondered for a while." Ava turns to Sara, taking in her curious expression, "Russia. Did you know who I was there?"

This has been something Ava's been thinking about since landing here in the states and suddenly finding herself with a lot more free time. It wasn't perfectly clear if Sara knew who she was that night, or if they had both found the truth of each other's identities afterwards. That evening Sara had said and done nothing to give away anything, though that could just be because she was being careful. "I did," Sara nods her head, folding her arms over her chest, her brows drawn slightly.

It makes sense really, though Ava can't help but be a little annoyed both with herself and with Sara. "So then you purposefully sought me out that night in the bar?" Ava continues on, her frustration rising as Sara purses her lips and looks to the side, "Why do that, why bother me there and why even try to track me down in the first place? Our agencies are not meant to interact like that and we both know it."

While it's an unspoken rule, it's a pretty powerful one. Working with the other team never leads to anything good if history is correct. Ava knows many members of the League that have been brought down by spies and many spies that have been killed by assassins. But Sara looks nothing but confused right now, her hands placed on the table as she leans in, her brows drawn. "Did nobody tell you?" Sara asks and Ava looks to her, shifting on her seat, "I thought you knew, I assumed that you were pissed at me afterwards because of why I was in Russia."

"I was pissed at you because you took out my contacts and seemed to take pleasure in doing it," Ava corrects, her gut twisting because she does not like that Sara seems to know something she doesn't here, "Why were you there in Russia and why would someone need to tell me about it?"

From the look on Sara's face, Ava gets the feeling that she is not going to like what comes next as the answer. "I was there for you," Sara replies and instantly Ava's hand shifts towards her gun while Sara shakes her head, "No, not to kill you—to protect you."

Ava recoils backwards, every warning inside her body flaring brightly. This is not what she expected and she has no idea how Sara just conveniently kept this from her all this time. "What?" Ava asks incredulously, setting her cup down on the table once more before leaning back in her chair, staring back at Sara who is watching her as well, "Protect me from what exactly?"

"From Russia in general," Sara shrugs, letting out a quiet sigh before gazing out to the street, "It's a bad place for spies and you were working alongside a media mogul who was gunning for the local government. That's not exactly something that places you in the safest position." Maybe not, but Ava's dealt with worse before, multiple times. "I never really found out who it was that placed in the request, and I'm curious to know why the League permitted me to go," Sara confesses and Ava bites the inside of her cheek nervously because this creates a problem, "But I do know that it

was one of your own.”

A sharp laugh bursts from Ava’s mouth as she stares back at Sara in complete disbelief. “Now that cannot be possible,” Ava argues, shaking her head and leaning backwards, her own arms now crossed over her chest, “My people would never have contacted the League for help on something like that, we have other operatives that they could have placed with me instead of calling in an assassin.” Sara is looking back at Ava, her expression somber in a way Ava’s never seen it before and Ava’s belief in her statement falters. “How sure are you?” Ava tests, pursing her lips as she feels her body tense up.

A single one of Sara’s shoulders lift, her hair rising and falling with the motion, slipping near her neck. “Pretty certain. I never had full confirmation but, to the rest of the world, Ava Sharpe doesn’t exist anymore,” Sara speaks and Ava hums quietly because Sara has a point here, “All I got was a photo and a name from my higher ups. No file, no information other than the fact that you dropped off the surface of the earth years ago in college. I had the location of your job but, finding you,” Sara pauses, letting out a little chuckle, “That wasn’t easy.”

But still, she had in fact managed to find Ava, something that is daunting considering the fact Ava had been very careful in obscuring her location. There are few ways that Sara could have tracked her, and each of them are unsettling to consider. That being said, there were exactly two people who knew Ava was going to Russia, Gary and Henry. It gives her a starting point to investigate this when she has time. “So then why’d you sleep with me?” Ava demands, her fingers curling into the skin of her arm, feeling a bit angry that Sara had been messing with her even back then, “Some kind of power play?”

A look passes over Sara’s face, something unreadable and something that disappears seconds later. “No, of course not,” Sara shakes her head and she almost sounds hurt that Ava would suggest something like that, “My orders said no contact, and that’s what I had planned on until I finally found you in that damn bar.” Sara pauses here, letting out a reluctant sounding sigh, “And then I came in and you were nothing like what I expected at all. When the photo came my way and the name as well, I quickly connected the fact that I was now meant to go protect someone after having killed two of your contacts.”

Grumbling quietly, Ava pops each of her knuckles, still pissed about what happened to James and Lim because she now has to find new contacts in those areas. “You’re a well known thorn in the side of the League,” Sara explains and Ava looks to her, surprised, “Oh don’t make that face, surely even you have to know that you’re annoyingly effective in every job.” It’s not quite a compliment, but it’s far more than Sara has ever mentioned and Ava doesn’t really know how to feel about that. Unsettled, and maybe a little suspicious.

“Is this your way of saying you then showed up and found me disappointing and average?” Ava throws back, watching as a smile curves across Sara’s face, the corners of her eyes crinkling near the arms of her sunglasses, “Because I can assure you the feeling is mutual. If anything, since meeting you in person I’ve only come to learn just how careless you are in some of your jobs.”

That’s only partially true. Ava will not admit out loud that she believes Sara is skilled because she simply cannot forgive the fact that Sara enjoys making her kills rather public and well known. Though then again, that is a primary difference in their line of work. “I didn’t find you disappointing. Based on your work that I could attribute to you, I thought that you would be different,” Sara explains and Ava regards her quietly, wanting to know what Sara’s expectations of her were, “League rumors say that you take down companies in weeks and bring powerful international players to their knees. But there you were, quiet and calm, reading a redacted file in the middle of a Russian bar.” Sara lets out a little laugh and Ava frowns, “You were fun, like I keep

telling you.”

Ava’s not sure that she likes the fact there are rumors in the League about her work. It would be very hard for them to piece things to her outside of some of her more obvious work that had been almost unavoidable to leave some trace of her existence there. So far Ava’s learned that Sara actually knows relatively little about where she has been across the continents. The few jobs Sara is aware of were some of the more obvious ones. But still, the fact that the League considers Ava a threat is slightly disconcerting.

“We have rumors of you as well,” Ava muses, watching as Sara raises a single brow, her lips quirked in amusement, “They say you’re the best but, I think that’s because they’ve yet to see your work in person.” A laugh bubbles from Sara’s lips and really Ava does not know how she just finds a way to laugh everything off. This only goes to prove that Ava’s right about Sara not being able to take things seriously. “Operative spies don’t really call you the Canary when we’re exchanging information,” Ava continues on while Sara tilts her head, “They call you Agrona.”

Ava forces herself not to smile as she sees the edges of Sara’s lips lift up into a smirk. “Do they really?” Sara asks, looking all too thrilled at the prospect of having some kind of code name.

Sara’s eyes are lit up, her smile wide, and Ava almost feels bad for what she has to say next. “No,” Ava replies, watching Sara’s smile fall, “That’s a name from a book I was reading earlier. She’s some mythical goddess of slaughter—I’ll admit it’s fitting.” A quiet grumble falls from Sara’s lips and she shakes her head before slinking backwards into her chair.

While Sara’s moniker ‘The Canary’, does appear in the some files, there certainly is no extra nickname that has been paired with it. Ava’s still not certain that anyone else other than her has come to realize that ‘The Canary’ is a woman.

“We’ve got a name for you too,” Sara replies, standing from the table and brushing out her pants before buttoning her coat, “Though everyone seems to think you’re a man. I knew the truth though, there’s some things in this line of work only a woman is capable of pulling off the way you do.”

That almost sounds close to a compliment, and Ava’s curious to know what her name is, but she won’t give Sara the satisfaction of asking. Instead Ava remains in her seat, her eyes leveled at Sara as Sara takes the takeaway cup from the table and lowers her glasses down. “Well, shame that you’re benched but can’t say I’ll miss you screwing things up for me,” Sara lilts, her blue eyes sparkling in the sun as she smiles, “See you around Sharpe.”

As Sara walks away, Ava watches her go, following the way Sara just waltzes right across the road, no regard for any traffic that might be coming. With a quiet sigh, Ava drags her eyes from the building as Sara disappears inside, another smile thrown over her shoulder in Ava’s direction. A few more minutes here and Ava will head back to her place. This conversation has brought on some new things that Ava has to look into, and she already knows where she’s going to get started.

Cleveland, USA — 23:45

With careful fingers, Ava raises a new bandage over her wound, taking in the mark in the mirror. It’s not going to scar as madly as she assumed it would, and really it’s nothing compared to some of the others that she’s gained during her time at the Operative. There’s a particularly nasty one along her spine that came from a bomb blast Ava hadn’t meant to get caught in. Certainly that one prevents her from wearing any open backed dresses without earning quite a few questions in the process.

But this wound should be healed soon and then she'll be back in the field where she belongs. A crash comes from just outside the bathroom door and Ava sighs heavily, closing her eyes for a moment before taping the bandage down in place. Taking her shirt in her hands, Ava opens the door and comes outside to find Gary there in the kitchen, clumsily stacking a case there on the counter. "Don't touch that," Ava scolds, coming over and removing it from his hands before righting it the other way, "Shake this case too much and you never know if it will explode."

It won't. There's only gun pieces inside, but it's enough to make Gary back away with a mumbled apology as he leans against the counter, nervously moving his glasses up his face. Placing the case on the counter once more, Ava brings her shirt around her body before buttoning it up halfway. "So?" Ava prompts as she heads to the studio area where a small couch and chair rests, "What do you have for me that's new?"

Gary is meant to be here to fill Ava in on whatever he's found about Sara. After their conversation in the café three days ago, Ava had texted Gary to see if he could come here to meet her. Seeing as he travels quite a lot for his job, Gary had been only an hour drive away and had made it in just this evening. "Nothing of real significance," Gary explains as Ava bites back a sigh, "There was something I found though, some mention of her and a crew whose ship went down somewhere off the coast of an island."

At least it's something that they didn't have last time. While Gary sits in the chair, Ava takes the tablet that he handed over to her and scrolls through the file that he's compiled. "Lian Yu?" Ava reads out, looking to Gary curiously, "Where the hell is that?" Gary motions for her to keep reading and Ava does. Of course she's aware of the translation, the fact that the island name means Purgatory. Apparently it's located somewhere off the coast of China, a remote place that Ava's never once heard of.

Humming to herself, Ava skims the report that came in of the sunken ship that went down, belonging to a scientist by the name Anthony Ivo. Gary's research on the man does not paint a very kind picture of the man, someone who was obsessed with discovering some kind of chemical formula he believed was found on the island. "You think she worked for this man?" Ava asks, holding up the tablet with the image of Ivo, "The same woman who now works to take down these kind of people?"

"The reported sighting of her corresponded to the ship's docking in a port of a nearby island," Gary explains and Ava frowns, scrolling to a rather blurry photo of a young looking blonde woman in a baseball cap, "I'm not sure if she was working for him or had been taken by him, but there are reports from Star City where her mother was circulating that very photo around as she searched for Sara."

Ava will admit that even though the photo is blurred, there is a likeness to Sara in this woman. It's too hard to tell without a full profile of her face, but there is a similarity that would be enough to claim this woman is Sara. "This was before the Canary surfaced in Interpol reports," Ava muses, checking the dates there that the photo appeared and the boat sank, "I suppose this is a good starting point." It's better than nothing, that's for sure. Placing the tablet to the side, Ava looks across to Gary and sighs quietly, "No more digging into this Gary. Things are getting a bit more troublesome than I expected with the League."

Even Gary looking into Sara could put him in danger. Ava understands that he is careful in everything he does, same as her. But the difference here is that Ava signed on for the danger and Gary is just an analyst with severe anxiety and a fear of blood of any kind. "That brings me to a question I have for you," Ava leans back in the couch cushions, watching Gary's every move carefully, "Did you ever say anything to someone about me being in Russia, or about me in

general?"

Instantly Gary's eyes go wide and his mouth opens slightly. "No of course not," he rushes out as Ava purses her lips, "Nobody know that I talk to you and I never use anything other than the computer you gave me to do this on. You made it very clear that my life would be in danger if I mentioned a single word about this to someone."

Yes, Ava did do that, but she also knows that Gary has the tendency to run his mouth on accident. However, she doesn't believe that he is the one that called in the League request. That's not something Gary would even know how to do. Ava's not even sure how someone does that. But Henry would know. Without a doubt this had to have been him who was seeking protection for her, something that makes Ava's blood burn with anger towards her mentor. It appears that all that talk of trusting her was in fact just lies.

With a quiet sigh, Ava brings her fingers to the bridge of her nose, rubbing the bone there gently to ease the oncoming migraine. "Well, then I suppose when I'm recovered here I'm heading to speak to someone in London," Ava thinks aloud, dropping her hand down and looking up to see Gary is looking at her nervously, "What Gary?" For a moment all that comes from Gary is a series of stuttered sounds, his eyes glued to the floor and his hands winding together. "What it is?" Ava prompts again, not having much patience.

"What is it about her that you're interested in?" Gary rushes out the question as Ava leans backwards, really not wanting to get into this, "From what you've said before, you've tangled with League members in the past. So why does this one assassin matter so much?" Ava has mentioned that. Though everything she tells Gary is completely redacted, just details rather than city names and individuals she's targeted, and never enough information for him to tie a news report to her.

"I ask because, this started after Russia, after you," Gary pauses here and Ava looks to the side, her cheeks heating against her will. Gary falls silent and Ava closes her eyes, regret swelling in her because she never should have told Gary about the woman in the bar in Russia. "No," Gary breathes out, sounding almost excited as his voice drops to a hushed whisper, "You're sleeping with the enemy."

This is not how Ava saw the evening going. But honestly at this point, there's no sense in denying it. Clearly Gary has pieced things together and if Ava lies it's just going to make her seem even more guilty. Best thing to do is to admit it. "Yes, like a damn cliché," Ava turns her attention back to Gary, taking in his wide grin and rolling her eyes, "She gets under my skin like nobody else has before, and sex was a convenient outlet at the time but we are done now. She's far too dangerous and somehow she knows things she shouldn't."

Gary is still smiling at her and Ava levels him with a glare, her lips pulling into a frown even as Gary's smile melts away. "Well seeing as I'm now off the case," Gary begins and Ava rolls her eyes, always hating it when Gary tries to apply those terms to what she asks him to do, "I should mention that Star City is only an hour and a half drive from here. There might be something you can find there, about her background."

There undoubtedly is something there, the question is how involved in this Ava wants to get. She knows of course that Sara's family lives in the city. Dinah Lance moved to Central City about a year after Sara supposedly died, her marriage crumbling in the process. Quentin Lance is a detective there in the city and Ava's been following his name through reports here and there when she has time. And then Laurel Lance, Sara's older sister works at a legal aid office just outside the city.

When Ava had learned that Sara's family was alive and well, still thinking that she's dead, her

immediate question was why Sara's never once returned to them. For Ava, there no family waiting at home, no relatives pining for her. But if there were, nothing would stop her from at least letting them know that she's well. There's something there that Ava wants to dig into, but she's not going to let her curiosity get the best of her. This is Sara's business.

However, Ava might do just a bit of prying in the city to learn a bit more on the family. Now that she knows Sara has information on her, it won't hurt for Ava to gather intel on Sara, as a from of security. "I might," Ava hums, resting her head back against the couch and looking to the ceiling, "I've got two more weeks left here, plenty of time to look into that before going back to London."

London, England —16:07

With long strides, Ava walks through the narrow hallways of the MI6 building basement, her shoes clicking over the neatly polished floors. This is where Henry is located here when he's in country, a small office in the basement that houses rows and stacks of files. It's rare that he's here in London rather than his normal office building in Budapest. However he flew back here to handle meetings in house and Ava had timed her arrival in the country alongside his so she has time for this confrontation.

Her time off has come to an end, and once Ava's cleared for another job, she's supposed to be shipping off to Galway for a surveillance and acquisition operation. It's been a long two weeks sitting around doing nothing, and Ava's more than ready to get back to work. The most that she moved around was when she traveled to Star City to tail Sara's family for a bit. It hadn't been easy to follow Quentin, so Laurel was the one Ava had chosen to look into when she was in town.

The office building Laurel works in was a quiet one, and Ava had wore a nice suit that day as she went to poke around a bit, pretending to be a potential job candidate. While she never made contact with Laurel, she was able to overhear parts of her conversation and from the pieces Ava heard, Laurel is nothing like her sister. Laurel is calmer and quieter, easily more reserved and a quick peek into her past cases showed that she is organized and neat. So apparently Sara is unique in the family with regard to her reckless behavior, something that hadn't surprised Ava seeing as Sara seems to fit every stereotype of the youngest child.

Though the trip to the city had actually been quite revealing. Of the family, Dinah has never stopped looking, and Ava found more than a few online blog posts that Dinah has created over the year. Ava had stopped in the cemetery to view the grave stone that sat there and marked the night that Sara was meant to have died. It was there she found a neatly kept stone and flowers that appeared to be fresh. Clearly Sara is still very loved by her family, and it had only made Ava question Sara's hiding even more.

If Ava had a bit more self-control, she would leave this alone. But Sara's never once showed a modicum of restraint when it comes to meddling in Ava's business, so Ava may as well repay the favor on the off chance Sara gets any ideas about really attempting to ruin things. Ava always makes sure to keep a fail-safe, a trigger clause to be released should something happen to her at the hands of someone else. As it stands she has one for the Operative. It would be nice if Ava could trust the organization she works for, but she doesn't, not entirely.

Turning the final hallway, Ava comes upon Henry's office door and this time she doesn't even bother knocking, she just comes into the room and says Henry's name. "Ava," Henry looks up from a docket resting in front of him, pale eyes staring in her direction, his glasses abandoned on the desk, "I was under the impression that you would be in later tomorrow evening. You're back early."

Henry appears surprised to see her, a good thing because Ava has every intention of using that to her advantage. “Tell me you didn’t see a League assassin to protect me in Russia,” Ava demands, stepping inside and closing the door behind her. As Henry’s smile fades to a frown, Ava has her answer. “Henry,” Ava breathes out, still not wanting to believe it, “We do not work with or alongside the League. That is what you have told me from the beginning, to stay out of their way. So why would you do this.”

Waving the the chair in front of his desk, Henry leans backwards, the frown never once leaving his face. Hesitating for a moment, Ava comes forwards slowly and slides into the brown leather seat. “They were to never know that you were part of our organization,” Henry replies and Ava only scoffs because clearly he underestimated the League, “Unless of course they were able to find out that information somehow?”

Sara had more than just figured out that information. “It was the Canary that came for me,” Ava replies, watching as understanding passes over Henry’s features, “Before then, him and I had already had minor clashes in the field as I once told you. But now he’s seen my face and he knows who I am.” Now Henry leans further back, his hands folded on his chest and his head tipped back to the headrest of his seat.

Ava’s not sure how Henry just never saw something like this coming. A simple facial recognition scan of her photo and the League would surely realize there was something off about Ava’s backstory. Henry may have given them an alias that Ava uses, but he still actively placed her in danger, something that makes Ava stomach turn. “I can’t say this is something I could have anticipated,” Henry reveals and Ava purses her lips, not buying that, “I was thorough in crafting your background.”

Not thorough enough it seems. “You never should have sent someone in after me, least of all someone that works for a group of known assassins,” Ava continues, her voice rising slightly as the anger wells in her chest, “What happened to trusting my actions Henry?” Nothing about this or Henry’s current silence is settling well with Ava. She’s quite lucky that Sara is the one that came for her that day and not another League member that might have gone off the books and just killed her upon learning her real identity.

“You are one of our best, and I do of course trust your judgment. But your infamy in the field, it puts you at quite a bit of risk,” Henry explains and Ava leans back, knowing that this is a series of excuses, “Russia is aware of the Operative, at least in the upper ranks and we could not risk sending you there alone. The job postponement had nothing to do with the target and everything to do with the political turmoil happening in the city before your arrival there.” Henry pauses and Ava works hard to maintain neutral facial expressions when he sighs, “I did not want to take further risks and those above me approved the League request.”

With a straight face, Ava nods her head and hums silently. But internally she is reeling from this information. Not only had Henry gone behind her back and sent an assassin along with her, but it had been known about and approved by those running the Operative. There’s never been a time where Ava’s really felt at risk in her job from those above her, but this time around she can’t help but be a bit unsettled. “Does this happen often?” Ava inquires, attempting to seem nothing but curious, “Does the Operative often request League assistance on jobs like this?”

Somewhere in all the data and information, Ava should be able to find a trail for this if there is one still. It will take a bit of digging, but she’s grown used to shuffling through the codenames used by the Operative and the League, so there has to be some kind of a paper trail for this request. “We have from time to time asked them to aid us in dangerous situations,” Henry replies, his tone diplomatic, his features giving away nothing, “While our organizations are at odds more often than

not, there are times where we have provided assistance under tricky circumstances.”

While his words do a bit to ease Ava’s nerves that this was a request targeted only at her, she does not like it. “Don’t do this again,” Ava demands, standing from the chair, not wanting to be here in this building any longer, “Not without informing me first, and preferably not at all. I do not need a babysitter in the field, nor do I appreciate having one in Moscow in the first place. I understand the risks of this job and I signed on to do it—alone.”

Henry is the one who drilled it into her—to never trust someone, especially not those closest. Surely he understands his actions here appear to be in direct contradiction with that because he had opted to trust a League member. “I did not mean this to be upsetting to you, and you’re right, I should have said something,” Henry concedes as Ava nears the door, her hand on the knob, “I was simply looking out for you. Your father would never forgive me if I brought you into this only to allow his daughter to die at the hands of the FSB.”

“My father is dead,” Ava states plainly, never liking it when Henry brings him up. It’s never a pleasant reminder for Ava to hear that everything she thought about her father as a child was never really true. He was never a business man, he was a spy, and that was the reason for their frequent moves and his constant absence from the house. While the accident the evening of her parent’s deaths really had been an accident, Ava knows how paranoid her father was about travel. She has no doubt that was the driving factor in what made him rush home that evening when he should have rested after a long flight.

At the desk, Henry is looking her way with a thoughtful expression on his face, his lips pursed and his hands still folded. “I understand that you try to look out for me because of him, but I am telling you that I can take care of myself,” Ava continues on, opening the door and stepping halfway out, “No more assassins, next time you’re worried about safety, I’ll go with a partner.” Henry raises his brows at that and Ava sighs because they both know she doesn’t exactly work well with others. “No more,” Ava repeats again as Henry nods, “I’ll contact you when I’m at the location.”

With that, Ava slips from the room and closes the door behind her. For a moment, Ava pauses there, her hand still on the knob, her eyes trained to the ceiling. Henry is her mentor and Ava does not want to believe that he had ill-intentions in doing something like this but it is so easy for her mind to slip to that. He had been blinded by the League, so he of all people knows that they cannot be trusted.

While he did make an official request and that is far different than digging into files the way he did before the League found out, it’s still him trusting an organization that the Operative is not working with. No matter the reasoning here, Ava does not like it at all, and she can’t seem to kick that sinking feeling in her stomach and the nerves rolling through her body. Shaking her arms out, Ava takes in a deep breath before opening her eyes and heading to the elevator. A few weeks on the job is what she needs to clear her mind and get her thoughts in order. After that, Ava’s doing a deep dive on the Operative.

Chapter End Notes

As always thank you to those reading along and commenting, I always love reading what you think as well as general reactions to the plot and characters. I’ve said this

before but should there be something you want to see/see more of, let me know
because I do add things in as I go and sometimes other's ideas are a wonderful spark to
add something new in. So just let me know!

Part Four

Chapter Summary

When Sara comes to Ava with a more than surprising request, Ava does maybe a little more digging into a certain topic than she should. But it answers a question that she had about Sara, and might have brought on a few more. Just when Ava thinks that maybe Sara might be calming down and laying off on doing her best to irritate Ava at all times, Sara goes and gets in her way once more.

Chapter Notes

So here we are with part four! I know so far this has been just Sara and Ava kind of dancing around each other, but it does get there, just slowly. And there's moment pocketed here and there, coming up next chapter I think. It's a very push and pull dynamic for a while but I love morally grey characters who say one thing and mean another so, that's what I was going for here.

As for warnings in this chapter, same as the others though this one is more action based than that last so, there's a bit more mentions of general violence and death. I've just now realized that I never said it before. But this is meant to follow Sara's canon story, though obviously not her canon characterization.

But yes, I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Galway, Ireland — 21:04

Taking in a long inhale before letting it out, Ava shifts her gaze away from the elevator doors and to the floor count above her, slowly ticking up a few numbers each second. There's really no rush to get to the top, Ava already knows what she's going to find here. After two weeks of peace and quiet on the job, Sara has arrived and Ava has no doubt that she is going to find her very dead target upstairs when Ava needs him alive.

The elevator chimes softly as it continues up and Ava leans against the back mirror, checking her pockets for weapons on the off chance Sara decides to pull something. They've stopped trying to kill each other at this point, but really Ava never knows quite what to expect from Sara so she'd rather be prepared. Ava's gun rests at her hip and there are two knives tucked soundly in the inside pockets of her coat.

This time around, Ava at least knew to expect that Sara was going to interfere in her business at some point. Ava's been here for two weeks, carefully keeping her eye on the business man Liam Byrne. There's the suspicion that he has found a trail to the Operative, something that he might be aware of but might have also stumbled into on accident. Ava's here to determine which of those is true. That means placing herself in close proximity to the office where he works as well as tapping all of his devices so she can mirror what he's doing on her screens.

It was easy work and if Liam really is doing all of this intentionally, then Ava's sure he should be taking better precautions. Rather than working in the office that he runs, Ava has instead been working across the hall where she can keep a close eye on everyone who has been coming and going. Just yesterday Ava had seen Sara slip inside the building, a wink thrown her way as Ava attempted to catch Sara before she entered the office but it was pointless. Sara had planned some kind of meeting with Liam, presumably pretending to be an investor of some kind.

And now Sara's beat Ava to the man, an email alert that came through Ava's email she set up at the banking firm across the hall. Not that Ava was surprised, in fact she had been waiting for the message to come through, sure that Sara was not in fact going to keep her hands off of Ava's target. Now here Ava is, only hours after having left the building, presumably arriving to a rather dead business man in his office. Still, this should be the time that she needs to take the intel from the main computer and get out. It's not ideal, but it's better than nothing.

The elevator doors open and Ava draws her gun, just in case. The office should be empty seeing as everyone is on break today, but there's always a few employees that choose to linger around. Turning the corner, Ava sighs quietly as she looks through the glass doors that push into the office space. There by the cherry wood front desk are two guards, one with a note of paper stuck to his chest with a nice crested dagger. Bending down, Ava checks the pulse of each guard to find that they are in fact dead.

There's blood on the spotless linoleum floor and Ava clicks her tongue quietly when she glances down to find that she's stepped in a section of it. After repositioning her feet to the side, Ava tugs the dagger from the man's chest and brings the paper with it. Flecks of blood are splattered on the note, but the neat looping handwriting is still legible enough to read through the stains. "Follow the trail," it reads, a little arrow pointed to the right side of the desk.

Now back on her feet and straightened out, Ava steps to the side and finds a small trail of blood that tracks along the floor and carpet. This is clearly all a little game to Sara, and if Ava didn't have to take that information from the office computer, she would just leave and avoid giving her the satisfaction. But Ava has no choice in the matter so she sighs before keeping her gun in front of her as she follows the line of blood droplets laid here and there. The only sound inside the room are the noises her feet make as she walks, an unsettling kind of quiet having descended on the office space.

Every chair in the room is empty as Ava passes by, every cubicle abandoned for the break from work. Ava doesn't like moving through spaces like this, it makes it far harder to see if someone is tucked away behind a little wall. Moving slowly, Ava follows the trail to the back hallway where a closed office door rests, small opaque windows set on either side. Once at the door, Ava takes in a deep breath before placing her hand on the knob and forcing it open.

Liam sits at the desk with a cut over his eye, blood dripping down his nose and cheek and staining his right eye red. There's ducttape over his mouth as well as binding his hands to the chair, and Ava's not surprised when she turns to find Sara looking out the window. "You're late," Sara muses, turning around, her knife in hand where she's twirling it between her fingers, "Tell me how it took you an hour to get here."

"I'm not late for anything," Ava scoffs, lowering her weapon and closing the door behind her as Sara approaches Liam. His eyes widen as she gets closer and he tries to call out but it's pointless; Sara's done a damn good job at silencing him. "I assumed you would have killed him by now," Ava nods to Liam who stares at her in confusion, clearly just now understanding that Ava is not in fact here to help him, "What did you want an audience for this kill or something?"

At this point, it wouldn't surprise Ava. If she were to want to stop Sara from killing Liam, her

options would be to either shoot Sara where she stands, or to risk a fight in yet another contained space. Neither of those options are ideal, but at least Ava's here in office where she can get what she needs. She just needs Sara to hold off killing him so she can draw the passwords out of him. "No I just wanted you to see that I beat you to him," Sara replies, shoving her knife blade down into the table as Liam yelps and stares at the stuck blade, "I win."

Choosing not to reply to that, Ava remains there with a blank expression, staring Sara down as Sara's lips curl in a smile. "But also I needed something from you," Sara continues on, tossing something in Ava's direction. When Ava reaches out to catch it with her hand, she finds a data drive there, small and compact and the right size to hold nearly everything contained on the office computer. "I didn't know what you needed, so I took it all," Sara speaks as Ava glances to her, "Deleted the rest so, treat that backup with care."

This is the first time that Ava's genuinely been confused by something Sara's done. They are not on the same team and Ava was sent here to look into someone investigating the Operative. Presumably the League has an interest here as well, which means that there could be something about the organization on this very file in Ava's hand. "Did you put a virus on this?" Ava questions as Sara leans against the table with her head tilted, "Is this going to wipe everything on my computer or mirror it so you can see what I'm doing?"

"How many times do I have to tell you that I do not do spy things, I kill things," Sara shakes her head, her tone sounding nearly amused, "There's no virus on there, though I'm sure you're going to inspect it before you trust me." That is exactly what Ava is going to be doing, so she just lifts her shoulder in a shrug, still not sure what to make of Sara actively helping her right now. "He's a terrible man so, I wanted him to see you with that. Aren't you terrible?" Sara turns to Liam who tries to speak, his words muffled and loud and incomprehensible, "Well just take my word for it."

Slipping the data drive in her inside coat pocket where it's safe, Ava gestures to the office and then Liam. "So are you going to tell me what all this smoke and mirrors is about or am I supposed to guess what you want from me?" Ava questions as she tucks her gun away, "You're here to kill him, so what is it that I can do here that you can't?"

The League has members that perform the same kind of roles as Ava does. Or at least Ava thinks that they do. Really the only thing that sets them apart is that the League tends to murder those when they're hired and the Operative only murders if there is no other choice. Surely there is someone on Sara's side of this that she could have asked for help. "He's built this company on the back of the pain of others, investments from countries that need help in times of crisis, only to rip their funding out from under them and take their money," Sara lifts her shoulder in a shrug, "Even after he's dead, this place continues. Everything is there, stock values, insider information, all the dirty secrets and more. I want you to shut this place down. Ruin them."

"I'm a spy, what makes you think this is something I can do?" Ava retorts, watching as Sara raises a single brow, "This isn't exactly my job description, burning companies to the ground like you're asking me to."

"Isn't it?" Sara fires back and Ava purses her lips, "Tibet, two years ago, there was an arms dealer running a multimillion dollar business outside Lhasa. Overnight everything crashed, stocks dropped, suppliers took massive hits, company information hit the local news before it went international three days later. A week after that, the company was in shambles and the arms dealer was found dead by a rival dealer." Sara pauses and Ava looks to the side of the room, completely silent when Sara continues on, "Tell me it wasn't you and I'll drop this."

Ava can't do that, it was her. Henry had given her explicit instructions not to just take the

information from the building but to completely burn the place to the ground. He provided her with all of the necessary resources to make sure that the company was in shambles in a days time. "Fine," Ava sighs in frustration, tapping her pocket, "But it's going to take time, at least the rest of my stay here. Things were different in Tibet, I have to be more careful around here."

The fact that Ava was actively in the office building this time around is going to complicate things. But she's here another week and a half so it should be easy enough to get done in that time. All it'll take is a carefully worded wire to Henry to let him know what it is she's about to do. He'll approve of it without a doubt, and after all, Ava still has free reign to do whatever she sees fit in the field. "Still," Ava looks to Sara, feeling conflicted, "Why me, you could do this, send this into the right outlets and it's done."

"I could but, you'll do it faster and my line of work doesn't require the contacts that yours does. You're more connected in this area, plain and simply," Sara flips the knife in her hand before stepping behind the chair as Liam lets out another muffled cry, "That and consider this the last act of me finally holding up my end of the deal." Confused, Ava looks back to Sara with narrowed eyes, taking in Sara's grin, "You were out two weeks, now we're even. Next time around I probably won't be so nice when I get here first."

Ava will admit to not really understanding why Sara has taken personal interest in this company. Even if there is League information in these files, that doesn't explain why she's hellbent on seeing this place in shambles. But Ava has what she came here for, so she's not going to question it. "Deal," Ava nods her head before gesturing to Liam, "You're still going to kill him though right, we can't let him go now."

With a smile, Sara reaches behind her back before placing a gun there on the desk top, something that Liam's wide eyes flicker to. "Taking a page from your book on this one," Sara says, holding up a folded note that she removes from her pocket, "Between the note, the missing data, and the self-inflicted gunshot wound, I think that's enough for the authorities to think that this was all his doing."

"And the guards outside?" Ava asks pointedly, wondering if Sara just conveniently forgot the minor bloodbath out there.

"League cleanup arriving here in about fifteen minutes to take care of it," Sara replies, already putting on a pair of gloves and polishing the gun with a cloth. Ava raises her brows in surprise because she hadn't known there was a clean up crew. The Operative has them, but they're only used in particularly bloody and high-profile jobs. "Speaking of which," Sara glances up, nodding to the door, "You should get out of here if you like breathing. They might be the removal team but they're armed and won't hesitate to kill witnesses."

Ava is really not sure what the hell to make of the near complete change in Sara this evening. She's almost being helpful, something that Ava's not used to. That and there's been nearly any of that usual flirting that Ava's accustomed to at this point. It makes Ava wonder just what things Liam has been doing to other countries and if one of those might be somehow connected to Sara. "Well," Ava sighs, heading to the door as Sara presses the gun into Liam's taped hand, "Have fun. Watch the news."

Pulling the office door shut behind her, Ava makes her way back to the front of the office. Right along the linoleum floor is a small half print where she had walked after stepping in blood. Using her heel, Ava scuffs through it to remove any traces that she was here before walking to the stair well, figuring it a safer way out if Sara's right about the League being on the way. With the data drive in her hand, Ava takes a look at it, already eager to get home and figure out what was so

important that Sara would risk working with Ava in this.

Zadar, Croatia — 18:58

Humming quietly to herself, Ava flips through the digital pages of the file she's going through and keeps an eye on the computer in front of her. As it turns out, Ava needed more time and her own space to bring down Liam's company, and that meant leaving Galway to do so. The best place for her to go was somewhere that not even the Operative or Sara could track her to if they tried. Currently Ava's in her storage bunker just outside of Zadar, about fifteen minutes from the safe house that she keeps here in country.

This space certainly isn't very big, only large enough for a desk to be crammed inside as well as a few rows of filing cabinets. The entire place is fitted underground, only able to be located via an abandoned transportation system. Ava's rigged the outside with cameras and motion sensors should someone happen to come across the place. There's a failsafe detonation that would go off if she received the alert that someone has attempted to break in, something Ava nearly had to use before the wayward group of men had wandered off.

Ava went to a lot of efforts to make this place impenetrable, though she likes to have backup reassurance on the off chance someone manages to get through. This is where she keeps her digital copies of any information she saves for herself. The computer resting on the desk is a rather old one, but Ava's found that it's the most effective and doing her work without a trace. Though this does mean it takes a bit longer not only due to the age of the computer and processor, but also because of the internet that barely filters down here.

True to her word, Ava is double checking the claims that Sara made in Galway about Liam to see if he really is funneling money from vulnerable people and giving it straight back to their oppressors. So far, of the thirteen open clients that Liam had, Ava's found instances of truth in Sara's words in about five of the cases. From providing funds to dictators to giving weapons to dangerous insurgents that are killing civilians, Liam didn't seem to care what it was he was doing as long as it was bringing money and loyalty into the company.

This is not what Ava expected to find when she was digging into him, and nearly all of this information had been so buried in his files that if Ava hadn't known what to look for, she likely wouldn't have found it accidentally. Which raises again the question of how Sara knew it was here. There's no way the League was looking into all of this seeing as there's evidence here that the League was well aware that this little operation was in existence. As best as Ava can tell, Liam made himself the League's target after he got a little too greedy and gunned for one of the economic allies in the Philippines.

It's dangerous information that Ava's holding in her hands now, the kind that can get her killed. The League never cared for Operative spies being in their business, and by asking Ava to demolish the company, Sara had brought Ava into the fold of this without warning. Though honestly, Ava wonders if Sara even is aware just how tangled with the League Liam's company really was. As best as she can gather from this, he was one of their benefactors as well, clearly one they could afford to cut ties from permanently.

Leaning back in her chair, Ava places her feet on the desk and glances to the uploading files there on the computer. She's currently in the process of sending them out to her contacts that have the means and desires to take down a company like this. It's a mass email, sent out anonymously to about seven different informants Ava keeps around the world. This should hopefully do the trick in terms of crippling the company, though Ava will be keeping close watch on it for the next four

days she's in town.

After that, Ava is moving on to Paris and whatever progress was made will just have to be the best she can do until she has time to come here again and finish what she started. The status says that there are about five minutes left, something that Ava knows is really closer to fifteen with this computer. Above her the lights flicker slightly, the result of a raging storm barreling on outside. Even if the power does go out though, Ava has a backup generator tucked inside the tiny closet to her left.

Turning her attention back to the tablet in her lap, Ava brings the bottle of beer to her lips and scrolls through to the next report she located in Liam's files. This one appears to be outline a mysterious slaughter that happened in a small town located in Malaysia. Something in the reports seems strange though, and Ava scrolls down to find the report of the local authorities. But there is nothing here, not even a single detail connected.

With a frustrated sigh Ava locates the date before swapping to an internet browser on the tablet and looking up the details. While the computer is running, she can't use it to see if any foreign offices contained details of this attack, so Ava's going to have to deduce things from new reports alone. It pulls up there, an attack about four years ago where eighteen were found dead in a burned building, each with strange marks on their bodies.

There's no photos attached here, but there were on the original report. Flipping back to that, Ava finds them there at the bottom and brings the image up on the screen. It's a gory scene, charred bodies there on the ground, some of them still completely intact and relatively untouched by the flames. Of the bodies that weren't destroyed in the fires, Ava can see blisters and rashes covering each of them. Never has Ava seen injuries like this from a chemical that she's aware of, so this might be a question for Dmitriy. He has a rather sensitive stomach for a criminal though, so Ava may have to resort to simply describing the wounds on the bodies.

The troubling thing in these images is that some of the bodies are laid near weapons that match the wounds on other victims. Ava's not sure that someone else was responsible for the slaughter, it almost seems as if everyone in the building did this themselves. It's strange, and Ava never likes it when she encounters something she can't figure out. Once more switching to the report of the local news, Ava reads the short description there.

Apparently there had been reported sightings of other individuals in the area and someone nearby claims they saw bodies being taken inside over the course of three weeks, all before the fire burned the place down. There's not a single note of a victim's name, and not a single mention of authority presence at the scene. Nothing about this is normal, and Ava hums quietly to herself. This has the League written all over it. From the rumors Ava's heard, the League has several local governments and police authorities deep in their pockets, and that's the only reason Ava can believe that no investigation was performed here.

Absolutely none of this explains Sara's interest though. This was about two months before the name Canary ever began circulating through whispers and information drop offs. In everything Ava has scoured in relation to Sara, she wasn't yet a full member of the League at the time of this massacre. But undoubtedly this has to be the reason that Sara asked her to bring the place down, Ava's yet to find such a strange connection in any of the other reports and cases. It's certainly worth bringing up the next time Sara takes it upon herself to bother Ava.

The computer chimes merrily and Ava glances up to see that her download is complete. "And gotcha," Ava hums, removing her feet from the desk before sliding closer in the chair and carefully typing out her message to the informants. Surely they won't enjoy having mass emails sent out

where their own anonymous servers are going to be exposed but that's hardly any of Ava's business. "Well friends, do you thing," Ava sighs as she presses send, leaning back once more and closing her eyes.

Now there's nothing else Ava can do outside of coming back here in a few days time to see if there's been any kind of response or progress. Everything is now saved and logged here on the computer for safe keeping with Ava's other files. The storm outside is preventing her from going home however, so it appears that Ava may be stuck here for a bit. Shifting to get comfortable in the chair, Ava kicks her feet up on the desk and shuffles down, drawing her arms up around her body and resting her chin down on her chest.

Getting a little bit of rest won't hurt until the storm passes. Ava's got a lot to do in the city to prep for the Paris job and Henry has once more arranged military transport for her to the country so she can bring whatever guns and toys she sees fit. This time around it's going to be a tricky job, likely one that is going to end in termination so Ava's already packed her explosives bag to go as well. Closing her eyes, Ava settles in and takes in a long breath before letting it out and trying to sleep.

It might be seconds later or it might be hours later, but the next thing Ava's aware of is her phone ringing there on the desk. Huffing out a quiet and impatient sigh, Ava forces her eyes open and blearily takes in the bright room and her phone that's buzzing closer to the edge. "Hello," Ava picks up, trying her best to muffle her yawn, "Line is secure, go when you're ready."

"For you I'm always ready," a low and teasing voice says on the other end and suddenly Ava's a lot more awake and a lot more annoyed, *"Why don't you tell me when?"*

"Sara, this is my private line," Ava sighs, pressing her fingers to her nose, "Do you have any idea how hard it is to swap over numbers once they've been found." From the chuckle on the other end of the phone Ava is going to guess that Sara has every idea how hard it is. "How did you manage to get this?" Ava demands, but she realizes about four words into that question that she knows exactly how Sara got this line, "Shit, the airport."

When Ava was flying out, she had come across Sara in the airport. They hadn't spent much time together there, though Ava should have known that Sara had some ulterior motive for being friendly that day. Ava's going to have to add pickpocket to Sara's list of apparent skills. *"Sorry, couldn't help it,"* Sara replies on the other end, sounding much to pleased with herself, *"I needed a way reliable way to contact you to check in on the lovely Liam's company."*

Ava knows for a fact that they went over this in the office and then again at the airport. "I told you to watch the news," Ava sighs as she looks to the ceiling, already thinking of all the people she's going to have to contact about a new number, "Are you really so impatient that you couldn't make it five days. I said that it was going to take some time."

"Well, has it taken time?" Sara speaks, and Ava swears that she hears a hint of nerves there in Sara's tone. Having conversations over the phone makes it so much harder for Ava to really discern what's happening with people's expressions and attitudes. With Sara it's even harder because Ava's really only used to Sara either teasing her, trying to kill her, or just being pissed at her in general.

Not able to help herself, Ava mutters under her breath while pulling the number Sara's called from and running a trace. It's the one thing her computer can reliably do down here, and the countdown begins as Ava leans back in her chair. "It's been sent out, all the information I found about what you mentioned," Ava explains, her eyes rapidly scanning the narrowing location window on the screen. Buying time to run the trace, Ava fills Sara in on the broad strokes of what is going to happen next.

First the company stocks are going to tank after their allies get wind of this through Ava's informants, then the company is going to devolve into a chaotic scramble to attempt damage control, then reports will hit the local news. Once that happens it's only a matter of time before company enemies file in and pick off what's left piece by piece. "It's all just a matter of knowing who to send things too," Ava concludes with a sigh, "Compiling information is easy, and then you just have to sit back and let them do the rest." The computer pings quietly and Ava hums, "You know I meant to ask, how's the weather there in Sicily?"

"Sunny and beautiful," Sara replies, clearly not even a little bit fazed that Ava knows her location, *"And of course killing politicians always makes me feel good about myself so I'm having a wonderful time here."* There's a pause and Ava can hear muffled sounds in the background, almost as if Sara's covering the phone receiver with her hand. *"Though I have to admit,"* Sara's voice comes back, the noise gone now, *"I did look for you after the airport, seems like you've once more dropped off the face of the planet; like you found yourself a nice little hole to hide out in."*

Snorting, Ava brings the phone out in front of her before putting Sara on speaker. The file is still there on her tablet, still staring back at her with the details of those burned bodies with the strange markings. This is as good a time as any to bring it up. "So what was your personal interest in this, and don't tell me you don't have one," Ava prompts, listening as Sara makes a noncommittal sound on the other line, "I found something strange in the middle of all the drug lords and arms dealers—what happened in Malaysia?"

"Nothing you should dig into if you want to live," Sara's response is rapid and hardened, and lacking any of it's usual underlaying banter. This time around, Sara means that and Ava shifts in her chair, propping the tablet on the table. *"I'm not messing around with this Ava, people have tried looking into that fire and nothing good came from it,"* Sara continues, sounding angry, *"It's connected to the local gang leader there, that's all you need to know."*

Ava had seen something about that, and she uses the computer to pull up information so she can see the two incidents side by side. "The one with the club there in Johor Bahru," Ava reads off the screen, "A local gang leader was involved in several drug related deaths, though nobody could identify what the substance was that led to the overdoses."

"Ava, stop digging," Sara's tone is filled with warning, something that instantly gives Ava pause, *"They're powerful—powerful enough to defy the League and get away with it. It's so much more than just a single drug lord. You have to stop. Delete all of those files and move on to the next job."*

That's not going to happen. Ava's job is information. There are countless connected reports here to this gang leader, enough that Ava thinks she could put a sizable dent in the operation. "And what if I told you I could bring them down?" Ava proposes, scanning to make sure that she has the basic information she needs there, "Gang leader connected to a local scientist here—I've got a few files here on him. Lucky that Liam was fairly paranoid, for good reason I might add."

Nothing here is painting a very pretty picture. When Ava clicks the final file, images are thrown all over her screen. Burned buildings, trashed cars, sunken ships, mutilated bodies that mimic those in the fire. It's more than enough to cause a dent in operations. It might even be enough to put them under. And it's nothing but horrifying, the lowest that humanity has reached through the torture of others in pursuit of something Ava can't identify from photos alone. "If I can sink them enough to make them scramble," Ava begins, listening to the sound of silence on the other end of the line, "Would the League move in and finish them off?"

Proposing this to Sara is dangerous, but Ava's never okay with this kind of community destruction

that appears to be happening at the hands of these people—whoever they are. They're all connected but the question is how. Ava gets the feeling that Sara has the answer. On the other end of the line, Ava hears Sara's muttered swear and then the sound of something rustling before a door slams. *"You can do that?"* Sara asks, her tone hushed now, as if she's hiding somewhere, *"With the information pulled from Liam, you can take them down?"*

"I can maybe cripple them at best, though this could take longer, I've got limited contacts in Malaysia seeing as I'm rarely there," Ava replies, already beginning another data transfer before picking up the phone and bringing it to her face once more. On the other end, Ava can hear Sara's breathing and what sounds like Sara's fingers typing a message onto the screen. "But I want to know something," Ava prompts, not about to help Sara without knowing what she's doing, "What's there that needs to be taken down? What's the common denominator here?"

Silence falls and the tapping sounds cease completely. For several very long beats, the silence lapses on. Then Ava hears the rush of Sara's exhale against the receiver, the loud noise filling the small space Ava is in. *"You've looked into me, and don't even pretend you haven't because I know you have,"* Sara begins, and Ava wasn't really going to deny it in the first place, so she hums, *"I've done the same for you but, Ava Sharpe has been all but purged from public records. Nothing but a news report when you were eight about winning some stupid regional spelling bee in France."*

Grumbling quietly at the dig, Ava rests her elbows on the desk, waiting for Sara's explanation. *"But my records, they were harder to purge from the news, so I'm sure you know about the Gambit sinking,"* Sara speaks and Ava hums her ascent, *"After that, I was involved with a man called Anthony Ivo and his crew."*

"I know," Ava says, listening as Sara makes a sound of surprised on the other end of the line, "You became a ghost after the Gambit, but there was a picture of you that surfaced in a city where the Amazo was docked shortly before it sunk off the island of Lian Yu. Didn't take much to put two and two together there."

On the other end, Ava frowns because she thinks that she hears the sound of a shaky inhale before Sara is clearing her throat. *"Right, well he was a terrible man interested in terrible things, mainly in this drug called Mirakuru. Think of it as a super human drug, something that makes the user impossibly strong,"* Sara explains as Ava drags up the photos of the nightclub overdoses, taking in the needle marks present in each of their arms, *"This group in Malaysia, they're trying to replicate the serum, but they're failing and it's killing people. Liam's company was funding them and the local authorities."*

That explains the mystery of the lack of investigation. Ava had assumed the League was involved but clearly she had been wrong about that assumption. "And the League wants them gone too?" Ava asks, pulling up records from the Operative and scouring them for any mentions of this group in Malaysia. Sure enough, there is a mention there buried in something Henry sent her a while ago. It's barely there, but it's the name of the gang leader. "Seems my people want them gone too," Ava muses, leaning back in her chair and considering this, "Okay."

"Okay?" Sara repeats, sounding genuinely surprised for the first time since Ava's met her, *"Just like that? No arguments or complains or lectures?"*

"I could always say no if you'd prefer that instead," Ava taunts, hearing the sound of Sara's scoff on the other end of the line, "I'll just tell my people I came across this on the Galway job, they won't care." They really won't, and Ava's done things like this before, discovered another target while taking down someone else. And if Ava can take out an Operative enemy from a distance, surely the higher ups will be all for that. "I have to run it by my handler first but—" Ava lifts her

shoulder in a shrug before swapping the phone to her other ear, “He’ll back me in this.”

Sara remains silent, and Ava can tell that somehow this is a rather touchy subject for Sara. It’s almost a little unsettling, the rapid change in Sara’s personality and demeanor. Ava doesn’t like it; she prefers the bickering over this terse silence. These jobs come with trauma, but it seems as if Sara’s might have come before the job even began. Sara might drive Ava crazy, but Ava doesn’t like men abusing their roles as authority figures and anger stirs in her stomach as her mind slips to what might have happened regarding this drug to make Sara shut down like this. “Give it a few days then check the news,” Ava clears her throat, pulling her phone away from her face, “And don’t bother calling this number back, I’m burning it.”

With that, Ava hangs up, leaving Sara to sort out whatever she had been in the middle of there in Sicily. It does Ava no good to wonder about Sara’s past, it’s none of her business anyways. What Ava knows and has gathered so far has been collected as an insurance policy of sorts in case Sara changes her mind about targeting Ava. There’s really no need for further prying, so Ava shoves her desire for answers down. Looking back to the screen, Ava sighs quietly before setting up the tablet to locate the information for her contacts in Malaysia. It’ll be another hour before the data is ready to go out, but it’s not as if Ava’s got anything else to do. She’s stuck here in the storm and has to make a call to Henry anyways. Hands on her keyboard, Ava sets to work drafting an email for the second time this evening.

Paris, France — 22:10

Staring down the sight of her rifle, Ava watches as three cars approach the warehouse entrance. Ava’s laid out over the top of a neighboring warehouse, pressed against the concrete roof on her stomach. All three cars stop there to park, likely taking in the small crate that Ava has delicately placed a laptop on top of. Ava’s waiting for her target to approach it to see what decision he makes here.

The past two weeks Ava has been collecting information on this particular local arms dealer. He’s a nasty man, involved in so many depraved things that Ava’s skin had crawled just reading his file. But he’s the job so she was forced to immerse herself in his business as a new hire so she had access to scheduling as well as to his secondary office. Anton Allard has been compiling information on his enemies, a mistake that he’s not going to get to make twice. Tonight he has a decision to make, and whatever he chooses is going to determine if he leaves here intact or not.

The computer contains copies of everything Ava has so far and the threat to release it all if he doesn’t stop prying. The second clause there is that he has to stop all affairs he has with a local human trafficking ring. That hadn’t been part of the job, just something Ava threw in there because reading the reports had made her feel physically sick when she was going through his things and his history. He’s really not the kind of man who deserves a second chance at all, however killing someone in Paris is not an easy thing to do, so Ava’s attempting to give him an out.

Anton is here to meet someone who doesn’t exist, someone Ava created as a way to lure him from the office and bring him out in the open where he and his security teams would be vulnerable to her attack. This had taken an extraordinary amount of planning on Ava’s behalf, particularly the meddling she had done to the cars before coming here to set everything up. That had been nothing but a pain in the ass, but it had been necessary.

Yesterday Ava had sat through a rather length telecast call from the Operative outlining League activity which has apparently picked up in the region. The entire time Ava had sat there biting her tongue, choosing not to speak up because left and right, handlers were pulling spies from areas with

known League presence. Sara's a nuisance, but she's not a threat, so Ava had remained quiet. And when she told them that there was no known activity in her area, she hadn't been lying. Ava's not seen Sara since they ran into each other in the airport after Galway. Handlers had asked everyone to report in if they come in contact with danger from an assassin, and Ava had just quietly nodded her head and followed along.

The wind blows softly, pushing Ava's hair around her face as she lines her sights up with the backseat window of the second car she knows belong to Anton. At the front of the car line, the passenger door and both backseat doors open. Three armed men step out, each with their weapons leveled towards the crate as the remaining driver and other two cars stay stationary. Sighing impatiently, Ava traces their movements with her gun, readjusting when a rough gust of wind billows along the roof.

As the men get closer, they wave to each other, their movements cautious and wary. It really is just a crate, no rigged bombs or traps. Ava hadn't had the time for that kind of thing and it would have been pointless seeing as she figured Anton wouldn't just stride up to it without having it checked first. The taller of the three men walks over and picks up the computer before kicking over the crate and then calling back to the driver in the frontmost car.

Dragging the sights back to the vehicle, Ava watches as Anton gets out of the back seat and straightens his striped black blazer before walking in the middle of his four guards and approaches the guard with the computer in hand. Ideally, Ava would have preferred that some men stayed near the cars, but she can work with this. Marksmanship was Ava's best category when she was in training, so she's not worried about having to make multiple rapid shots if necessary.

When Anton comes to stand in front of the computer, the guard holds it as Anton uses a single finger to scroll through the screen. His back is to Ava now, the perfect shot lined up the very second he chooses his fate here. Even over the sound of the wind, Ava can hear Anton's laugh traveling in the open corridor between the warehouses as he takes the computer from his guard and smashes it there on the pavement. "Well," Ava sighs, clicking off her safety, "I gave you a chance."

Before Ava can even check the shot, gunfire erupts in the clearing and the guards all tighten around Anton. In complete and utter disbelief, Ava raises her head away from the gun to find a figure in all black approaching the vehicles with a gun in each hand. "You've got to be kidding me," Ava mutters, lowering down once more and peering through the sights.

There's Sara, her hair tucked away under a black beanie, already dressed in all black, her vest lined with weapons. Swearing under her breath at her now ruined plans, Ava finds Anton there in the clearing and fires off the shot. The bullet pierces through the guard that was covering him, dropping them both to the ground as Ava fires off two more shots and ejects the cartridges that clatter near her as they hit the roof.

Now that all the guards are down near the case, Ava turns her attention to Sara where she's taking on a guard nearly twice her size. The moment Sara kicks him away from her, Ava fires the gun and kicks the bolt back once more, another cartridge falling to the roof. There are three guards left, one that Ava picks off and the last two that are taken down by Sara. Satisfied that everyone is either dead or down for the moment, Ava flicks her safety back on and roughly pushes off the ground.

With quick and rapid actions, Ava breaks down each piece of her rifle before tucking them snugly in the case. There are four cartridges on the ground that Ava counts and pockets before slinging the case over her shoulder and heading for the ladder to the side of the roof. Hustling down, Ava jumps from the last few rungs and rapidly crosses over to where Sara is rifling through Anton's

pockets. “What the fuck was that?” Ava demands when she’s close enough, “Are insane, walking in like that with at least four armed men to a car?”

“Oh please I was fine,” Sara waves her off, straightening up. Something in Sara’s features tighten and before Ava even has time to process, Sara is raising the gun up at her and fires it off. Not even flinching, Ava turns over her shoulder to find that one of the guards had been sitting up, attempting to raise his own gun. He’s dead now though, a bullet hole right in the center of his forehead. “Don’t get all high and mighty with me when you’re the one who came with only a rifle,” Sara retorts, holding Anton’s phone in her other hand.

With her hand, Ava brushes her coat to the side, revealing the shoulder holsters and double guns tucked there. “These are just the precautions, the real weapon is in the car trunks,” Ava waves to the SUVs that are now all empty and parked to the side, “Bombs lining the insides of the spare wheel area.” Sara’s brows raise and her lips curl into a smile as Ava scoffs and looks to the man near her feet. “It was meant to look like an accident with the guards and now look what you’ve done,” Ava nudges his shoe with her own as Sara shrugs, “You’ve killed them all.”

“Again with the moral outcry,” Sara groans as Ava glares back at her, not able to believe that only just weeks ago she thought that maybe Sara was becoming a normal non-agitating human after the phone call in Croatia. “So we just shove them all in the car and you blow them up,” Sara replies, looking around them at all the fallen bodies, “It’s just these over here that are going to be the worst to try and move.”

It really would be a shame to waste those bombs on empty cars, so Ava sighs before reluctantly agreeing. She and Sara share the weight of the bodies, carrying them back to the cars and laying them inside. “Doesn’t have to be neat,” Ava grunts as she shoves a man into the front seat and just leaves the door open with him half outside the car, “There’s enough in these cars to obliterate the bodies.”

“Aren’t bombs a lazy weapon,” Sara raises a brow and Ava reaches over, hitting Sara right in the arm and rolling her eyes when Sara fakes a wince and raises her hand to the place Ava just struck.

“Shut up and help me move the last two,” Ava tells her, already heading back to the crate. In truth, Ava is not a fan of bombs and hasn’t been ever since her near death experience in Bucharest in her early months on the job. Any loud noises or blasts in areas tend to send Ava back to those moments where the plaza she was in had quite literally just imploded. To this day Ava has no idea what it was that struck her along her spine and left that terrible wound. All she remembers is the discordant ringing in her ears and the screams of everyone around her as her vision filled with dust and ash and crumbling buildings.

That was the first and last time Ava had gotten caught in something of that caliber, so she’s always very touchy with explosives. A pair of noise canceling earbuds sit in her vest pocket to use for the car explosion itself, though Ava’s usually better when she knows that the blast is coming.

When the very last body has finally been loaded up into the car, Ava goes back for the laptop as well and tosses it inside the front car where it lands in the lap of a slumped guard. Ava’s already exhausted from that, her shoulder injury aching just a bit from the still healing gunshot wound she took nearly two months ago. The front of Ava’s vest as well as patches along her jacket are smudged and stained with blood, something that was not meant to happen tonight. “So,” Sara muses, already walking away as Ava takes her gun case from the ground and walks with her towards the far parking lot, “Drinks? I know a good place.”

Ava should say no but honestly drinks sound amazing after tonight. She’s still pissed at Sara though, and not keen on being dragged somewhere fancy in the city. It would be easy to say no to

Sara, to turn her down. But Ava could go for a distraction this evening, and seeing as Sara is offering. “I know a better place,” Ava tells her, tossing Sara a card from a pocket in her pants, “I need an hour to get cleaned up and get this blood off me. Meet me there.”

Sara makes a pleased sounding hum that Ava chooses to ignore as she shoves the earbuds as far into her ears as they’ll allow. Wordlessly, Ava offers the second pair inside to Sara who removes them and places them in her own ears as well. They’re far enough from the cars now, so Ava pulls the remote from her pocket before aiming it over her shoulder. The moment her finger lands on the button, the sounds of explosions ripple through the air and Ava can nearly feel the heat of the blast against her back. Not the neatest job but, for tonight, it’s going to have to do.

Paris, France — 01:34

The very minute the elevator doors close, warm lips descend on Ava’s own, tasting faintly of apple brandy Sara had been drinking not even minutes ago at the bar. This wasn’t what Ava had intended to happen this evening, and she could stop it—but she doesn’t want to. At this point Sara is familiar and even though that familiarity comes with unparalleled levels of frustration and annoyance. Ava can’t bring herself to care or say no. Especially not as Sara backs her into the elevator wall, her tongue running along Ava’s bottom lip.

Ava’s intention had been to get drinks and spend time going over what happened in Malaysia and how the organization with the gang leader there seems to have all but collapsed in on itself. She had meant to ask Sara if she was there and what came from it. But then she let herself get distracted by the way Sara never once took her eyes off of her. Ava let herself fall into the trap when Sara had laid her hand inside Ava’s thigh just near her knee and hadn’t moved it for a half hour straight, her fingers rubbing in slow teasing circles.

Sara had not only just cleaned up, but she had thrown on a midnight blue slip dress that Ava had paused when she came around the hotel bar corner and spotted her there. Blonde hair had been neatly pulled back from Sara’s face with pins that looked sharp enough to be weapons, a few neat strands of hair tumbling from the hold and cascading near Sara’s shoulders. Ava won’t lie, Sara is attractive and she is captivating, and suddenly Ava had felt so out of place in her pinstriped grey and green suit. Until she had gone to Sara who had tugged on her lapel as she sipped her drink, “You look good in suits.”

That was the line where Ava’s resolve began crumbling. Ava’s not had sex since Moscow and the tension has been bubbling and building in her each time she fucked Sara against a desk or had to deal with her on a mission. Ava remembers how Sara’s fingers felt moving inside of her and she could not possibly force herself to say no for the third time when Sara had leaned in near her ear and asked if she wanted to get out of the bar.

Conveniently, this is Ava’s hotel, an address she gave to Sara because she relocates to Versailles tomorrow to ride out the aftermath of the warehouse bombing. But all of this, Sara’s lips moving along her own. Ava’s going to blame this on the liquor they drank, on the fact that it had been a shit day and Ava wanted to have control over something, on the fact that Sara was talking too fucking much in the lobby so Ava had pinned her to the wall before the elevator even arrived on the ground floor and kissed Sara as hard as she’s been wanting to since Cleveland.

Sara’s kisses are hungry and deep, her fingers already trying to shove Ava’s blazer down from her body. “Not in the elevator,” Ava manages out against Sara’s mouth, letting out a sharp exhale as teeth sink into her bottom lip. The hands along Ava’s sides are harsh and firm, every bit a continuation of the game she and Sara have been playing in the field. When lips migrate to her

neck, Ava fists her fingers in the slippery fabric of Sara's dress, a quiet moan falling from her lips when a thigh slots between her own and presses up. Tilting her head to the side, Ava notices something there, "How did you know what floor I'm on?"

"Research," Sara replies, teeth meeting the skin of Ava's pulse point hard enough to make the area smart with pain. But Ava relishes in it, digging her fingers into Sara's side as her other hand drifts to Sara's hair where she pulls the pins out. Ava watches on as soft blonde hair tumbles down, settling in perfect waves along Sara's shoulders the same way they had in Moscow.

Another bite of Sara's teeth comes to Ava's collarbone as Sara rips Ava's shirt from her pants in a rather jerky fashion. "I'm still mad at you" Ava tells Sara as Sara's finger drift up and over her skin, her palms skirting up Ava's abdomen before nails rake down her muscles.

"Yeah—sure you are," Sara retorts in what sounds like amusement. With a small exhale, Ava pushes Sara away from her and flips their positions so it's Sara against the wall now. The elevator chimes up as they go and Ava's only vaguely aware of the fact they could be caught doing this here.

Kissing Sara hard, Ava tugs up the front of Sara's dress, returning the favour from earlier as she skims her palms up Sara's smooth bare thighs. "You know, I could still kill you one of these days," Ava forces out between breathes as Sara's fingers come to tangle in her hair, pulling none to kindly at the back of her head and Ava digs her nails into Sara's thigh in response. The result comes as a low noise bubbling from the back of Sara's throat that Ava greedily swallows lest Sara let the surrounding floors know exactly what they're doing on this elevator.

When Ava sucks a series of opened mouthed kisses down the side of Sara's neck, the hands along her back and in her hair only pull her closer. "Maybe—or maybe I'm the one who will kill you," Sara replies, her voice breathless, her head tipping to the side so Ava can reach the soft and tender skin near her throat.

"Is everything a competition with you?" Ava mutters against Sara's collarbone, her nails still lightly raking up and down Sara's thighs, "Don't you ever know when to quit?"

It's a rhetorical question because Ava already knows the answer is no. The answer is no for the both of them, which is why they're here in the first place, because neither of them can back down when they should; not to a target and certainly never to each other. But Sara takes it upon herself to answer it anyways. "I never stop," Sara replies, her hands pushing Ava away as the elevator doors open, revealing Ava's floor. With a smile tossed over her shoulder, Sara heads to the halls, "I like to be the best."

Coincidentally, as does Ava. The room isn't far and Ava only barely manages to get it open, her hands fumbling with the key as Sara wraps herself along Ava's back, her hand creeping between Ava's stomach and her waistband. "Be patient," Ava warns her as she throws the door open before stepping inside. The moment Sara is in as well, Ava pushes Sara against the door, her hand flipping each of the locks as well as the third and fourth ones she placed on the door three days ago.

"If we're doing this," Ava pants quietly when Sara shoves her blazer from her body, letting it crumple to the ground, "No talking from you." In front of her, Sara's lips are smudged with the colors of both their lipstick, her waves are not nearly as neat as they were before, and her eyes are dark but still lit with a challenge. "No teasing, no mocking," Ava warns, searching Sara's face, "Just silence."

"And other things," Sara counters, that cheeky grin on her face. But Ava has no time to interrupt her before Sara is pushing her backwards towards the bed. When Ava's knees hit the mattress

roughly, she tumbles backwards. “This has to go,” Sara instructs, her fingers nimbly undoing the buttons of Ava’s silk shirt. Helping Sara to remove it, Ava winces and swears when Sara presses into her still sore shoulder. “Sorry,” Sara says, not looking even remotely apologetic as her eyes roam Ava’s chest, “Forgot you’re delicate.”

Their clothing all comes off, Ava’s pants unbuttoned and tugged down her legs as Sara kisses her hard enough that it makes it difficult to complete the task. Sara’s dress falling to a pool of dark blue that melts into the ground, revealing nothing but a pair of underwear underneath and so many damn freckles Ava could lose count. Ava’s bra is thrown somewhere to the side; removed by Sara with just a single hand before Sara’s straddling her lap, lips latched around Ava’s nipple and fingers digging into Ava’s ribs.

Nearly all the covers are off the bed by the time Ava finds herself pressed to the mattress, Sara’s fingers finally slipping inside where Ava wanted her most. “Fuck,” Ava groans, tipping her head backwards as heat bunches and bundles in her abdomen, leaving her needing so much more.

“Better?” Sara teases in that low voice, her teeth meeting the skin near Ava’s ear as she is already moving inside Ava, “I’ve thought about this for a while now—ever since Moscow.” Warmth floods Ava’s face even as she glares at Sara, her hand keeping Sara’s own in place between her thighs because she wouldn’t count Sara out on getting her back for Portugal. “How could I not—you’re so hot when you’re angry,” Sara lilts, her lips shifting up Ava’s jaw, “Have you thought about this too?”

That’s not a question that Ava is going to answer because she does not want Sara any more smug than she already is. Purposefully digging her nails into the soft skin near Sara’s spine, Ava once more levels Sara with a look. “Stop talking,” Ava reminds her again as Sara’s fingers draw out a horribly slow pace inside her. A thumb presses harshly right against her clit, red hot licks of electricity fanning from Ava’s abdomen to her thighs. “I’ll kick you out,” Ava threatens, her grip on Sara’s hand tightening as her breathing stutters, “You know I will.”

“You won’t,” Sara replies, that wicked smirk on her lips. But that’s all that’s said in the end, silence lapsing between them, the only sounds coming are the quiet moans Ava does her best to bite back as Sara alternates between tortuously slow strokes and nearly painfully hard thrusts. Ava’s hips cant on their own accord, chasing after the friction Sara’s thumb offers her when she brushes it along Ava from time to time.

Sweat builds between their bodies, Ava’s breathing wavering as she does her best to continue kissing Sara. Everything in her lower abdomen is tight and hot and Ava can feel the muscles of her thighs shaking each time she pushes up off the bed to follow Sara’s motions. When Sara drifts down her neck, Ava hardly even notices, too caught up in her own arousal and the tension building and burning her from the inside out.

When her orgasm comes, it comes fast. All of that tension in pressure in her body just snaps without a single warning, something warm hitting the inside of her thighs and spilling down her skin. “Fuck,” Ava exhales as her chest heaves and she throws her arm over her face, her skin flushed and overheated, her body still electrified. Sara’s hand between her legs slows, mercifully bringing Ava back down rather than stopping cold or throwing her over the edge of a subsequent orgasm.

Only when Ava’s mind comes back to her and her sense clear does she realize what has happened. Almost not even wanting to open her eyes, Ava bites back a quiet groan. “Did you?” Sara begins but that’s as far as Ava lets her get.

“Do not even finish that question,” Ava tells her curtly, removing her arm from her face, well

aware of the liquid pooling between her thighs that came as a result of the rapid and overwhelming orgasm. When Ava does open her eyes, Sara's gaze is locked near Ava's abdomen, her fingers there, glistening in the dim lighting in the room. Sara turns back to Ava, her eyes glinting, her smirk firmly in place and Ava points at her in warning, "Don't."

But Sara never was one to listen. "It's flattering," Sara teases, "I'm that good am I?"

Her cheeks are already heating because Ava's had enough of Sara and her smart mouth, not really in the mood to be teased. In a rapid motion, Ava locks Sara's arm to her chest before arching a leg over Sara's waist and flipping their positions. They bounce a bit when Sara's back hits the mattress, Ava already straddling her and holding both her arms down near the pillow. "Please," Ava lays her lips near Sara's neck, biting down on the skin there, "Stop," She drifts upwards to Sara's jaw, "Talking." Once more kissing Sara hard, Ava wastes absolutely no time in slipping her hand down between their bodies.

If Ava thought that sex with Sara in dark rooms full of clothed was thrilling, she quickly learns tonight that there are new things to learn. Sara is as intoxicating as she is lethal. Every breathy gasp that falls from her lips as Ava sucks her way down Sara's chest, settling over her nipple, every stutter of her hips when Ava trails lower still, her mouth never going near where Sara wants, every tug of Sara's fingers in her hair is exhilarating. Sara is high-inducing and Ava is hooked.

Ava could easily spend all evening feeling that rush of pride in her chest with each little noise she draws from Sara, prolonging the moment she knows Sara wants from her right now. It would be a wonderful revenge, a repeat of Portugal in payment of what Sara did this evening at the warehouses. But Ava wants this too badly to deny herself the simple pleasure of knowing that she too can wreck Sara in a different way.

Sinking her teeth into the soft skin of Sara's thigh, Ava looks up to find Sara staring down at her, her lips parted, her breasts rising and falling with each short breath, her eyes heavy lidded and her pupils blown. Sara is a marvel like this and Ava finally brings her mouth to cover Sara, flattening her tongue over Sara's clit and watching with unblinking eyes as a quiet whine releases from Sara's throat. The cords of muscle in Sara's neck strain as she tips her head back, revealing the marks Ava laid there not long ago.

Sara's taste is dizzying and Ava does not pick a gentle pace tonight. Instead she brings her hand under her chin, sliding inside Sara because she is more than just wet, her thighs already coated with built up arousal. Lost in the moment, Ava chooses to ignore the fact that Sara nearly fucked everything up tonight and instead focuses on Sara and the movements of her undulating hips and the fingers tangled still in Ava's hair.

It doesn't take long, something that makes Ava just a bit smug when Sara is coming with a final tremble of her thighs before her back arches once more and relaxes into the bed. Wiping her mouth and chin on Sara's thigh, Ava pushes back to her knees and then lays on her back there. "That was fast," Ava taunts, not about to let Sara be the only one to get a dig in this evening, "Been long for you?"

"Why—would you be jealous if I said no?" Sara throws back and Ava scoffs, rolling her eyes as she tips her head to the side when the mattress dips. Sara's already on her feet and Ava feels her lips curving up in a smirk when Sara's first few steps are unsteady. "Shut up," Sara mutters, and honestly Ava wasn't going to laugh until Sara said that, but now she can't help herself, the vibrations starting low in her stomach before tumbling from her mouth.

Rolling to her stomach, Ava watches as Sara walks to the other side of the bed and begins collecting her clothing from the ground. "Not that I wouldn't love a second round, but I have a

flight that leaves in a few hours,” Sara speaks, shifting her underwear up her legs as Ava’s eyes trace the movements. When Sara bends, the muscles of her abdomen contract, highlighting the evidence that she is just as strong as Ava always knew that she is. “This was nice, though, I needed some stress relief before heading out,” Sara quips, throwing Ava a wicked smile.

“Don’t you have other ‘stress relief partners’ scattered around the globe,” Ava teases as she fights the urge to yawn. Sara scoffs quietly in the background and Ava glances at her in amusement, “What, assassins don’t have time for relationships?”

Sara just scoffs as she steps into her dress and draws the straps back up her shoulders. “Ava,” Sara chides, finally glancing at herself in the mirror on the wall, her fingers rubbing along the particularly dark hickey that Ava had sucked along her collarbone, “What do I say about this when someone asks? What if my next job is in an office setting?”

That’s not Ava’s problem. It’s not as if Sara never felt her leaving them. “Probably the same thing I had to say in Salzburg,” Ava retorts as Sara slips her shoes on her feet, a smile spread across her lips, “I had to tell her I slipped on ice—that I nearly busted my lip open.”

“It’s April,” Sara deadpans as Ava lifts a shoulder because again, not her problem, “The time for that lie has come and gone, smartass.” The pins that Ava pulled from Sara’s hair are inside her own blazer pockets and Sara bends down to remove them before twisting her hair back up and shoving them in the messy bun. “Well I have to go but this was fun,” Sara speaks, the door already open as she stands there, throwing a wink Ava’s way, “You’re fun. See you next time.”

Rolling her eyes, Ava watches as the door closes behind Sara and she’s gone. Now alone, Ava drags herself from the bed before walking over and flipping all her locks back on the door. As tired as Ava is and as badly as wants to do nothing more but crawl into bed and just sleep, she knows that a shower would be best first. With a sigh, Ava gathers her own clothing from the floor before heading to the bathroom.

Something in the mirror gets her attention and Ava turns, taking in her reflection. A bruise right along the side of her breast contains the very visible indentation of teeth marks and Ava just snorts and shakes her head, “Hypocrite.” Throwing her clothing to the hamper, Ava flicks on the shower and steps in under the cold spray, already wiping the evidence of the evening from her skin. Words from her Operative meeting come back to her as she stands under the spray. There’s no explicit rule against this between the two organizations, and even if there was, the Operative doesn’t need to know this. Ava did not encounter danger, so there’s no need to report. They don’t never ask for details and Ava’s certainly not going to be the one to tell them about this. It’s really for the best this way—for everyone.

Chapter End Notes

I have such mixed feelings about writing smut. It’s a strange thing to sit down and do and I’m not terribly pleased with it but, at a certain point you have to call it a day. Also, just a general disclaimer, pretty much all of my knowledge on just about any spy related thing mentioned here comes from TV shows so, might be a smidge inaccurate in certain places but we can pretend.

As always thank you to everyone who has been reading along. All of the comments

left behind have been so wonderful to read and see reactions so thank you for those.
And feel free to let me know what you think so far or what you'd like to see down the
line!

Part Five

Chapter Summary

Sara proposes a change to the way that her and Ava operate in their run ins in the field. Immediately Ava protests, but when given time to think, she realizes that it has the potential to be a mutually beneficial agreement. When Ava's confronted with danger in the field, she realizes that maybe she doesn't actually know Sara as well as she thought she did.

Chapter Notes

I should not be allowed to write summaries. Plain and simple. I never know how to cover events without giving too much away or making it so vague that it makes no sense. But anyways, here we are with part five. I have exactly no idea when part six is going to be up (I should have been studying today, not wrapping up this chapter but here we are anyways) because there is a lot upcoming in my schedule these next few days but it will come before the weekend's end.

As always, same warnings apply here and I don't think there are any additional ones that need to be applied for this chapter. But yes, here is part five and I do hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Madrid, Spain — 02:34

It is far too early in the morning for Ava to just now be getting back to her flat just on the outskirts of the city, but her target is a rather busy individual and seems hellbent on making Ava tail her everywhere. This job is to watch only, to gather intel and look into the accounts held by a socialite here in Madrid that might be making some unsavory friends who have information her father could exploit. The target, Lucia Reyes is the daughter of a technology company owner just inside the city. Antonio Reyes has been an enemy of the Operative ever since turning on MI6 and the devices that he helped them develop, so Ava's here to make sure he's not using his daughter to cause trouble.

Turns out the only trouble Lucia gets into comes from going out to far too many nightclubs and drinking far too much before someone has to take her keys and take her home. Ava's tour around the city following after the twenty-seven year old had come shortly after Lucia had been ushered into the car and taken straight back to her house only just an hour ago. Rather than following them there, Ava's come home instead so she can have some time to rest. The drive home for Lucia was only about fifteen minutes but Ava's place was further and she had to make a stop to pick up more surveillance equipment from her city contact here.

With the bag now thrown over her shoulder, Ava sighs quietly to herself before slipping her keys from her pocket and unlocking the door to her flat. Inside she throws the keys to the side table and

locks the door once more, securing all of her extra bolts in place. When Ava goes to kick off her shoes, she pauses, staring down at the set of shoes that should not be there. A pair of black combat boots a bit smaller than Ava's own shoe size rest there, neatly laid against the door. "Sara," Ava groans as she slips the bag from her shoulder and comes into the main studio area.

Sara is sitting at Ava's little kitchen table, a round circle hardly big enough to fit two people. There's food spread out on the table, Chinese from the looks of it, and a bottle of some unlabeled liquid sitting there in the center of it all. "Welcome home honey," Sara teases as Ava just takes in a long and deep sigh and reminds herself that it is not worth it to give Sara the satisfaction of a reaction.

As Ava comes to lay her bag over her bed, Sara stands from the table in Ava's periphery. "One more step and I shoot you," Ava points her finger to the side, not glancing up as she sheds her jacket and throws it on the bed over the bag. Popping her neck and stretching out after a long day spent in the car, Ava sighs and sits on the edge of the bed before removing the holster from her ankle and the gun there.

"Is this how you greet me when I've come with food?" Sara teases, now back in her seat, staring over at Ava with that amused smile. Right now Ava's not much in the mood for this, and she's pissed off that Sara has this much energy even at two in the morning. As always, Sara is dressed in all black but this time she's wearing a tank top that reveals cords of muscle along her arm that's propped over the back of the chair. Rather than having her hair down, Sara's braided it neatly away from her face, though a few errant strands slip loose near her temples and the nape of her neck. "You're moody today," Sara comments when Ava casts her a glare.

"You would be too if you had the day I did," Ava mumbles, removing her shoulder holster and tossing that to the bed as well, "I've been up nearly twenty-four hours so, cut the games here." Ava pushes up off the bed and comes to the kitchenette, taking a seat across the table from Sara. When Sara holds the clear bottle to her, Ava shakes her head, not sleep-deprived enough to attempt trusting that Sara hasn't poisoned the contents. "Why dinner?" Ava asks, leaning back in her chair, sure she knows the answer, "What did you do?"

A look of mock-offense passes over Sara's features, her head tilted to the side as she fails to hide her smile. "Why do you assume I've done something?" Sara lilts while Ava stares back at her, not even bothering to answer that question, just glancing pointedly to the liquor bottle, "Alright fine, I did something. I killed your target." And there it is. Scoffing, Ava rolls her eyes as Sara reaches for a dumpling from the middle container and shrugs, "And her father too."

Well there goes Ava's chances of figuring out what the Reyes' were into before their deaths. "You're unbelievable," Ava mutters, folding her arms over her chest and tipping her head back to look up at the ceiling, "I mean I expected this from you, but do you have any idea how much attention this puts on me at my job when you keep ruining all of my jobs." Sara says nothing, just takes a bite of the dumpling, her eyes sparkling in the single light hanging over the table. "I at least needed access to their database to finish my job here," Ava shakes her head and lets out a long exhale, "And now you've gone and done this."

Still Sara isn't speaking, but a smile is slowly curving along her lips, her eyes bright as Ava sits up in her chair and brings the box closest to her across the table. "Are you done complaining now?" Sara asks and Ava glances up, leveling Sara with a look, "I ask because I've got something for you, not that you let me get a word in edgewise."

Something smacks into Ava's shoulder and falls to her lap, nearly tumbling over her thigh. Catching it before it can plummet, Ava brings it up and sets it on the table. "What is this?" Ava

asks distrustfully, no longer touching the box in case Sara has some kind of trick or scheme planned here.

“A proposal,” Sara replies, grabbing her chopsticks from the table before using them to point at the box, “Go on, open it. Tell me what you think.”

At this point Ava’s learned that there never really is much choice other than to just indulge Sara in what it is that she’s doing. Tonight Ava’s certainly too tired to bother fighting her, so she takes the box in her hands once more. Inside are two neat rolls of velvet, the kind found inside of ring boxes. Perched between the rolls is a slip of paper and when Ava unfolds it, she finds a password there and a link. It’s undoubtedly to the server that Ava needed into, which explains what Sara meant by this being a proposal. “You found a ring box just to pitch me an idea?” Ava holds the paper up questioning.

Sara has noodles in her mouth, some of them falling down to her plate that Ava hadn’t noticed Sara had dug out from Ava’s cupboards. Making a face, Ava leans back and waits for Sara to finish chewing. “That was already in Antonio’s office. I knocked it over when I killed him and lost the ring but, he didn’t need that anymore,” Sara speaks with a shrug as Ava rolls her eyes, “But, that being said, I want you to freeze his assets. He’s been funding human trafficking organizations and even when he’s dead the cash will keep flowing.”

Humming quietly, Ava thumbs the password there and the web address on the paper. This is now the second time that Sara has brought information here for Ava and asked her to do something with it. After placing the password back in the box, Ava snaps the lid shut and glances to Sara once more. “This is the proposal?” Ava holds up the little box as Sara twists up noodles between her chopsticks, “You’ve helped me get what I needed so now I return the favour again?”

“No,” Sara shakes her head, placing the chopsticks down and letting out a quiet sigh. Her eyes scan Ava’s face as if she’s searching for something, an action that makes Ava only slightly uncomfortable because there is none of Sara’s usual joking or teasing present right now and she doesn’t know what to make of it. “I’m proposing that if we have a shared job and know the other is in the city, we keep doing this,” Sara nods to the box sitting in Ava’s hand, “Whoever gets there first keeps the target alive until the other can either come in person to get the information or until the first one there takes everything from the system.”

“Absolutely not,” Ava instantly protests, letting out a laugh at Sara’s insane suggestion, “We are on opposite sides of this. Your people have tried to kill my people on multiple occasions.” Sara hums and purses her lips, her eyes cutting to the side because they both know that Ava has a point in that. “Not to mention the repercussions that could come from us even interacting as we have been,” Ava pauses, nerves building in her chest as she thinks of what might come for her from the League if they knew what she knows about them.

Right now what Ava knows about the League are facts that are all committed to memory. It’s hardly possible to exist as a spy and not know some things about the League, and it’s not in this little arrangement that she’s not allowed to check Interpol records without the League coming after her. But should Ava cross this line and work directly with one of their members—there’s no telling what the League might do to Ava, or what the Operative might do to Sara.

“Okay well then I guess we just go back to the other messing with our plans half the time and having awkward conversations with bosses about how we somehow got what we needed even after a target died,” Sara replies with a shrug and Ava sucks in a long slow breath, “But tell me, what is it that happens to spies who fail to hit their mark and bring back the intel that’s needed? What happens when you can’t complete the job?”

Nothing good. Failed marks mean more work to gain back intel from a company or individual. It's a hassle for everyone involved and it more often than not means at least a month's worth of clean up when a target is killed prematurely and there's no access to intel. Sara has a point in this. They can't keep killing each other's targets without punishment for whoever fails, and explaining postmortem successes are getting increasingly difficult. Even Henry had questioned how it was Ava was able to get the information from Liam's company in the same time frame that he was being killed in his office.

But agreeing to do this with Sara means trusting her. It means really working with the enemy, not just sleeping with her. "I have to think about it," Ava replies diplomatically and Sara nods as if she was expecting this, "For now I'll handle this company," Ava holds up the ring box, "I hate people like him just as much as you do, so I'll handle the accounts." Freezing assets is a really easy thing for Ava to do, and she could have it done in a relatively short amount of time.

However there's something else Ava wants here, something that she has wondered for a long time. Seeing as she's agreed to think about this, Ava thinks that Sara owes her an answer. "How are you finding me when I'm in town?" Ava rests her elbows on the table, staring down Sara who is already eating again, "I've been thinking about it and the only thing I could think of was the tech company in Belfast that seemed to have your name all over it. Two CEOs working on facial recognition software murdered in a hotel in Athens."

She's not surprised when Sara nods her head on the other side of the table, the motion moving the braid that's fallen over her shoulder. "I kept their demo because I decided it would be useful to apply it to traffic cameras to find my targets. Once I had a picture of you, I could find you in any city," Sara recounts and Ava hums quietly, relieved that it has nothing to do with any predictability in Ava's actions, "You're good at avoiding cameras so, they're all partial matches. Someone who hasn't seen that face up close and personal wouldn't be able to locate you."

Chopsticks are pointed her way, that smirk back on Sara's face as Ava rolls her eyes and scans the table in front of her. "Dinner?" Ava points to the containers there as Sara passes her over the box of plain white rice. The contained that was in front of Ava has sweet and sour chicken in it, not Ava's favourite but it will do. "Did you poison any of this?" Ava tests, glancing up to find Sara with a grin on her face.

"Do you really think I would tell you if I did?" Sara taunts and Ava snorts before bringing a bite to her mouth using her chopsticks, "I know you like your poisons and potions, but if I wanted to kill you, I would prefer a more personal touch when it comes to murder." Under the table, Sara's foot is brushing up the inside of Ava's calf, drifting higher as she lowers her voice, "Something a little more intimate."

Jostling her leg to the side and using her knee to nudge Sara away, Ava levels her with a look of warning. But that doesn't appear to bother Sara one bit as she laughs. "I'm too tired to deal with your shit tonight Lance," Ava tells her pointedly, watching as Sara's delight only seems to multiply, "Keep your hands and feet to yourself if you want to keep them attached to you." When Sara's mouth opens and words begin to form, Ava clicks her tongue and points her chopsticks at Sara, "Assume that I meant you should keep your entire person away from my entire person."

It's clear that Ava had been correct in assuming Sara was going to make some joke about not keeping different body parts to herself when Sara just smiles and shakes her head. Reaching out, Ava has her hand over the dumpling container when Sara swats her away with the chopsticks, the wood stinging along the back of Ava's hand as she retreats with a glare. "Those are mine," Sara draws them closer to herself using a single wooden piece, "Come after them again and lose a finger."

Rolling her eyes, Ava goes back to her own food, waiting for the right moment. When Sara's not paying attention, too busy placing more of her noodles on the plate, Ava uses that and snags a dumpling. Instantly blue eyes fly up to her but Ava brings the knife out from under the table that she secured there yesterday, suspended by a taped down piece of cardboard. Sara's eyes follow it where Ava lays the knife right on the table as a silent threat, and Sara's lips curving up in a smile. "That's fair," Sara hums quietly, "Well played."

They eat in silence, with Sara humming something quietly under her breath in what might be Arabic, a language that Ava doesn't know much of seeing as most of her jobs are based here in Europe or the States. It does get her interest though, the soft rasp of Sara's voice when she sings the words quietly once there's no food in her mouth. Neither of them speak much, but as they eat, Ava sneaks glances to her companion across the table, not trusting her, but not really sure that Sara's a threat to her anymore. Something has changed here, and Ava doesn't know what to make of it.

Rome, Italy — 23:44

"I'm just saying," Sara quips as Ava rolls her eyes, taking the stairs as quickly as she can to get away from Sara and her incessant talking, "If I was the spy here, I would have probably thought to keep a way of checking the cameras near me and then this whole issue could have been avoided. I didn't even know you were here."

"That is the point of what I do," Ava fires back, turning over her shoulder where Sara stands, blood still splashed along the arm of her coat, a speck of it there near her nose, "You weren't meant to know that I was here, and keeping an eye on the cameras wouldn't have been needed if you had just taken a more subtle approach and killed them somewhere that isn't the main office."

Turning back around, Ava resumes her pace down the stairs, still angry even though she has what she needed from the office here. It's been about three months since Ava saw Sara in Madrid, and since then they've come across each other about five times since then. For four of those times, the end of their shared time together in a city had been carried out by having drinks and then winding up in Ava's hotel room or the room of whatever supply room was closest to them at the time.

The sex is a good stress-relief, Ava will admit that. As much as Sara gets on her nerves from time to time, she's relentless when they're pressed together, always touching Ava in ways that electrify Ava and leave her wanting so much more. New routines mean new rules, most of which tend to be unspoken between them. There's no staying after, no affection during sex, and after their run in together in Cairo where Sara had nearly blown Ava's cover, there is now no acknowledging they know one another in public.

By the third time they were together for the evening, Ava realized that there appears to be another rule, that they never go to where Sara is staying within the city—ever. At this point, Ava doesn't even care if Sara knows where she's located. If Sara really wanted to kill Ava, she would have done it by now. That and should Sara ever get an order to kill Ava, Ava has no doubt that Sara would want to make it as public as possible, true to form. So she stopped caring that Sara learns where her flat is or what her hotel number is.

It's clear they don't trust each other. As flirtatious as Sara is and as much as she is constantly in Ava's business, Ava knows that Sara is keeping her at just as much of a distance as Ava is keeping Sara. Neither of them swap any personal information outside of their jobs, though Sara certainly does try to dig into things. Ava's personally very proud that Sara finds it so irritating she can't find anything about Ava's past. But Ava hardly even had a file before she joined the Operative as it

was. With one parent the member of a clandestine operations group and the other parent being a cultural attache, there was hardly anything of Ava's existence at all.

"You're so angry all the time," Sara scoffs behind Ava, breaking her from her thoughts and somehow managing to make Ava's scowl deepen, "No wonder you're so tense and pent-up when we fuck, how did you let all that anger out before this."

"By doing my job right," Ava retorts, turning the stair landing and glaring at Sara as she goes, "Have you ever considered that maybe I wasn't this angry before you started showing up in the field left and right?" Recently Sara hasn't been as bad and obvious when she's been in the field, but then again besides tonight, they've only been at odds with each other once since Madrid. Ava had almost forgotten just how destructive and reckless Sara truly can be in the midst of all that peace.

Tonight though, Sara really outdid herself, practically creating the situation they've just left up on the twentieth floor. Ava had been placed here for two weeks and over the course of that time she had learned the building layout of the business executive. Her goal was to take the information from a server room, all of it. Ava had placed the download before leaving her temporary work post for the evening and she had come back just now to retrieve it. However the room required a key card, something that Ava had certainly taken from another employee earlier but suddenly found missing from her pockets not even twenty minutes ago.

Getting in was still possible, but Ava had to plug her tablet into the scanner and manually override it so she could get in. She hadn't even been five minutes into her work when she heard floor doors opening and then the chaos began. Sara had been here to kill the executive of the company, and in order to kill him and the man under him, she had invited them to the building and had been in waiting in the very stairwell they're in right now. The moment they arrived, Sara had killed the younger man first, but the executive had come down the hallway Ava was kneeling in.

The entire damn floor went on lockdown because Sara had slammed the younger man into the glass doors, so all Ava's work on the keypad had been rendered useless. This had been meant to be a discreet job, and now it was anything but that. "In a way you're lucky I showed up when I did because how else would you have gotten his access card," Sara had argued as she dangled the badge between her fingers and Ava had snatched it from her before letting herself into the server room and pocketing her now uploaded drive before setting off a virus through the system to wipe everything out.

Behind her, Ava can hear the sound of Sara's boots coming rapidly down the steps and Ava sighs quietly. She really shouldn't be so angry, Sara really didn't know that she was here in the city at all. Neither of them had been aware of the other actually. This time around there had been no interference of the intentional kind, unlike moments in the past. They both got what they needed in the end, which is something that Ava hopes will happen more in the future, she just has to swallow down her pride a bit and admit Sara had a good idea three months ago. When Sara catches up with her, elbow accidentally jostling Ava in the side, Ava simply sighs and slows down a bit. "Yes," Ava states, her voice almost echoing in the stairwell.

Sara is silent as she turns her head to face Ava, bright blue eyes scanning her face, seemingly confused. "I'm going to need more context to guess what you mean by that," Sara replies as Ava sucks in a deep breath and makes a quiet noise while she parses through her thoughts, "That could mean all matter of things. Yes Sara you are better than me in everything you do." Sara tilts her head to the side as they reach another landing and turn the corner, walking a bit faster than Ava now as she continues, "Or it could mean yes Sara I will actually keep my hands above my head tonight when you tell me not to touch."

As Sara continues rattling off things that are increasingly sexual in nature, Ava comes to a complete stop on the staircase. “Okay that’s good—no more examples are needed about the vague nature of my statement,” Ava clarifies, placing her hand on the handrail, “I meant yes—to your proposal in Madrid.”

That does the trick and Sara comes to a halt on the third to last landing, her hand frozen on the railing as she turns her head around so Ava can make out her side profile only. Then Sara turns in full, now completely facing Ava, her brows drawn and her gaze sweeping over Ava’s body. “This is you admitting that I was right?” Sara asks, her lips quirking at the corners as Ava adamantly shakes her head, “Oh come on, just say it once, ‘you were right Sara, it was a good plan and you’re not reckless’.”

It’s a concession that Ava is not going to make—ever. “There have to be ground rules, like no contacting my secure line ever. That means no stealing it in the first place or the deal is off,” Ava keeps her tone even as she glances to the walls, thinking about the risks and dangers she’s been tallying up in her head to use to form these rules, “Seeing as this only seems to work when you’re coming to kill someone and I’m not, should we find ourselves in that situation, the deal can’t apply there. You can’t afford to let them live and I can’t afford to let them die.”

“May the best operative win,” Sara’s lips are now forming a full smile, her words an echo of the ones Ava spoke when they made their month long deal all that time ago. Ava dips her head in a small nod as Sara leans against the railing, her gaze still sweeping over Ava. “And the times where I want you to do something extra with information after I refrain from killing your target?” Sara tests, her head tilted to the side, “You’ll do it?”

That’s a bit more complicated. Coming down the steps, Ava glances up to the stories above them when a noise comes. It’s nothing though, likely just a leaking pipe somewhere that has shifted. “It will depend on your terms and what I have as a next job,” Ava replies and Sara hums quietly, pushing off the railing and now bringing them chest to chest as Sara continues to back Ava up, “And of course it involves me double checking to see that you’re doing,” Ava’s breathing hitches as her back hits the wall, Sara’s hands already on her hips, “I still don’t trust you.”

“Glad we’re on the same page,” Sara lilts, her fingers brushing up and down Ava’s sides, her eyes skimming down to Ava’s chest, “But just so we’re clear, one day I’m going to make you trust me.” Sara’s hand lands on Ava’s breastbone, her nails catching in the fabric of Ava’s plain cotton shirt as she drags them downwards, “I’ll make you cave one day.”

“Unlikely,” Ava replies, her tongue darting out to lick her lips as she swallows when Sara’s free hand drifts up her neck and tangles in her hair, “Not when you’re always showing up like this, always talking and getting in my way.”

A laugh breaks from Sara’s lips and Ava scowls because she hadn’t been expecting that. The lighting here in the stairwell is nothing but abysmal but Ava can see every single hue of blue in Sara’s eyes, already swallowed up by partially dilated pupils. “If you want me quiet,” Sara teases, her fingers tugging in Ava’s hair, “Why don’t you do something to make me shut up?”

“You’re a walking cliché, you know that right,” Ava throws back as she tangles her fingers in Sara’s jacket lapels and pulls her back to stop Sara’s hand from moving any lower down Ava’s stomach.

“And yet,” Sara grins widely, her eyes sparkling, “You’re still going to kiss me aren’t you?” While Ava hates to prove Sara right, she also can’t resist when Sara’s right here and Ava could use a good distraction before she has to leave early in the morning for an arduous job in the States. Flipping their positions, Ava presses Sara into the wall this time around and leans down to kiss her.

Sara hums quietly into the kiss and Ava can feel the lift of Sara's smirk against her lips. "Maybe you're the cliché," Sara murmurs, her fingers hooked under Ava's chin, keeping her close.

A stairwell is not the place to be doing this but Ava can't resist, especially not when Sara grinds down on the thigh she lodges between her legs. Lips drift down Ava's neck, teeth sinking in just below her pulse point. "Hey," Ava backs away rapidly, shaking her head, "No marks. I have a job tomorrow and I am not wearing a turtlenecks all week like I had to do last time."

Nothing about Sara's expression right now suggests that she is anything close to apologetic for the rather dark bruise she left along Ava's neck two weeks ago in Turkey. When Sara leans back in, Ava plants her palm right on Sara's chest, pressing her to the wall once more and prompting Sara to promise her. "Fine I'll be nice," Sara rolls her eyes before smiling at Ava, "At least only a little bit. When are you headed out?"

There's no point keeping the answer from Sara seeing as there's every likelihood that they're going to wind up in the same city anyways. "Nine in the morning but I should leave by eight," Ava replies, already dreading getting up and going to the airfield to take the transport plane to the London airfield. She'll be meeting Henry at the offices there because he had sent word that he wanted to talk to her before she's off to the States.

"Perfect," Sara smiles, grabbing Ava by the shirt sleeve, "Perfect time for me to have my way with you." With a slight stumble, Ava follows after Sara, shaking her arm free so Sara doesn't drag her down the remaining flights of steps. Outside the stairwell there's a small closet that Sara pulls Ava into and closes the door.

The moment the door is closed, Ava's being pressed against the wall, Sara's body firm against her own, her kisses rough and rushed. This is familiar by now and Ava sinks into it, skimming her hands along Sara's sides to begin removing the weapons there. Last time Ava had been pricked by a knife in Sara's thigh holster and that had led to the new inclusion of a rule where no weapons can be present where someone could get hurt.

But Sara catches her hands, bringing them to the wall and sliding them up above Ava's head. Sara likes control, that must have become clear over time. However Ava likes it just as much so she breaks free from Sara's hold before pulling Sara's shirt from her pants. Sara tastes faintly of some kind of chocolate, sweet and rich. "By the way," Sara breaks away from Ava's mouth, giving Ava the perfect chance to go after the tender skin along Sara's neck, "A year ago today is when I took out your contact in Brussels." With her teeth, Ava bites into Sara's skin, a small reprimand for bringing that back up. "Just saying," Sara breathes out when Ava soothes the mark with her tongue, "Happy Anniversary babe."

Scoffing lightly, Ava pulls away, never understanding Sara's need to be constantly talking when they do this. "You know," Ava runs her fingers up Sara's arms, watching blue eyes flicker over her face, "There are quite a few other things you could be doing with your mouth right now that aren't talking."

That smile is back along Sara's lips as her fingers move to Ava's belt, undoing it in a series of deft motions before popping the button. "As you wish," Sara teases, her eyes still locked on Ava's own as she bends down, taking Ava's pants with her as she goes. Seconds later when a warm, soft tongue moves through Ava, she tilts her head back against the cold wall with a stuttered inhale. Fingers tangled in Sara's hair, chest already rising and falling unevenly, Ava just leans back and surrenders to Sara for a moment.

The wind whips around Ava's body and she draws her coat even tighter as she suppresses a shiver. After being in Texas in the states for a three week period, coming back to some of the chillier climates here has been quite the adjustment period. Ava's not in the city in any official capacity. Now that she's approached seven years within the Operative and five years on the job, Henry has given her a little bit of time between Texas and her next job to get some things settled. Usually Ava has about two weeks to herself after running around, and this time she's come here to Minsk to visit Dmitriy and trade back in weapons from the past.

Case in hand, Ava sets off down the street that leads to the business front that masks his real operation down in the underground basement. Hardly anyone is out moving around seeing as this cold front has blown through, and Ava really can't blame them. It won't be long until snow blankets the streets here, covering the cracked sidewalks and casting everything in shades of glistening white.

Carefully stepping over a puddle that sits near the sidewalk, Ava makes her way down the streets, keeping an eye on her surroundings. The past month has come with quite a lot of rather unexpected changes and new knowledge that Ava hadn't seen coming. Her dig into the Operative had revealed that Henry was telling the truth that day in his office—the higher ups in the organization really did approve Henry's plot to bring Sara in on this, though nobody had any idea it was going to be Ava's closest adversary coming in.

Not only that, but she has discovered evidence that Henry was telling the truth again when he told her that the Operative has previously used the League as protection for spies in certain countries experiencing difficult times. However, it's rarely hands on and as far as Ava could tell, the League never knows that those clients are spies rather than just ordinary civilians. It explains why Ava's cover story for Russia had been so extensive, crafted in order to shield her from the knowledge of the League. Though it hadn't worked, but that had more to do with Sara than it did the Operative.

Ava's not seen Sara since that evening in the executive building. She could have sworn she caught a glimpse of her in Texas and then again when she landed in London, but if Sara was there, she never approached Ava. Whatever the case, they've not yet shared a job and haven't had time to take each other up on the new deal. This past month has given Ava time to feel a bit more comfortable in her decision, though it has of course followed with questions as to whether or not Sara will consistently hold up her end of the deal.

With a sigh, Ava pushes open the heavy door and slips inside, unwinding her scarf with a single hand and letting her hair flow over her shoulders once more. This time around, she hadn't called Dmitriy in advance because Ava has just landed in the country and she hadn't had the time on the ride over. But he never seems to mind when she pops up unexpectedly or unannounced seeing as that's how her visits come more often than not. Hand on the railing, Ava sets off down the steep steps and comes to the second door at the very bottom.

"Dmitriy," Ava calls as she backs inside the room, closing the door after her and flipping the locks, "I know I wasn't expected here but I've come across a bit of free time and thought this would be a good time to bring back some of those weapons from the last time."

"You mean to tell me you didn't extensively plan and plot out your visit?" a voice teases, a very familiar voice. Certainly a voice that shouldn't be here right now.

Placing the case down and turning around with her gun in hand, Ava levels it Sara's direction, finding her sitting there drinking a cup of what has to be that same vodka Ava was drinking the last time she was here. "What are you doing here Lance?" Ava asks, her eyes scanning the room,

instantly nervous that she's going to find Dmitriy laying dead somewhere around here, "Tell me he wasn't a job for you."

Sara nods over her shoulder towards the little room in the back where Dmitriy works on his projects and stores chemicals. With a deep inhale, Ava slowly walks to the door, her heart picking up in her chest. There's no sound coming from inside, not even one. Placing her hand on the door knob, Ava swiftly turns it and jerks the door open. "Damn it Dmitriy," Ava's breath leaves her body in a rush as she takes in the startled looking man sitting there on a bench, mask around his mouth, bifocals perched on his eyes that contain the extended lenses.

"Ava," he greets happily, placing down the needle that he had in his hands and the vial in the other, "I thought that I had at least another month before expecting you back. What are you doing here ahead of schedule?"

When Dmitriy slips the mask down to kiss her on the cheek, Ava hums quietly under her breath, relief flooding through her. Henry might think that he's a replacement figure in stead of her father, but really Ava thinks that Dmitriy comes far closer to that even though he knows relatively nothing about who she is and what she does. "Just stopped in for a visit and to exchange some things," Ava explains as she walks to the main room, finding Sara there with her hand in her palm on the counter, "I didn't know that you had company though. Particularly not this kind of company."

Sara places her hand over her heart and makes a hurt expression as Ava glares at her, not trusting why Sara is here for a single second. "Well you're hardly my only customer, even if you are my favourite," Dmitriy replies, stripping gloves from his hands and coming out to the room. Ava points to his face, silently reminding him that he has yet to take off the magnifying lenses and he laughs before removing them, "My new friend here needed a rifle."

"Oh did she?" Ava asks, turning back to Sara who just raises her brows, "And what happened to those kinds of guns being a coward's weapon?" That had been what Sara told Ava when they bumped into each other in Cairo and Sara had seen the inside of Ava's trunk. She had picked up the gun before examining it and throwing it back down to the trunk once more while telling Ava her thoughts on long-distance weapons. Which is hypocritical seeing as Ava's seen Sara use guns since then.

Dmitriy comes to stand against the second counter, looking between Sara and Ava in confusion as Ava scans Sara to see what weapons she has. "The two of you know each other?" he asks, finally turning to Ava. Ava simply raises a brow, knowing that Dmitriy is capable of what's going on here. Understanding dawns on his face and he points to Sara, "This is her, the assassin?"

"Aves you talk about me," Sara teases, her voice lifting at the end of the question. Scowling, Ava turns to Sara and watches as her hand slides to her lap. Instantly tensing up, Ava's hand tightens around her gun as Sara smiles at her. "Relax," Sara laughs, raising both her hands up, "I'm not here to kill him, I'm just visiting and needed a gun for my new target. He's rather hard to get to in the city."

After searching Sara's face and waiting for her to nod again, Ava tucks her gun away and slips into the chair along the counter Sara's sitting at. Dmitriy looks mildly alarmed, his brows raised as he backs further away from Sara. "This is her," Ava nods her head and holds her hand up, motioning for Dmitriy that everything is okay, "I guess I shouldn't be surprised that she somehow managed to find my contact here and get in my way."

"Oh please," Sara rolls her eyes, tipping the glass up near her mouth, "Not everything is about you Sharpe, I just needed guns and this place happened to be the closest." Ava doesn't trust that, not at all, especially not when she knows that Sara has the ability to find her within the city and could

have even tracked her here in the past.

Today Sara's dressed in civilian clothing, not her usual all black outfit or any kind of dress. She's just as bundled for the cold as Ava is, wrapped in a thick looking olive green coat with what might even be jeans underneath. "Well, I'm glad that nobody is here to kill me," Dmitriy laughs nervously as Ava turns her attention back to him, the glare melting from her face, "But, I am assuming if you're here it's because you're on break?"

That's not something Ava wanted revealed to Sara, but she nods her head slowly before picking up the case and handing it over to Dmitriy. "I haven't received my next job just yet but I came to bring you these," Ava passes the case over as Dmitriy sets it to the side and opens it, "If you have more of the nerve-toxin and the poison I'd appreciate getting some more. I've been running low the past three jobs."

Whenever there are outside individuals involved in jobs, Ava prefers to use the nerve-toxin to temporarily incapacitate them rather than just killing them. It's more discreet and a lot less trouble for her in the end. Dmitriy hums and takes the empty vials that Ava had tucked inside along with the darts that are all laid inside a jar. When Ava turns her head, she finds Sara watching on with interest, her eyes focused on the case and the vial that Dmitriy holds to the light. "You must have been busy since you were here last," he remarks and Ava just shrugs.

The truth is that Ava is likely to be a lot more busy when this break ends. She had come here with the intention of telling Dmitriy the biggest change that's been made in her job, but now that Sara is present, Ava doesn't feel like revealing that. When she had come back to London just a few days ago and had gone there to meet Henry once more, he had revealed that the higher ups of the Operative are yet again placing more trust in Ava and her abilities.

Once this break is over and Ava returns to the field, she'll be returning with full choice over what jobs she does and doesn't take. This means getting access to the Operative database, something that only senior spies or handlers are allowed into. Henry will remain as her handler, and he will still be giving her jobs that require immediate attention, but other than that, Ava's not been granted a lot more responsibility and freedom. It's not as if she didn't know this was coming now that she's been working as long as she has and has managed to keep her hands clean in the process. But it was a bit of a surprise all the same.

When Dmitriy picks up the case and takes it to the back before telling both Ava and Sara to stay put, Ava turns to the assassin, taking in the smile on her face. "What are you really doing here?" Ava asks, keeping her voice low, not trusting Sara's previous explanation one bit, "Dmitriy isn't a well known supplier in this area and I know the League has better contacts that you could have used here."

"I've hit a snag and needed an immediate fix," Sara replies, lifting her glass to her lips with a small shrug, "Didn't want the League to know that I encountered an issue."

There's really only one reason that Sara might need to use a gun as a result of something going sideways with a target. "You missed, didn't you?" Ava realizes, her lips lifting into a smile when Sara's frown begins to form, "I see, so it seems as if you've once again rushed into something and this time there were consequences. Am I right?" Sara says nothing, but the way she rolls her eyes is enough of an answer for Ava. Laughing, Ava just shakes her head and reaches over to take the glass that Sara has set down.

It is in fact vodka in the cup, and Ava welcomes the warm burn of the liquor as she drinks what's left in the cup. "You act as if you've never fucked up before," Sara scowls, standing up already and tying the strap around the waist of her coat, "I'm sure you've had something go south last minute

and had to fall to other plans.”

“Only when you’re around,” Ava retorts, raising her brows as Sara turns to her with that glare set firmly in place, “At this point I practically build plans around the expectation that you’re going to show up and attempt to ruin everything.” Or at least Ava had before their most recent deal. The only time she’ll really need to plan for something like that in the future is if Ava knows that target termination is her only option in the field and she might have to be prepared for Sara to try and stop her.

Before Sara can say something to that, Dmitriy is coming from the back with two new cases in hand. “Here is the rifle and grenades for you,” he hands the larger case to Sara who hums, “And then this is for you, your usual treats are tucked inside.” He means those local candies that Ava likes, but she appreciates him not saying as much where Sara can hear and would definitely mock her for this.

“Well, I’ve got to get going but thank you for this,” Sara raises the case up and Dmitriy nods his head. As Sara is passing by Ava, her hand skims along Ava’s elbow, tracing up her arm, “And as for you, drinks later? The little bar downtown?” Ava doesn’t reply, just purses her lips and continues looking forwards, ignoring both Sara’s smirk and Dmitriy’s knowing smile. But Sara doesn’t seem to need an answer because they both know Ava is going to meet her there. With a laugh Sara walks from the room, calling out another thanks to Dmitriy.

As the door closes behind her, Dmitriy comes to stand in front of Ava and she shakes her head and holds up her hand, “Don’t.” Still smiling, Dmitriy takes the seat that Sara had been in before and brings down the vodka bottle before pouring more into the cup there.

“So,” he slides the bottle to the side and Ava scowls, already knowing what’s coming, “What happened to one and done?” That is a promise that went out the window, maybe even a promise Ava never even intended to keep in the first place. But she’s not going to answer that. Instead she just leans back and prepares to fill Dmitriy in on the things happening that do not involve Sara and anything she and Ava have done together since she was here last.

Copenhagen, Denmark — 17:01

With a sigh, Ava leans back into her office chair and peers across the hall where the server room is. It would be so easy to just jump over there right now and break in so she can get the intel that she needs to finish the job. Already Ava’s been here a week just waiting for the right time and it has yet to come. There’s no one target here, rather the entire board of executives is what Ava had been sent in to watch. This technology institute is a rather powerful one in the region and Ava’s been sent out by Henry to make sure that the rumors of them having military information and intellectual property are in fact just rumors.

Some employee here had sent in a tip about a month ago and not even two weeks ago that employee was found dead of a heart attack. It seems innocuous enough, but nothing is ever really that simple when it comes to these companies. The Operative suspected foul play so Ava’s stuck here until she figures out of that tip was true and if this institute really did murder a former employee. Right now it’s not clear if the rumors are true or not because Ava hasn’t been able to get her hands on anything significant.

Her cover this time around is as the replacement HR administrator for the company, already set up in the office that sits right across from the server room. The former administrator is fine. He’s currently in a contained medical facility after he suffered a nervous break from the drugs Ava had

administered a heavy dose of, courtesy of Dmitriy of course. When Ava's finished here she'll go get him out, but until then it's better that he's out of the way of this so Ava has easy access to the building.

So far Ava's yet to see something dangerous here, or something that would suggest that the leaders of this institute are up to nefarious things. The most security they have here are the locks on doors and the guards that walk around the floors, but that's all fairly standard and was to be expected. Other than that, there's no signs that this office is actively working to hide or protect information of any kind.

Glancing out the glass doors of her office, Ava watches as a few people walk to and from in the hallways. This has been a boring job, one that Ava is keen to leave as soon as she can. A man across the hall swipes his card along the wall scanner and steps swiftly inside the server room. It's the same kind as Ava's own key, logging each entry to the room. Somehow she's going to have to find a way to disable not only that, but the cameras tucked outside and inside the room as well.

As Ava goes to pick her pen up and begin signing whatever form sits in front of her this time, her office phone begins to ring. Surely it's the routine call from the employee on the fifth floor that calls her this time every day to complain about the woman across the bullpen from him. "Ava Short," Ava picks the phone up, already pinching at the bridge of her nose, "How can I be of assistance."

The other end is silent for a moment, then Ava hears the sound of rustling. *"Is your alias always your name with a last name that starts with the same letter?"* a teasing voice asks on the other line as Ava clicks her tongue and instantly looks back out the glass windows for a sign of Sara, *"I have to say, that doesn't seem safe and I really did expect better from a spy."*

Taking the whole phone unit with her, Ava goes to the doors of her office while the cord drags along the floor with her. "It's the most effective way at not blowing or mixing up covers," Ava retorts as Sara chuckles on the other end, "But I swear if you tell me you're here to kill someone in this office I am going to be so mad. I am so close to wrapping up here and I do not need you to come in here and stand in the way of that."

Another laugh comes and Ava hears the sound of a door opening and closing. *"Well you know how much I love getting in your way,"* Sara replies, her tone suddenly shifting to something more serious as she continues on, *"But this time around, I'm actually here to warn you. Go look out your window."*

For a moment Ava pauses, staring at the same place in the hall before looking over her shoulder to the window. Wordlessly, Ava walks over and pulls up a single side of her blinds, peering down to the streets below. Nothing seems out of place right away, but then Ava spots the three all-black SUVs lining the side alley, not a single one of them moving. *"Get somewhere safe in the next few minutes,"* Sara instructs, another door opening and closing on her end, *"This time it's not me coming in. It's a League contact in the city and they won't hesitate to kill anyone that's armed in the building."*

When a few men emerge from the tucks, all carrying automatic rifles, Ava lets the blinds fall back down before going to her desk and jerking open the lower drawer. Placing Sara on speaker, Ava pulls her bulletproof vest and gun box from the drawer before shedding her blazer. "How long do I have?" Ava asks, strapping the vest over her body and thinking of the best way to get out of the building. She can come back tomorrow after this is finished. If anything, a League attack here might actually give Ava the window she needs to come back and get the intel later.

Ava knew that Sara was in the city, she saw her just the other night. But Sara was here on a

different job and Ava had assumed that meant this job was going to wrap up with no interruptions. Apparently she was wrong about that. *"I don't know, but not long,"* Sara replies on the other end, her tone much quieter now, *"Just get out. Trust me when I say this is one fight you can't shoot or poison your way out of."*

There's an urgency in Sara's tone that Ava's not heard before, a clear sign that Ava should in fact take Sara's concern seriously. Not bothering to reply, Ava hangs up the call and tugs her blazer back on her body over the vest. After pocketing her phone, she grabs her bag and shoves her computer in it before throwing the bag over her shoulder and walking to the doors. Nobody in the office will question Ava being on the move, after all she's usually on other floors talking to employees most of the day, learning the building's layout.

The halls are quiet now and Ava heads for the stairwell that will lead her to the alleyway on the other side of where those vehicles are parked. It should be safe enough, and it's the fastest way out of here without risking getting caught in the firefight. The stairwell is empty when Ava shoulders through the door, already taking the steps at a rapid pace with her gun in hand. Getting outside isn't going to be easy, and Ava's going to assume that the militia down there has covered all the exits. But it's the difference of taking on about two men as opposed to larger numbers if she remained upstairs.

Just as Ava's turning the landing corner, the door there opens and someone grabs her, pulling her back by her waist. Ava throws an elbow at the assailant but before it connects she's being pressed to the wall, an elbow over her chest, a hand over her mouth. Bright blue eyes stare back at her as Sara presses a finger to her own lips. *"Shut up if you don't want to die,"* Sara whispers, carefully removing her hand only after Ava rolls her eyes.

They're currently on the records floor, level three. It's always a ghost town down here, but Ava lets Sara remain pressed against her because right now they're in the only hidden alcove here by the steps. In the stairwell, Ava hears the sounds of boots coming up the stairs. If she had continued down those steps, she would have been greeted by what sounds like six men moving up to the further floors. There's no way Ava would have survived against them and their weapons.

Sara's eyes are focused on the little window in the door, her chest rising and falling against Ava's own. Scanning her face, confusion bubbles in Ava's chest because she does not understand why Sara would come here, about a half hour from her own job further in the city to warn Ava of this. *"Why aren't you with them?"* Ava whispers, hearing a door open in the stairwell about a floor up, *"Or why aren't you at your job?"*

"I finished this morning," Sara replies, her gaze flickering to Ava for a moment as her arm over Ava's chest lets up a bit, *"I don't do militia hits like this, but I heard about it from another contact in the city, recognized the address."* Ava never told Sara where she was working, but it doesn't surprise her that Sara knew. After all, Ava knows the exact building Sara's target was in as well. *"Besides,"* Sara tilts her head to the side with a little smirk, *"Couldn't have my favourite spy dying on me now could I?"*

It's a taunt, but it's confusing all the same. This is not part of the deal. Sara didn't have to warn Ava and she certainly didn't have to come here to make sure Ava got out. If the roles were reversed, Ava's not sure what she would do if she learned that Sara was in significant danger at a different location. Though the thought of suddenly losing the only constant communication she has with someone in the field like this is a bit daunting. *"I think it's clear,"* Ava nudges Sara away from her, peeking through the window there, *"I've got my car downstairs."*

"And I've got my bike, it's faster to get away," Sara replies, pushing the door open as they both

walk through.

“No,” Ava shakes her head, handing Sara one of the guns from her bag and watching as Sara checks the magazine, “No bikes. I hate them.” Sara only scoffs as they slowly make their way down the stairwell, muttering something under her breath. “Motorcycle fatalities are thirty times higher than car accident fatalities,” Ava explains as Sara shoots her a look, “I’m taking my car.”

They never said they had to go somewhere together, but it’s probably for the best seeing as one of them can drive and the other can keep a look out for anyone that might be following them. “You are aware that your job is far more dangerous than riding on a motorcycle, right?” Sara tests as Ava levels her with a look, not backing down about this. “Fine,” Sara sighs dramatically as they reach the ground floor, holding her hands up in mock surrender, “No bikes.”

The final door is there and Ava can already see movement just outside. Silently she motions for Sara to stop and waves for Sara to open the door on her count. When Ava nods, Sara pushes the door open and Ava can hear the sound of it colliding with a body on the other side. There’s another man with a gun there but Ava pushes it up as it fires, the bullet striking the brick wall above the door. With her gun in hand, Ava strikes the man once in the nose hard enough to hear the bone crack before bringing the gun down against his temple. He crumples there, body slack and limp against the wall.

When Ava turns around, Sara’s already taken care of the man she hit with the door. “Who the hell are these guys?” Ava asks, picking up the handgun near the guard she took out and tossing it to the side. Sara is doing the same, but she bends down and removes something else from the body as well, something that appears to be a pager or communication device of some kind.

“Bad people,” Sara replies as Ava snorts, scanning the area around them, “They’re some kind of local mafia or militia. The League called them in to take out the entire tech company up there. Not sure if that call included civilians as well.” It means that the office is going to be a crime scene this time tomorrow, and that’s always far easier for Ava to break into and get what she needs from.

When Ava turns back to Sara, movement catches her eye. A gun is leveled their way, glinting in the sun and Ava already knows that there is absolutely no time to fire off a shot before he can. But it’s not leveled at her. Grabbing Sara by the waist, Ava pulls her around and presses Sara flat against the wall, their chests brushing as the gun goes off. Pain ricochets through her chest when the bullet makes contact with her ribs, the sharp waves radiating to her spine and ribs.

Sara’s arm sneaks under Ava’s own, her gun raised and firing. Ava doesn’t see the man fall, too busy biting down on her tongue from the continued pain, but she knows that Sara’s aim is impeccable so she didn’t miss. “What the actual fuck did you just do?” Sara demands, her voice filled with anger as she pushes Ava from her, the contact not at all gentle. Ava winces as Sara flips them around so now Ava’s leaning against the wall. Hands are ripping Ava’s blazer open but Ava swats her away.

“I was trying to save your life, thank you for your gratitude,” Ava replies, grunting quietly as she lifts away from the wall, her ribs feeling as if they’re on fire. The bullet struck her in the back, right along her ribcage and the entire area smarts with a deep and throbbing pain.

In front of her, Sara is standing there, her eyes caught on the vest that has now been revealed. Tipping her head back to the wall, Ava takes a moment to breathe before they have to move again. Even breathing hurts, and Ava already knows that’s she’s likely broken a rib or two from the impact. “Nobody asked you to do that,” Sara mutters, her eyes flickering over Ava’s face, “And what’s with the vest, were you expecting to get shot or something?”

Scoffing, Ava pushes off the wall and resists the urge to wince once more. “Some of us prefer to do things for safety,” Ava retorts, pointing in the direction she’s parked as Sara starts walking down the alley, “I know that assassins just jump in feet first, but my people like to be prepared, just in case.”

Again Sara mutters something under her breath and Ava presses her hand against her aching side, her gun still in the other palm. Blue eyes look back to her as Sara glances over her shoulder and Ava swears that Sara almost looks concerned. But before Ava can tease her, Sara is looking forwards again, already setting off towards the parking lot. “I’m coming with you,” Sara speaks, her voice firm, “Someone has to make sure you didn’t just puncture a lung doing that.”

Ava thinks that Sara could at least pretend to be grateful, but really that would be a bit too much to ask here. The pain in her side aching too much to warrant much of a fight from Ava, she just follows behind Sara, ready to get back to her bed and dig out all the ice packs that she owns.

Copenhagen, Denmark — 18:15

Once inside her flat, Ava moves instantly to the bed and sits down, relief flooding her body. But it doesn’t last long because Sara is instantly there in front of her, a stern look on her face as she begins shoving Ava’s blazer from her shoulders. “For a spy you’re pretty stupid,” Sara states as Ava flinches at the rough and rushed treatment, “Stepping in front of a bullet right away. You’re not the goddamned Secret Service you know.”

Ava does know that, and she is over Sara scolding her for attempting to keep Sara from dying. Had that bullet hit Sara, it would have hit her right in the stomach and Ava knows there is every chance Sara would have died. “It was a split second decision,” Ava retorts, letting out a sharp inhale as she raises her arm a little too high, “And stop manhandling me, I can get out of my jacket by myself.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Sara fires back, unwinding the blazer from behind Ava and sliding it down her arm, “Let me help.” At this point Ava does need it. The bullet struck off the center of her spine but it’s high enough up that it’s impacted the mobility of her left arm as well. The only positive thing here is that it didn’t hit her shooting arm. Sara is currently undoing the straps of Ava’s vest, her fingers unfastening the straps and velcro. When Sara holds the vest out, Ava can see the bullet embedded in the material along the back. “You’re lucky he had shit aim,” Sara comments.

There’s something present on Sara’s face that Ava can’t really read, but it’s gone before she has the chance to really observe the emotion. It’s probably anger. Sara did spend the entire car ride here lecturing Ava over the same points about how stupid she was, about how Sara doesn’t need saving, about how Ava could have killed the man herself if she was a bit faster in noticing him there. Between that and Sara mocking the fact that Ava made them drive in a few circles to avoid the chance of being followed, Ava’s ready to be alone for a while.

“The shirt too,” Sara speaks, standing in front of Ava once more, pushing her legs open. Too tired and sore to complain, Ava lets Sara come stand in front of her and says nothing as Sara unbuttons her shirt and helps her slip it from her body. At least this part of it is familiar. But when Sara moves behind her on the bed and a palm lays against Ava’s skin, she tenses a bit. The touch is almost gentle in a way that Sara’s touch rarely ever is.

Feather light fingers trail over Ava’s ribs, maybe tracing the boundaries of what has to be a very large and colorful forming bruise. It hurts when Sara presses two fingers into the center of the area that is the most tender and Ava winces, flinching away from Sara. Ava’s not used to this. Nobody has helped her take care of an injury like this in years. Or at least nobody that hasn’t been

medically trained. "I think you've gotten lucky and only broke one or two ribs here," Sara's hand trails along Ava's spine, "They might even just be fractured."

Either way it hurts, the pain a strange juxtaposition from the gentle way Sara is brushing what feels like her knuckles over the area. A palm has settled over the side of Ava's ribcage in an almost comforting manner. "Well my breathing is fine," Ava replies, shifting away from the touch, not sure what to do about the strange way it makes her feel, "So the good news is I don't think I've punctured a lung, though I'm sure you'd like if I did."

It's a taunt that Sara doesn't reply to, and Ava finds the silence nothing but unsettling as Sara climbs from the bed and goes to the bag that she carried in with her. As she rifles through the pockets there, Ava slowly leans backwards so she's staring at the ceiling. Every little movement hurts and Ava already knows this is going to greatly compromise her ability to move on to the next job. It looks as if she might be stuck only taking a role that means observation only until she can move without aching.

Closing her eyes, Ava takes in a deep breath, exhaustion settling over her as her adrenaline begins to crash. This is always the worst part of an injury like this, the steep come down that lets the real level of pain make itself known. Tomorrow Ava will have to call in to Henry to explained what's happened after she goes back for the intel. He'll undoubtedly see this in the news and want to know what the hell went wrong. "Sit up," Sara speaks and Ava turns her head to the side.

Sara is there with something offered out in her palm, a cup of water in the other hand. Ava hadn't even heard Sara move to the kitchen, something that gives away just how tired she really is. "What is this?" Ava asks, using her arm to push herself up. Two little pills sit in the center of Sara's hand.

"Pain killers, I left the rest on your counter," Sara nods to the kitchen where Ava can see a little bottle there, "I keep stock with me in my bag for jobs that go sideways." Ava doesn't need to ask what Sara means by that because she's seen the scars all over Sara's body. That second time they slept together in an actual room other than just finding a convenient location is the first time Ava had really paid attention to just how many injuries Sara has accumulated over the years. Normally Ava's fairly shy regarding her own scars, but it had felt less daunting to know that Sara wasn't going to judge her for something like that seeing as she understood.

Not speaking, Ava takes the pills from Sara before taking the cup as well and swallowing them down. Sara hums quietly and settles there on the end of the bed, her eyes tracing over Ava's body. Now without her shirt and vest, Ava's sitting in only her bra and pants, something Sara's seen her in more than a few times by now. But the way Sara is watching her is different, and it makes Ava feel vulnerable and exposed in a way she never appreciates being. "Why did you do that?" Sara asks, blue eyes meeting Ava's own, brows drawn as she frowns.

Honestly, Ava's not entirely sure herself. It really had been a split second decision. But she hadn't even hesitated even though she knew there was a chance that the bullet was in fact going to hit her somewhere it would really hurt. "I'm a woman of many job titles," Ava replies diplomatically as Sara purses her lips before scoffing and looking to the side, "Why did you come here and let me know to get out."

The question comes before Ava could even stop herself. She shouldn't have asked that. Asking means that she cares that Sara came to let her know to get out before Ava found out the militia was breaching and likely would have died in the process. Right now though, Ava's too tired to care about the implication of her question or her actions today. "Because then who would lecture me for just doing my job?" Sara replies, her lips curving up in that familiar smile, "That and I like the sex."

Now that's something Ava can believe. In this line of work it's not really safe getting involved with others. Not that what Sara and Ava are doing together is safe, but it feels more secure than something temporary in the field might. Wanting to get away from this subject, Ava ventures back to something Sara never explained to her in full before. "What ended up happening in Malaysia, you never said," Ava reclines into her pillows, letting out a quiet grunt when her ribs protest painfully, "Were you there?"

"The League took out the gang leader and the head chemist that had been working on the formula," Sara replies, leaning back on her hands as she spread out on the bed, her legs brushing near Ava's own, "They called in a bunch of League members to sift through the ruins afterwards, take out everyone else. Not me though, I had to stay away to avoid the League catching on about it all but, some of your own people were there."

Ava had heard about that from Henry when she was in London the most recent visit. "I think they sent out a few spies to gather what information remained, to make sure nothing could be traced back to us," Ava recalls back to the conversation she had with Henry, "Not me though, had to stay away."

Sara's lips twitch upwards at Ava's repeat of her own words. That look is back again in Sara's eyes, something guarded, something Ava doesn't think she's seen there before. Whatever it is, Ava doesn't really like the way it makes nerves swell in her chest so she looks away. "You know they say you're heartless. Detached, cold, occasionally calloused in your jobs," Sara explains as Ava glances to her in confusion, "Your name in the League is the Director, though I think they've attributed too many jobs to you. It's often hard to tell where you've been other than the more obvious cases where that poison has been used."

Usually Ava switches up her poisons. Even the one Dmitriy gave her this time around is different than the previous kinds. And she's always careful that none of it can really be traced back to any kind of source. "The name could be worse," Ava shrugs, not sure what to make about the fact that she's been named by the League, "I was expecting it to be terrible after what you said back in Cleveland."

A small laugh comes from Sara as she lifts her shoulder in a shrug. Once more Sara's wearing normal clothing other than her job attire. She's dressed in a sweater that Ava hadn't really noticed before now and a pair of brown corduroy pants. Her hair falls over her shoulders in soft waves, barely catching some of the light coming from the kitchen behind her. The outfit makes her look softer, nothing like the absolutely lethal and powerful woman that Ava knows she is. "Thank you," Sara speaks, her tone quiet as her eyes meet Ava's own, "For Malaysia."

Lifting her shoulder in a shrug Ava shifts on the bed and glances to the side. "You did me a favour so I did one back," Ava replies in a nonchalant tone as Sara hums quietly, "They were a bad group of people. And there's more there to be taken down, from what I've gathered." When Ava looks back to Sara, she finds that Sara isn't looking at her anymore, her head turned to the side, her jaw working.

Clearly Ava had been right about something regarding this drug being a very personal and touchy subject for Sara. In her digging Ava found that the research behind it doesn't end in Malaysia. There were accounts tied to the chemist that not even Ava could track, though she had tried that night in her records bunker. But before Ava can ask about that, Sara is standing abruptly from the bed and going to her bag. "Well I've got a flight to catch in the morning and things to settle," Sara speaks, clearing her throat with her back now to Ava, "Better get a move on seeing as I have to go move that bike."

Ava hums, tilting her head to the side as Sara packs her weapons away neatly, removing knife after knife from hidden pockets of her pants. “Well I’d offer sex but,” Ava gestures to herself as Sara turns around with the bag over her shoulder, “I don’t think I would be the best participant.” Sara’s lips curl upwards with a smile as she laughs, shaking her head slightly in what seems to be amusement. “You might want to wait a bit for things at the office to die down,” Ava continues, taking in a deep breath and preparing what she’s about to offer, “That couch over there pulls out, if you need somewhere safe to lie low overnight.”

A series of emotions flicker over Sara’s face, moving faster than Ava can decipher before settling on confusion. “It’ll probably have calmed down by the time I get there, that militia moves quickly and I’m sure the cops will be too busy with the scene to care who’s showing up to move vehicles,” Sara replies, already tugging the door open, “Besides, nowhere is ever safe so, may as well get the job done.” She pauses there, halfway out the door before glancing back over her shoulder, “I’ll see you around Sharpe.”

With that Sara is gone, the door closed once more as Ava’s left alone. Staring at the door, Ava parses back through the last few minutes of conversation they just had and realizes that this might be the first time that they’ve talked about something outside of a crisis without Sara either teasing Ava about something or mocking her in some fashion. That unsettled feeling still rests in Ava’s stomach and she wonders if she should call this all off with Sara, if she’s letting the assassin get a little too close.

While Ava’s made other close contacts in this job, none of them confuse her in the way Sara does. Each time Ava thinks that she has Sara’s personality and actions pinned down, Sara goes and does something else. Today was completely out of what she thought Sara’s character was, and Ava doesn’t know what to think about the fact that both of them had somehow done something today to protect the other. But then again, this is the job. Both of them kill at times, and both of them protect. Perhaps that’s just all there is to it.

Ava’s reaction today had been a knee-jerk one, something engrained in her to keep those safe who don’t deserve to die. Sara might be a pain in the ass, but Ava is never going to believe that Sara deserves death of any kind. Her head too filled and cluttered to continue sitting around thinking about this, Ava drags herself from the bed to set her locks. Tomorrow she can overthink it all again, but tonight Ava’s going to curl up and sleep off these pain killers.

Chapter End Notes

I had forgotten how difficult it is to keep track of details in longer and more complicated fics, so should someone see something that makes no sense, definitely call me out on it so I can fix it. I had to edit a whole section here because I remembered a detail from an upcoming outline section but thought I had wrote it already. But yes, I hope you enjoyed and as always thank you for reading along!

Part Six

Chapter Summary

Ava learns that Sara is far more than she appears to be and realizes that they're growing closer than Ava expected. She knows that she should pull away, that what they're doing could blow up on them one day. When a job goes south, Ava can no longer continue lying to herself about finding Sara's company enjoyable.

Chapter Notes

I hate summaries. Just, never trust what I write there. It does not sum up the chapter at all but I always feel like I have to put something there. But here we are with part six. It took some time to write this one because I was not pleased with the smut (you'll see what I mean), but couldn't wrestle with it anymore so I just let it be. Now that my schedule has been picking up, updates are bound to not be as frequent but I am of course still working on this when I get the time. There's two chapters left in this segment, then comes the second segment that carries kind of the conclusions to all things mentioned in the plot so far.

To everyone who has been reading along, thank you as always and I hope that you enjoy this six part!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

New York City, USA — 21:00

"God I needed that tonight," Sara exhales, already pushing off the bed as Ava lays there spread out, her arm over her face, her chest still rising and falling in rapid breaths. Sara had been absolutely relentless tonight, thrusting into Ava with rapid and hard strokes, each movement bringing Ava higher and higher. From the moment Ava found Sara in her hotel lobby she figured something was up, but she had no idea that it was going to lead to this. "It's been such a shitty day," Sara mutters, now sitting on the edge of the bed.

Each ridge in Sara's spine stands out in the low light, casting small shadows to just one side where the light is striking her body at an angle. Bruising covers the left side of her body, old and faded, maybe from a few days ago if Ava had to make a guess. It's been a month since they last saw each other in Denmark, but only a week since they last saw each other. After a long absence, Ava had been quite surprised to find Sara there in the lobby the evening. Sara hadn't even waited until they were in the elevator, instead she had fisted her hands in Ava's blazer and pushed her against the wall nearby, setting off the buttons.

Tension ripples through each of the muscles in Sara's body and Ava scans her back, trying to see if there's something that can clue her in to might be wrong. Sara's a puzzle to Ava sometimes, far more complicated than she originally thought. Ava's initial assumptions that Sara is all anger and violence and recklessness had been wrong. While Sara is still fairly loose with her field conduct,

Ava gets the feeling that some of Sara's more sarcastic banter might be a front for something she's hiding.

"Well I guess it's a good thing we weren't after each others clients," Ava remarks as Sara snorts before she sighs, "I'm still here another five days at least to see if I can't get this intel before I have to pass up on another job." There's no response, just Sara humming quietly to herself, not moving towards her clothing just yet. "But your bad day, did you want to talk about it?" The moment the words leave Ava's mouth they feel wrong. She's already grimacing by the time Sara turns around and gives her a look. "I was just trying to be nice," Ava shrugs.

Sara's brows draw down once more, but she's smiling just a bit as she shakes her head. "Well don't try to be nice, it doesn't suit you," Sara teases as she flops backwards to her back, nearly crashing into Ava's shins as she does so, "That and it's weird. Spies and assassins aren't supposed to do feelings."

There's no real manual that says they can't. But Sara is right in a general sense that attachment to things, places, and people do get in the way of the job. "You're just a walking cliché aren't you—the assassin with no feelings, never one to talk about her emotions," Ava can't stop herself from taunting, nudging Sara's shoulder with her foot as Sara slaps her away with a small laugh, "I guess I'll just leave you to your self-torturing thoughts, alone and pretending you don't need affection and connection."

Now Sara is properly laughing, a sound that brings a slight smile to Ava's face as Sara jerks half of the comforter over her body. Clicking her tongue, Ava pushes it back down, not wanting Sara to ruin her neatly arranged comforter. "Well thank you," Sara retorts, rolling on her side and resting her head on her arm, "My tortured soul and family issues thank you."

"Family issues?" Ava prompts, laughing quietly as Sara shrugs, "I never once said you had family issues, so it seems as if you've self-diagnosed yourself on this one." Another hand slaps at Ava's thigh, but this time around, Sara leaves it there. Her breath hitching, Ava stares at the fingers tracing over the inside of her knee. The smile has dropped from Sara's face, almost as if it was never there in the first place.

Ava doesn't know what to do here. It's been a long time since she's really tried to get to know someone, and even before the Operative she was never very good at meeting people. Friends might not be the right word to name what she and Sara have, but all Ava knows is that she doesn't really consider Sara the enemy anymore and hasn't for a while now. The touch isn't uncomfortable, but it's strange and unfamiliar and elicits that strange weightless feeling in Ava's stomach that she associates with rapid drops in height when flying.

Silence lingers between them, not the kind that feels stilted, but the one that feels filled with anticipation. "I don't think anyone can escaping having some kind of family issue in general," Sara says as she lifts her shoulder up, her fingers still drawing mindless circles on Ava's knee as she stares at her hand, "I was already a fuck up before I was an assassin, certainly not my parent's pride and joy. Compare me now to my sister the lawyer and I'd be the odd man out even if I wasn't a trained killer."

Everything in Sara's tone is tinged with bitterness, but there's also sorrow there that Ava's not heard from her before. Denmark shifting things, and Ava's not sure if they've shifted for the better. Sara now holds her targets so Ava can come and get the information that she needs from their companies before Sara kills them. In return, Ava does her best to sink the company or turn over copies of whatever it is that Sara needed. Never once has Ava been able to guess what it is that Sara is either searching for or tracking down, and she gets the feeling Sara might never tell her.

Neither of them quite trust the other in full, that much is clear. But now after sex, Sara lingers here longer, usually stopping to talk to Ava about what jobs they've worked. After Denmark, they met in Egypt again and Sara had meticulously inspected the bruising from the bullet, claiming that Ava needed an all clear for sex. Ava finds herself no longer dreading Sara's arrival in the field with her, she instead almost welcomes it. Sara is frustrating sometimes, but she's also predictable to a certain extent, and she definitely makes everything interesting.

But right now, Ava doesn't know what to say. There's an urge there to soothe Sara, simply because it feels wrong to see Sara hurting, even if she is hiding it. Ava can hear that hurt in her tone, and she can see it in the way that Sara is lacking her usual presence, almost curled in on herself. "But I'm sure you understand how that is," Sara continues, her eyes glancing upwards and almost startling Ava who hadn't meant to be caught staring, "Surely your family can't be too happy you ceased existing."

Family isn't something Ava really wants to talk about. Even after all these years it's a touchy subject. Shifting on the bed slightly, Ava lifts her shoulder in a shrug, doing her best not to get combative because Sara's not digging this time, she's just asking. "I was an only child so, can't say I know what it's like to face comparison to siblings," Ava replies, looking over to the side where their clothing litters the floor, "As for parents, they're dead so, no one around to really do the comparing even if I did have a sister."

It's more information than Ava gives away, and maybe more than she should give away. But when she turns back to Sara, she finds that some of that tension has melted away from Sara's features, replaced instead by a little smile. "You say that so calmly," Sara teases, her eyes sparkling as she pushes up off the bed, her hand falling from Ava's thigh as she reaches for the shot glasses and bottle of vodka on Ava's nightstand, "Maybe I'm not the one with issues."

The little joke cuts through some of the pressure that had been rising in Ava's chest, relieving her from having to talk about this any further. "Shut up," Ava mutters, nudging Sara lightly in her side. The drinks are there from earlier when Sara said she needed something strong before they did anything further. After slamming down two shots, Sara had tasted of the sharp liquor and Ava normally doesn't enjoy that but with Sara it felt right. "Don't get that on my bed," Ava warns, watching as Sara fills a glass far too full.

That very glass is passed to her and Ava swears quietly when she fumbles in taking it, causing some to spill down her chest. Glancing to the side, Ava finds that Sara is watching the cold droplets travel down her skin, slowly getting closer to her hips. "Well," Sara holds out her glass and Ava does the same, "Here's to our families fucking us up and everything that came after."

That's something Ava can cheer to, and she laughs quietly before gently knocking her glass against Sara's own. This is vodka Sara brought, and it tastes slightly of cherries or something else that is sweet and cuts through the sting. The very moment the glass is taken from her, Sara is rolling into Ava's side and lips meet her own. Sara tastes of those same cherries, sweet and lingering as Ava tangles her hand in Sara's hair and draws her closer. Another laugh tumbles from Ava's lips into Sara's mouth as Sara's hand drifts down her stomach, following the exact same path the spilled drink did. Things might have changed, but others seem to have stayed exactly the same.

London, England — 14:02

Ava should be paying attention right now. She should be focused on Henry and what he is saying instead of staring off the clock in the corner of the room. Or she should at least be pretending that

she's listening, but at this point Ava hasn't the slightest clue what's being said. They were talking about some complex job he might need her on in a few weeks time, something about a CEO of some company needing to be looked into.

But Ava's mind isn't here in this room, and it's certainly not invested in this conversation. Instead she's stuck thinking about something that was said to her only yesterday, a passing comment that was made. Ava's always been an over-thinker, and in this line of work that never hurts. Over-analyzing means making good and reliable plans, as well as a multitude of backup plans. Never once has this part of who she is failed her. Except for maybe now, when it's making Ava obsess over a comment that probably meant nothing.

Yesterday in Stockholm where Ava had been for a job, she had spent her evening once more with Sara in a hotel room. This time around, there was no sex, there was only work. Sara had information that Ava needed and she had asked to see it when Ava had finally broken in. It might not have been a good call, but Ava had agreed to do it. She'd broken into the files there and laid them all out, digging through them a few at a time while searching for keywords. Ava was looking for evidence of the company's involvement in some fraud operation that was in close ties with the Operative.

As it turned out, the company was invested in far more than just that. Any evil deed imaginable was there in those files, from kidnappings to assassinations to documentation of human rights violations. Sara had seen those and had insisted that Ava do something to stop the company. Only this time around, Ava's hands were tied. It happens sometimes, where the intel is wrong and a company really isn't looking into the Operative or contains no knowledge of them. While it's not common, it does in fact happen once and a while.

Whenever Ava can't find evidence, she's prohibited from engaging as per the rules of the Operative. There is to be no unnecessary meddling or actions taken. Sara hadn't liked that. Ava hadn't been able to change her answer when she told Sara no. They've not really fought in a long time, at least not the kind of fight where things get ugly. There've been the same levels of gentle teasing, but this was a real kind of anger coming from Sara that Ava hadn't witnessed before. It took her by surprise.

Sara had been livid, pacing back and forth over the ground as she tried to argue with Ava, her eyes blazing with a challenge, her words loud and harsh. But Ava stood her ground. Doing what Sara was asking, interfering in business that is not her own like this and without the clearance of the Operative would bring her nothing but trouble. Sara didn't seem to care about that though, and she had stormed to the door. "You know, I thought maybe the League rumors were wrong about you," Sara had said, her voice low, her jaw clenched as she stared out the half open door, "But they were right. You are just as cold as they say."

It shouldn't have hurt, but it did. Sara had left before Ava had the chance to explain—that if she could do something here, she would. But getting involved would mean being benched and potentially even losing everything she's worked for in the Operative. Spies who go rogue are not treated with respect, and it would likely only draw attention to the reasoning behind Ava's decision to bring down the company. There's a chance that an investigation into her actions could even uncover her connection to Sara which would place them both in danger.

Despite knowing this, Sara's words had stung and settled low in Ava's stomach. They plagued her all night and even now, about fifteen hours later, they've yet to leave her. "You're not paying attention to me are you?" Henry asks and Ava's attention snaps back up to him. He doesn't seem angry, maybe just curious instead. "Have you been heard anything I've said in the past five minutes?" Henry inquires as Ava sighs out a quiet negative response, "Is it the month long job?"

That's just the standing estimate for now, but you know how these things go—they're never as long as we expect they'll be."

It's not the job at all, though Ava should probably make up a lie and say that it is. However, her need for an answer gets the best of her here. "Am I cold?" Ava asks, watching as Henry's expression morphs into one of surprise. He's leaning forwards now, hands folded on the desk as his brows draw behind his glasses. "I just ask because I was called out by a target in the field," Ava waves off her answer, hoping Henry doesn't dig, "It caught me off guard because I've never been called that before."

That's only a partial truth. When Ava was in college she had a hard time connecting with others and she one day heard a group of students call her distanced, which is not the same as being called cold but it's as close a comparison as Ava has. Now there's an organizations of assassins out there who think that Ava is the calloused one and it's not sitting well with her. What has settled even less positively is that Sara, the very person who had been hovering over Ava's shoulder that evening, had suddenly turned on her.

"Well, you can be yes, but only because that's what we trained you to be," Henry replies, a look of bewilderment passing over his face, "I wouldn't pay a comment like that any mind. Any good spy needs to be cold and disconnected, ruthless when they need to be. It's why we picked you." Humming quietly, Ava leans back in her chair, her eyes trained on the ground, suddenly glad that Henry can't actually see her reactions to his words. "You had no family and no connections and were used to life on the move, it made you perfect," Henry continues on as Ava flinches slightly, "These are all good things Ava, they're what make you one of the best."

Ava's just not sure about that. Those were things that she used to pride herself in. Moving around so much felt like Ava was always having these little adventures. But as the years go by, this job has come to mean more violence and more dangerous targets. The constant and rapid rise of technology means that jobs sometimes take longer or involve taking more risks. Things are not as they were when Ava started, not in terms of mechanics and not in terms of her perception of this life.

She's not ready to leave, just perhaps ready to slow down a bit, less time spent moving around. But Ava voices none of this. It was only recently that she's been given more freedom, so perhaps she can wiggle some time in for herself. "I guess you're right," Ava agrees, nodding her head and taking up the file from the desk once more, "If you don't mind going from the top again, tell me why I'm headed to Italy?"

Florence, Italy — 01:32

Loud music thrums in the room around Ava as she lifts her drink to her lips, finally able to relax now that her job has finished. It was an easy job, and Ava's allocated herself three days to take some time before moving to the next one. At the end of her meeting with Henry she had confessed to feeling some general traveling fatigue and he had agreed that breaks between jobs should be a regular thing that Ava makes an effort to take. In return, Ava's taken on the next two cases as a favour to another spy who apparently has been injured and was unable to finish something over in Ireland.

Tonight though, Ava simply had to take out a target while here at the nightclub, she's a young heiress from England who is visiting the town and has been spreading dangerous sentiment regarding the nature of the Intelligence Agencies in country. Henry said that he had been recently to a meeting at Downing Street where the Operative had brought up far too many times in a

Cabinet meeting for comfort due to the efforts of this heiress, so termination was the only option.

Ava made it relatively painless, a simple poke with the needle after bumping into the twenty-eight year old at the bar not even an hour ago. It'll take a bit longer for the poison to take effect, but already Ava imagines the alcohol that has been consumed by the heiress tonight is going to shorten that window. Messy kills aren't Ava's thing, she prefers something that leaves virtually no trace afterwards, be it a bomb or a poisoning.

With a small sigh, Ava turns and takes in the room around her that is crowded with a variety of different people. Clubs are not her scene, and certainly this one is out of her comfort zone. There is a relatively small dance floor that rests in the center of the room, cast in vibrant lights as the sultry music plays on in the background. It's the ideal place for people watching, and Ava's been focused on a young couple to the side who appear to be in an argument of some kind. Whatever has happened the younger looking woman is not pleased at what the older has apparently done.

They're trying and failing to be subtle about their fighting, quickly gaining the attention of others around them. Fighting is the one thing that Ava does not envy couples of, and this couple appears to have no shame about swapping verbal blows in public. Ava has dressed with the sole function of blending in tonight, in all black with a silk shirt and buttoned pants that come up her waist. She'd left her hair down, something that she tries to avoid doing on the job, but her usual tight bun or ponytail was not really going to help her fit in this evening.

Bringing her drink to her lips once more, Ava watches as the young heiress moves from the dance floor to the top level of the club, security teams trailing behind her. They were painfully easy to evade when Ava had poked the heiress at the beginning of the night, and she can't help but scoff at their poorly hidden weapons. "Sharpe," a voice says and Ava turns her head to see Sara there, dressed in a white tank and what might be black leather pants, "I'm not letting you kill my target, if that's why you're here."

Ava's not entirely surprised to see Sara here. Sara had mentioned back in the states that she was going to be in Italy next, and seeing as they always manage to find each other in these cases, Ava had prepared accordingly. "I'm afraid it's too late for that," Ava replies with a small shrug, glancing up to the top balcony where the heiress is leaning over the railing and peering over with a wide drug-induced grin.

Sara's eyes move there as well before falling on Ava again, narrowed and suspicious. When Sara takes a step forwards, Ava doesn't stop her, though she does roll her eyes when Sara's hand roams to her hip before grazing over her backside. "Front pocket," Ava sighs as Sara brings them chest to chest, her blue eyes glaring up into Ava's own. A hand slips into Ava's front pocket and Sara removes the vial there, holding it to the light as a frown appears on her lips.

Eyes flickering over Sara's face, Ava waits in silence for her response. They've not talked since they were both stateside, and Ava's not sure if Sara's still angry at her for the decision about the company. "How long?" Sara asks, tucking the vial back but not backing up, her fingers digging into the skin along Ava's side.

"Maybe three hours?" Ava looks to the railing where the heiress has since slumped against the ground there, seemingly laughing uncontrollably, "Maybe less than that."

"God you're annoying," Sara sighs impatiently, but there's no bite to her words, just resignation. Shifting from one foot to the other, Ava maintains her spot pressed up against Sara, unsure what comes next. "Well seeing as you killed my target, I guess you owe me a dance," Sara replies as Ava raises a single brow, not expecting that, "I hate coming here so, may as well find some way to make it worth it."

Ava doesn't like crowds, and she likes being in the middle of them even less. It makes dangers hard to see. But before she can say something, Sara is taking the glass from her hand and setting it to the side, dragging her to the floor right after. Left and right bodies bump into Ava and she stiffens each time, never liking accidental contact of that kind. It's hotter out here, something that instantly has Ava making a face as she considers why that might be.

There's a quieter and less crowded place off to the side, and that appears to be where Sara is leading them. It's near several round, high-backed booths that hold the important members and visitors of the club, each of them filling the seats and talking as they look to the floor. Sara comes to a stop a few feet from the booths, leaving them in the very outskirts of the crowd. This isn't the place Ava would have chosen, but Sara's clearly made up her mind as she winds her arms around Ava's neck and sways to the beat. "Relax," Sara grabs Ava's hips, pushing on them lightly, "Just move with me."

Dancing is not something spies do, but Ava bites that comment back, already knowing what Sara might say in reply—that Ava could learn if she really put her mind to it. "I hate coming here to Italy," Sara mutters as a song comes to conclusion and another one begins, a more upbeat one, "I don't know the language so I have to rely on translating devices."

It's a strange thing for Sara to not know, and Ava backs up in confusion. "You speak four of the most common Middle Eastern languages, but you don't know Italian?" Ava questions as Sara's hips roll into her own, igniting heat in her stomach, "Tell me how that works out for an assassin when you're traveling here in Europe?"

"I already told you," Sara tilts her head to the side, her lips lifted in that smile Ava's so familiar with and so relieved to see is back again, "It doesn't work out, and I hate these jobs here so I typically avoid them." In her arms, Sara is turning, her back now pressed against Ava's chest, her hands drawing Ava's own to splay over her stomach. They're in the middle of a club right now, but they're hardly doing anything different from those around them. "Thought maybe you could translate for me," Sara prompts, her lips near Ava's ear as she tilts her head back, "I've got a thing for women who speak multiple languages."

Ava thinks that Sara just has a thing for women period, but she snorts instead of letting her comment out. Sara's hands are reaching back, holding onto Ava's thighs as she rocks her hips, each time striking the front of Ava's pelvis and doing nothing to soothe the heat curling and coiling in Ava. When Sara prompts Ava to focus on the music and tell her what it is, Ava sucks in a breath and tries to pay attention. "It's something about not wanting casual sex anymore," Ava murmurs, shivering when Sara's lips meet her ear, "I don't know this one."

Palms sliding over Sara's stomach and brushing the underside of her breasts, Ava lowers them down to Sara's hips and then pauses. Sara lets out a little laugh as Ava's hand brushes slightly over something sitting just between Sara's hips. "I have to confess I knew you were in the city," Sara drawls out, her tone low as Ava feels the outline of the strap-on there tucked inside her pants, "Thought we might mix things up a bit, though I didn't know you were going to come here."

There's something about the thought of Sara wearing this all evening that has Ava sucking in a deep breath through her teeth. "You really wore this out on a job," Ava questions, slightly incredulous. Digging her fingers into the sides of Sara's hips as Sara hums proudly, Ava noses at the side of Sara's neck, "While trying to protect someone, you had this in your pants."

A laugh rumbles up from Sara's throat as Ava slides her nose along the column of her neck. Sara smells like coconut and vanilla, nothing like the harsh scents that fill the room around them. "Where else was I supposed to put it?" Sara muses as Ava snorts quietly, "It could fall out if I had

it in my purse.” As if Sara carries around a purse. Ava has seen the vests that Sara wears instead, each one filled with knives of different sizes. “At least here it’s not going anywhere,” Sara purrs in a low tone, her hand guiding Ava’s back between her legs once more, “Not until I want it to anyways.”

Dragging her hands slowly up Sara’s thighs and hips, Ava settles her palms against Sara’s sides once more. “You’re insatiable,” Ava murmurs, dropping her lips to Sara’s neck, desire burning through her body. When Sara hums as Ava nips her skin lightly, Ava presses her fingertips further into Sara’s hipbones, her stomach curling in anticipation. It’s not something Ava’s tried before, but the thought of Sara using that definitely has peaked Ava’s interest. Thoughts of Sara moving inside of her using that toy fill Ava’s head as she lets her hands roam Sara’s body.

Ava suddenly doesn’t care that they’re surrounded by others, too focused on Sara and the hands that have reached up and tangled around her neck. A particularly hard tug to the back of her hair makes a stuttered sound rise and fall in the back of Ava’s throat. Lightly, Ava bites the skin near Sara’s jawbone, something that only makes Sara repeat the same motion again. That need to feel Sara moving against her, to feel Sara’s fingers shifting to all the right places wells up in Ava once more.

A new song comes on, something definitely less upbeat than the one before, and a song that Ava happens to already know the lyrics to. Sara requests the translation once more, her fingers gripping tight into Ava’s thighs. Ava does her best to translate as Sara turns around, her lips attaching to Ava’s neck, her palms pressing Ava even closer. Ava doesn’t really want to continue the translation but Sara urges her on. “‘You talk a lot and I talk too much’,” Ava manages out as Sara bites down particularly hard. Her grip faltering along Sara’s sides Ava inhales shallowly, “‘Now find a way to make me shut up.’”

“I thought you’d never ask,” Sara teases, her lips detaching from Ava’s skin, her smile wicked, “Bathroom, or your place?”

Ava wishes that she had the patience to say her place, but she’s staying twenty minutes from her and she won’t survive that long in a car with Sara when she’s like this. Already Ava can feel the uncomfortable press of her own arousal against her pants, something she knows Sara is going to take great pleasure in finding. “Bathroom,” Ava nods her head decisively as Sara steps back for her, her pupils already dark, “Over there.”

It’s really more of a private bathroom, but Ava already swiped the key this evening so she could have a place to prepare the poison before the heiress arrived. It’s certainly less public than the dance floor. Ava leads the way with Sara in tow, glancing over her shoulder to make sure that nobody is paying attention to where they’re going. The moment Ava is inside, Sara is there against her, pressing her roughly against the wall. Sara’s lips are relentless, insatiable—chasing after Ava.

With a single hand to the side, Ava fumbles with the lock. Heat builds in her stomach as Sara’s teeth sink in her lips and a hand undoes the buttons of her pants. “You sure about this?” Sara asks, backing up, her hand still laid along Ava’s jaw. It’s the first time that Sara’s actually checked, usually Ava’s giving her more than enough consent through responding to each of Sara’s actions. This is another change, and Ava nods her head, not really wanting to talk as she draws Sara back in.

They don’t do gentle, or at least they didn’t before. Ava’s not sure that she can call this gentle though, not entirely. Sara keeps her pressed against the wall at all times, her spine resting against cold tiling—but the hands along Ava’s sides hold her carefully. There’s urgency in the way Sara kisses, but patience in the way she pulls Ava’s shirt from her pants. Pain smarts along Ava’s neck when Sara bites the skin there, but her tongue immediately soothes it before Sara latches her mouth

over a spot and sucks hard enough to leave what is going to be a dark bruise.

It's a series of contrasts, delicate as if this is some kind of a dance and Ava can't tell if she prefers things this way or not. Either way, she pushes Sara's hand down past her pants, needing to be touched. Ava doesn't care if Sara teases her for being needy—she is, and this time she has no shame about it. Sara peels Ava's pants down just slightly as Ava lifts her hips from the wall to help. Finally, nimble fingers slip through her and Ava's head hits the back of the tiled wall as she closes her eyes. "God I love it when you do that," Sara mutters, her voice thick as she finds Ava's clit, something that draws a quiet whimper from Ava.

Sara's words carve through Ava, intensifying the pleasure. With no warning, Sara removes her hands and Ava sighs impatiently, bringing her gaze back to Sara. In front of her, Sara is unzipping her pants and Ava's stomach rolls in both excitement and nervous anticipation. The dildo is larger than Ava imagined, maybe seven inches in length and the girth bigger than anything Ava's tried before. It's also bright pink, something that makes her laugh as Sara rolls her eyes. "Really?" Ava teases, as Sara shrugs. Pushing down any of her nerves, Ava reaches out and grabs Sara by the shirt once more. With no warning, Ava draws Sara in to her roughly.

Sara's elbows strike the tile on either side of Ava's head, her eyes wide and dark, her lips parted slightly. Pride courses through Ava, making her smile. There's nothing she loves more than being able to catch Sara off guard. No matter how friendly they get with each other, Ava knows that competitive streak won't ever disappear. That is something she knows she prefers. "Figured the color wouldn't matter," Sara shrugs, her lips brushing Ava's own as she speaks, "It's not as if we're going to see it."

Humming quietly, Ava draws Sara back in by the nape of her neck and kisses her once more. The very tip of the dildo slides through her, not entering her yet. Ava's hips shift upwards automatically when Sara draws it right over her clit. She can feel that smirk on Sara's lips, that amused exhale of her breath. Even after all this time, Sara is still just as intoxicating as she was before, but there's so much more about her that Ava's drawn to.

She's drawn to the way that Sara matches the speed of their thrusts, dragging the toy through Ava and letting Ava get used to this. Ava's struck by the way Sara's cradling her jaw. She's hooked on the way Sara's breathing falters when Ava pushes back into her, knowing that the base of the toy is pressing into Sara as well. But most importantly Ava finds herself stuck staring into those bright blue eyes when Sara pulls backwards. "You ready?" Sara asks, hand sliding between their bodies.

Nervously, Ava nods her head yes, wrapping her arms around Sara. Something about this feels awkward, like maybe the pair of them has lost their rhythm somewhere in this newness. Ava wonders if Sara notices it too. Or maybe this is just awkward for Ava because she's never tried this before. It's something that feels vulnerable in a way she hasn't allowed herself to be around Sara. They've had sex before, and a lot of it, but this is something new. This is Ava allowing herself to try something new and that makes everything different.

The tip lines up with Ava's entrance and she can feel her muscles clenching slightly as she looks down, not able to see anything past where Sara's stomach meets her own. "Just relax," Sara soothes, her voice uncharacteristically quiet. One hand is on Ava's hip, rubbing in soothing circles as Ava does her best to nod, looking up into Sara's eyes as the toy slides inside. It can't be more than an inch inside but Ava can feel her muscles resisting it. It's not painful per say, but it was more of a stretch than Ava anticipated and she winces slightly. "What?" Sara asks, immediately stopping, her eyes flickering over Ava's face, "I've got lube somewhere out in my coat if we need it."

They definitely don't need lube, but the thought of Sara coming here that prepared almost makes Ava want to laugh. She doesn't though, her words caught as she remains with her eyes closed. When Sara goes to back up, Ava grabs her by the hip, stilling Sara's motions. "No, don't pull out," Ava tells her, swallowing slightly as she feels herself adjusting still, "I've just—never done this before." Looking to the side, Ava absolutely refuses to make eye contact with Sara right now. Heat floods her cheeks and she can almost feel Sara's disbelieving stare caught on her face.

This job doesn't exactly allow time to experiment with partners, and Ava's not always the biggest fan of penetration anyways. There's a certain level of vulnerability required to try something new with someone, a fact that Ava's sure Sara is aware of as well. "Are you meaning to tell me that I'm taking your strap-on virginity in the middle of a nightclub in Italy?" Sara says, her voice lilting as Ava levels her with a glare, "In a bathroom, of all places." That is exactly what Ava is saying, and she just rolls her eyes, knowing there's no getting her out of this teasing. "Should've told me," Sara continues on with that wide smile, "I'd have brought rose petals or something—make it special."

As always Sara is nothing but ridiculous, but this time around, rather than annoying Ava it almost seems to ease the tension just a bit. Not able to stop the tiny laugh that falls from her lips, Ava just shakes her head. "You always talk so much," Ava chides, drawing Sara back to her with a hand along her jaw. Sara hums into the kiss, and this time is slower than it was before. Sara's lips move slowly, languidly against Ava's own. They're taking their time, breaking a silent and self-imposed rule they set for this. "Keep moving," Ava taps Sara's hip, "Just go slow."

There's no question Ava's wet enough to take it, but that doesn't stop her muscles from tensing up as Sara pushes inside bit by bit. Her breathing hitches when their pelvis' meet, and Ava can feel herself clenching around the toy. It's deeper than she thought, and Ava's never quite felt a sensation like this before. The toy is settled far further inside her than fingers have ever reached. That initial bit of pain has shifting to nothing but pleasure as Ava feels herself clench around the toy. Heat is curling in her stomach, chasing away the nerves that were once there before, leaving that electrifying sensation behind instead. "Fuck," Ava mutters when Sara moves back a bit before thrusting back in.

Pleasure sparks through her body when Sara does the same thing again, clearly taking Ava's utterance as permission to continue. With her hand on Sara's face still, Ava draws Sara even closer, tilting her head to capture Sara's bottom lip. "Now?" Sara asks and the best Ava can do is hum quietly, already knowing that when she comes, it's going to be fast. Already Ava can feel the beginnings of her orgasm building up and Sara's barely moved. Maybe if it was anyone else Ava would find it in her to be embarrassed, but she knows that she has the same effect on Sara as well.

The pace Sara sets is slow—too slow. Ava shifts against her, silently prompting Sara to go faster. Ava rocks into Sara, smirking into the kiss and relishing the surprised gasp that falls from Sara's lips. "Fuck," Sara exhales breathily, her eyes closed when Ava backs up and does the same thing, watching Sara this time. Sara's eyes are closed, the tendons in her neck showing as she breathes in heavily before opening her eyes. They're dark and so blue and Ava sees something there in them that she can't read.

It doesn't matter anyways because Sara's kissing her once more, finally picking up her pace. They find a rhythm this time, chasing away the awkwardness that existed before. Ava's desire burns through her and she can feel her legs beginning to tremble even before Sara shifts a hand between their bodies. Deft fingers find her clit, forming circles there and a moan topples from Ava's lips. Gripping Sara's shirt, Ava drops her head to Sara's shoulder, too busy chasing her orgasm to kiss her anymore.

Ava's hips drive up after Sara's own, seeking out more and more friction. Everything around her

has faded away, nothing there but her chase after pleasure and the gentle way Sara's holding her close. That little bit of vulnerable touch is overwhelming, so Ava hides her face in Sara's neck. Pressing messy kisses along the column of Sara's throat, Ava digs her nails along the muscles of Sara's shoulder blades to urge her to go faster.

Warmth blossoms in her chest and flames lick through her abdomen as Sara thrusts into her, harder this time around. Ava's orgasm comes with very little warning, crashing through her body as a hand flies to the wall so she can support herself there. Chest heaving and eyes closed, Ava leans there, feeling herself tightening around the toy. Her muscles are shaking, her breathing trembling. Fingers are brushing over her clit still so Ava reaches down with a single hand to push Sara away, a little too overstimulated still.

Instead of pulling away as Ava thought Sara would, she remains close, her head tucked near Ava's own, fingers brushing over Ava's hips. Sara's making circles there in Ava's skin, mindless little patterns that give Ava something to focus on as she comes down from her orgasm. "So on a scale of one to ten—" Sara teases and Ava lets out a breathy laugh, still finding her bearings as she opens her eyes.

"Maybe a six," Ava manages to tease as Sara laughs. Ava swallows thickly before wincing slightly as Sara begins to pull out of her. Somehow this is worse than when it was going in, and Ava's left with an empty sensation inside when Sara stands there in front of her. It's an obscene thing, Sara standing there with a bright pink dildo sat between her legs, glistening in the overly bright lights of the bathroom. It makes Ava want to laugh, this warm and light feeling spreading throughout her body. "You look insane," Ava comments as Sara finds the paper towels.

"And yet," Sara throws back, smiling over her shoulder, "You still let me fuck you." That Ava did. Multiple times in the past, sometimes against her better judgement that told her this wasn't a good idea. Ava's still not convinced it's a good idea, but she has learned that there's something about Sara that makes her impossible to stay away from. "So, could I proposition you to go get drinks with me somewhere that isn't this nightclub?" Sara asks, not looking at Ava now, her hair obstructing Ava's view of her face, "I believe you still owe me an apology."

Something about this ask feels different. Sara's voice is lacking that usual upwards turn at the end that indicates her teasing. "Are we friends?" Ava blurts out before she can stop herself, flushing furiously when Sara turns around, her pants zipped again, her brows raised, "I just—don't know what to call us. Clearly you're not the enemy anymore, so. What does that make us?"

A series of emotions flicker over Sara's face before they're gone. Ava's usually good at reading people, but something about Sara makes determining what she's thinking hard. They've both been trained to do this, to never show what they're really feeling. Ava wonders if Sara finds her just as confusing. "Do you want us to be friends?" Sara asks, coming over and standing in front of Ava as Ava slides her own pants back upwards, "You did spend about the first year of our time together hating me."

"I didn't really hate you," Ava mumbles, fastening her buttons. Sara levels her with a look and Ava sighs quietly. "Okay, I did—strongly dislike you—that's certainly the truth," Ava continues as Sara snorts while that smile sits there on her face, "But turns out you're not terrible," Ava lifts her shoulder in a shrug, "Not all the time at least."

The smile on Sara's face widens, revealing the barely there dimples at the corners of her mouth and the one tucked into her chin as well. "Such high praise," Sara teases as Ava scoffs. It's the best Sara's going to get, Ava's not going to sit here and inflate Sara's ego when it's already big enough. "They yes, I guess we're friends—with benefits too," Sara replies as Ava rolls her eyes, leaning

back on her hands, “You’re not terrible either,” Sara’s eyes flicker over her face before she purses her lips, “And you’re not cold. I was just angry.”

Ava doesn’t really want to get into that tonight, or ever. That comment had stuck with her more than she wanted to admit even to herself, so she’s not going to tell Sara. Though maybe somehow Sara knew. Maybe Ava’s somehow transparent to Sara. “Well then I guess that’s settled,” Ava announces as Sara raises a brow, “Friends who sometimes share benefits and job deals. And friends who should get going before the good bars close down for the night.”

“I like how you think Sharpe,” Sara fires back as she opens the door for Ava, “Lucky for you, I happen to know the best bar in the city.”

“It’s my hotel room with another bottle of cheap vodka isn’t it?” Ava questions as she slips outside, already making sure nobody is looking. Sara’s laugh is enough of a response and Ava just smiles, shaking her head in amusement and walking towards the front of the club. Behind her she can feel Sara following close, a hand skimming along her thigh. But this time Ava doesn’t swat her away like she would have before. This time Ava just lets it happen.

Tramore, Ireland — 23:41

“You drive like an absolute maniac,” Ava mutters as Sara takes the curve far too quickly for the third time this evening, “This is not a chase, we’re just following him. The purpose is for him to not catch us this time around. Novel concept for you I’m sure.”

Scoffing, Sara says nothing, just dramatically holds her hands up around the wheel, making a show of the fact she’s letting the car decelerate naturally. “Not all of us drive like we’re eighty and should have had our license taking from us years ago,” Sara throws back, coming to a rather jerky stop at the crosswalk sign, “And besides, you said to follow closely. That’s what I’m trying to do here.”

Letting Sara drive had been a mistake, but Ava had needed to get everything ready so it was their only option. The nerve-toxin darts rest in her lap, only half of them prepared for their arrival at the docks sometime in the next five minutes or so. Sara hadn’t known how to do it, something Ava had taunted her for because it’s a relatively simple thing to do.

They’re here together in the city, both having arrived three days ago where they learned that for the first time, they’re actually here to take out the same target. It happens from time to time with the Operative and the League, and there’s usually a general sense that whoever gets there first should take over. Sara had been the first here, but Ava had been the one to offer help seeing as she already made a plan. When Sara accepted, they had found a nearby coffee shop to hide out in and go over everything.

The target’s name is Iain Walsh, a local crime boss of some kind. Ava never really expected to find a criminal of his caliber in a relatively small town, but that might be what gives him the privacy he needs. His group acts as a courier between other mobs and mafias, smuggling things in and out of the country using fishing boats. Apparently he’s not only managed to piss off the League, but he’s been interfering in Operative business where he posed a big enough threat to warrant a job.

After about three days spent constantly following Iain and his various different partners in the city, tensions are running just a bit high between Sara and Ava. They reached the peak yesterday when Sara suggested they just shoot him when he goes into the main town for lunch to meet his niece, but Ava had immediately turned that down. The caveat of Ava helping Sara meant doing this

neatly, not in the rather public and messy way that Sara is used to getting her own work done.

That and Sara had not been pleased that Ava had instituted a 'no sex on the job rule' as of their first day here. "It's professional," Ava had lectured as Sara clicked her tongue and walked away from where she had backed Ava against the table, "We cannot afford to get distracted here." It's not been easy though, particularly not when Sara had walked through the room they've decided to share wearing nothing but her underwear last night. Ava had just pressed her face into her pillow and groaned, "I know what you're doing Sara and it's not going to work." It nearly did though, and they both know it.

Sharing a space with Sara has been an interesting experience. Ava's not slept in the same room as another human being since she graduated from training. She hadn't even realized how used to sleeping alone she was until she had to listen to every little movement Sara made in her bed and every little sleepy mumble that came from her over the course of the night. It was horribly distracting, and Ava's been running low on sleep. Usually she wakes in the morning to find Sara gone before the sun is up, always out to get coffee for them both so they can be in the car in time to trail Iain for the day.

But it's been a learning experience too, adjusting to Sara's need to leave her clothing on the ground. Or dealing with Sara's habit of sprawling naked over the bed after her showers. Neither of them seem to be completely comfortable being around the other like this, not because of any remaining dislike, but just because it's as if they both know how new this is for themselves and the other. Not that they've had a conversation about things. That remains the one thing that they have yet to do.

"Is this the place?" Sara asks, bringing the car to a halt just as Ava finishes with the final dart in her lap. Looking up, Ava nods her head with a hum before carefully loading each of the two guns and passing one to Sara. "Assassins use real weapons," Sara protests quietly, but she tucks the gun away all the same, "You've got the needles ready?"

Ava holds it out to show Sara before stepping from the car and walking to the trunk. They're down by the docks now where Iain and about five of his men have come to check the most recent shipment of quite illegal drug they're bringing into the country. The current plan is to wait for the moment where they board the ship before moving in and taking out the guards with the darts. From there, they find Iain and whoever has brought the drugs here in the first place and do their best to make this look like another crime boss is responsible.

There's a group another town over that has been murdering their competition after injecting them with drugs, as some kind of signature. It's a pointless method, but they're striving to copy that, which is why Ava currently has the loaded needles in her pocket. Sara wasn't pleased about that, she wanted Iain to suffer and honestly Ava does too. One of his primary contacts is to a dealer in a much bigger city and last shipment's drugs had been tainted with chemicals that killed twelve college students. They'd all bought their drugs inside a bar and nobody knew that it was a bad batch. Or at least nobody but Iain knew. He simply didn't care as long as money was made off it and he threw responsibility to someone else.

Slinging the bag over her shoulder that contains the camera and tapping device, Ava sets off to where Sara has already found a place behind the little shed just along the docks. "Here's fine," Ava motions to a stack of crates that will offer them cover, "Set this up there and then we'll get started." They've been over this plan several times. Watch Iain and his men arrive and head to the boat, open the communications system that allows them to listen in, wait for them to attempt to leave the boat, and then move in.

Plan B is their fall back, a complete detonation of the boat itself, courtesy of the explosive device

Sara brought along with her that can be tossed onto the boat. It's messy, and less effective, but should things go sideways it's their only chance of keeping Iain from getting away and leaving the country. Ava is pretty sure that Sara is hoping things go sideways because she's currently fiddling with the controls along the bomb. "Don't blow us up," Ava teases, nudging Sara in the side as she comes to settle near her behind the crates.

From the bag, Ava removes the tapping device and passes it over to Sara before taking out the camera as well. Iain has yet to come down from the cars, so they've got just a bit of time. "This is ancient," Sara grumbles, pulling out the antenna along the device, "Where did you get this, some archive from a war?"

That's not something Ava is going to answer right now. She did in fact have to find something a bit more old-school seeing as Iain is technologically savvy and it would have been too hard to try something newer. "Just get it set up," Ava tells her, rolling her eyes as Sara petulantly taps the device while she's trying to power it up. This is not Sara's style of doing jobs and Ava knows it, but thankfully Sara's kept her complaints to a relative minimum so far.

Camera at the ready, Ava turns to Sara, taking her in. This evening Sara's been unusually tense, and Ava has been keeping a careful eye on her. The plan means potentially entering the boat, something that Sara hadn't said she's not comfortable with, but she hadn't really needed to say that kind of thing. Ever since they came up with this line of events, Sara has been sullen and silent. There's tension in her shoulders and every now and then Ava watches Sara's gaze flicker up to the boats in front of them. "I was thinking about the plan," Ava clears her throat as Sara looks to her, "It might be better if one of us remains on the docks—as a lookout of sorts."

There's no security down here this late, and really no need for a lookout at all. But Ava's trying to give Sara an out, a chance to remain on semi-solid ground and avoid setting foot on the boat at all. Blue eyes flicker over Ava's face, Sara's lips set in a frown. "And you're proposing that I be the one to remain here on the docks?" Sara asks and Ava hums, glancing to the camera as she adjusts the setting, "I can handle being on the boat. If I wanted someone to parent me on this job I would have just called home."

Her tone is angry, combative, and probably what Ava should have expected after Sara's been so tightly-wound to day. "Believe it or not, I'm not just coddling you here," Ava replies in a hushed tone, glancing up to see the car doors opening, "You've been on edge since we made this plan and I don't really want to be in a confined space with you if you're going to snap at a moment's notice."

It was maybe too far, and Ava watches a momentary flash of hurt pass over Sara's features. "Fuck you Ava," Sara says quietly, her voice angry as she shuffles to the side, her back now facing Ava, "I'll be fine. Why don't you just worry about your end of this so we can get out of this fucking city and go back to our own jobs."

Ava hadn't meant to piss Sara off, and she had lied a bit about coddling Sara. That was part of this, simply because Ava doesn't know what to do with Sara when she's like this. All of the flirting and innuendoes had been a lot to deal with coming from Sara, but Ava prefers that over stony silence and vitriolic arguments. She shouldn't care but she does for some reason, but Sara's apparently going to make that impossible right now.

Sighing in frustration, Ava grips the camera tight in her hands, watching as Iain and his men come down the docks. They're talking quietly amongst themselves and Ava snaps a few pictures here and there, watching an envelope exchange hands. The boat is at the very end of the dock, one that Ava knows contains a second story down below the surface of the water. It's not a very big boat,

but it's easily the largest one down here and is decidedly not a fishing boat like all the others are.

Sound comes to life from the device when Sara turns a dial, and Ava tucks the camera to the side, quietly tuning into the conversation. Two men remain above on the docks, scanning the area with their eyes as Iain and the supplier exchange pleasantries that can be heard in the device Ava and Sara have in their ears. There's nothing of note yet, but Ava's recording this so she has records of it later.

A wave sloshes against the side of the dock and Ava can both see and feel the way Sara startles. With a quiet sigh, Ava reaches over and carefully removes the device from Sara's hand when she tenses up and nudges the volume control. "I wasn't trying to be a dick," Ava murmurs quietly as Sara sucks in a short breath, "Everyone is afraid of something, there's no harm in admitting it and remaining somewhere that isn't going to trigger you."

"What are you scared of?" Sara fires back right away. It's a rapidly asked question, but there's no bite in her tone that indicates Sara's being cruel about this. Ava turns her head and looks into bright blue eyes, realizing that Sara's more scared than she has been letting on this entire time. Fears aren't something Ava really talks about, and certainly there isn't anyone asking her this question so she never really has to answer. But maybe responding will keep Sara from being so anxious about this if she's distracted.

"I don't like heights," Ava replies evenly, lifting her shoulder with a shrug as Sara peers back at her curiously, "I had a bad experience when I was younger on a zip-line where I was stuck in the middle of the line for about a half hour hanging over open air. That did the trick." A quiet hum comes from Sara as Ava looks through the camera once more, scanning the guards there. "That and I don't drive at night," Ava clears her throat, taking in a deep breath, "Not if I can avoid it."

It's why she made Sara do the driving here, or at least it was part of the reason. At night there are times where Ava's driving where all she can think about are the last moments of her parents and if they ever saw their deaths coming. She prefers to think that it was quick, and that there was no pain but, the truth is likely not as kind as her imagination. "Why don't you go home?" Ava asks curiously, Sara's words coming back to her as she turns to the assassin, "Your family is there, and they're alive. Surely you've thought about at least letting them know?"

Instantly it's clear that Ava has asked the wrong question when Sara flinches. Her jaw is working, her hand forming a fist along her leg as she looks to the docks. "Going home isn't an option after what I've done," Sara's tone is hard, flint-like as she shakes her head, "I left as the rebellious college kid and now I'm an internationally wanted assassin. If that was your kid, would you want them back?"

Her eyes pierce through Ava's own, hollow and dark. It's the first time Sara's really let Ava see her like this. Of course Ava knows that their jobs make for long periods of loneliness, but Sara's hurting in a way that Ava hadn't considered before. An ache forms low in Ava's chest and she wants to say something to make this better but she doesn't know how. Ava's parents have been dead quite some time so she doesn't know how to tell Sara to remedy this. Maybe Sara doesn't even want her to in the first place.

But before Ava can even think up a response, she hears the conversation in her ear turning around to focus on the drugs. Both Sara and Ava lapse into silence again, and Ava waits to hear what she's listening for, a confirmation that the drugs are on board. They're moving through the boat, likely to the back room where Ava needs them confined as they take out the guards on the dock and on deck. When the confirmation comes, Ava nods her head to Sara who moves from behind the crates.

Wordlessly Ava follows her down the docks, using the shadows to keep them hidden. Sara takes

the first shot at the guard and Ava goes for the second one. They fall to the ground, the sound of their bodies hitting the dock just loud enough to alert the others on the deck of the boat. Sara gets there before Ava does, taking out one man and lowering him to the ground so as to not alert those down below. Before Ava can step in, Sara's fired off a shot in the second man's arm as well. "Not in the water," Ava chides as Sara moves to push him over, "He'll make a splash."

Not looking pleased, Sara carefully lays him down along the dock. "There's one left down there," Sara points to the staircase leading down below the deck, "You're sure you'll be okay with all three of them in there?" The guard left with Iain is his personal security bodyguard, and Ava's been given free-rein here so she's allowed to take them all out. "Here," Sara nudges something into Ava's arm, "Your darts won't cut it this time."

It's a normal gun this time, one with normal bullets that Ava takes before passing over her own dart gun. "Just listen in," Ava taps her ear, "This should be quick." Ava's not here to have a conversation, she's just here to take out the targets, plain and simple. When Sara nods, Ava steps onto the boat and holds the gun out in front of her as she walks down the steps to the cabin below.

Everything down here is cast in orange hued lights, the kind that makes everything seem just a bit darker. Papers are spread over the desk to the side and there's a small hallway to the right that appears to lead towards the back of the boat. It's a narrow space, the kind that makes it clear a fight breaking out here is not an option unless Ava wants to risk being shot. At the end of the hall is a slender doorway through which voices can be heard.

Moving slowly, Ava continues down the path before leaning against the wall right along the doorway. Inside she can hear them talking, their position maybe ten feet from her. Three targets, rapid fire shots, no hesitation—that's all that has to happen here. Taking in a deep breath, Ava pushes off the wall and moves into the space. The guard turns to her first, seemingly surprised. Ava fires towards him first, a single shot to the chest, another to the head. He falls to the ground as Iain spins with his own gun in hand. When Ava fires the gun this time, the shots echo in the more confined space.

His white shirt stains red before he even hits the ground, his gun falling to the side. The supplier is left, and he's not the worst person here, but he's still involved and has to die as well. "Sorry about this," Ava tells him right before pulling the trigger. She's really not that sorry, not when she knows who the other kinds of criminals this man sells to. Humming quietly, Ava looks around the small room and finds the remnants of the shipment there to the side. Several bricks of powdered cocaine rest there on a raised platform, far more than Ava can count.

But it all appears to be here and Ava didn't come to handle the drugs, she came to fake a crime scene. Removing the needles from her pocket, Ava bends down near the supplier firsts and injects the contents into his veins. It's not as effective as it would have been if it was delivered before death, but all they need is for this to show up on the toxicology test performed during the autopsy. This should be enough to convince the authorities it was another gang conflict and will hopefully be enough to prevent a real investigation. Even the gun Ava used can be traced back to the rival group.

After injecting all three men, Ava wipes the needles down before tossing them beside each body. She'd spent time looking over the crime scene photos from past kills committed by the rival group, and each time they left the needles behind as well as the drugs. It's some kind of a power play, and a rather stupid one at that. But that's hardly her business.

A loud sound comes from above the cabin and Ava pauses, her hand reaching for her gun again. "Damn it Sara," Ava mutters, taking long strides down the hallway before pulling herself up the

steps. Above deck there's a guard slumped there that hadn't been laying there before. When Ava turns her head, Sara is nowhere to be found and the toxin gun rests there on the dock. Her heart picking up in her chest, Ava drags herself off the boat and steps to the dock, scanning the waters nearby.

All the guards are accounted for, but Ava can't find Sara. "Sara," she calls out, panic forming as she looks around, her gun raised, "Sara if you're messing with me this isn't funny." There's no reply, but the sound water being violently splashed from the side gains her attention. When Ava comes around the end of the boat, Sara is there, thrashing in the water with wide eyes and a pale expression. "Shit," Ava breathes out, instantly rushing back to the boat.

Moving quickly, Ava comes to the base of the boat and jumps down to the lower level. "Hey," Ava calls to Sara, kneeling down on the back ledge and holding her hand out, "You're only a few feet from the ladder here Sara, just come towards me." Her words have no impact. Sara's not responsive, and Ava watches her head disappear under the water before coming back up as Sara sucks in a deep and strangled sounding breath. This is worse than Ava thought, and she finds herself frozen for a moment.

Ava trying to talk to her isn't going to work. Sara is having a panic attack in the water and likely isn't hearing a damn thing Ava's saying. Tossing the gun to the side, Ava brings her body around the ladder and holds on with one hand while reaching for Sara's shirt. With a single hand, Ava grabs her by the shoulder and hauls her in, grunting as she does so. The water is freezing cold and Sara's clothing produces a drag as Ava struggles to bring her in. Finally when Sara is close, Ava shoves Sara towards the ladder, urging her to climb it.

Sara's motions are shaky and rushed as she scales to the desk, instantly on her feet and grabbing the gun from the ground. Dread pools in Ava's stomach when she finds herself staring down the barrel of a gun held in trembling hands. "Sara," Ava tries, pulling herself to the deck and slowly standing, "It's just me, it's just Ava." Sara's eyes are wide, her pupils blown and her stance defensive. Ava's in real risk of being shot here if she doesn't navigate this carefully. She's never seen Sara like this before and has no idea how to begin talking her own.

"We were here to take down Iain Walsh, remember that," Ava continues on, scanning Sara's face for any sign of recognition as Sara's breathing accelerates, "You were on the dock, watching guard but I was down below." Nothing has changed and Ava is sure Sara's well on her way to a panic attack. Taking a risk, Ava comes closer, her hands still raised in the air. "It's just me," Ava repeats again, swallowing as Sara brings the gun up to her head, the barrel mere inches from Ava's head, "Just Ava."

A momentary flicker of emotion passes over Sara's face and Ava snaps into action. Swatting the gun upwards, Ava moves down as the shot goes off. Heat fills the space her head just occupied and Ava roughly grabs Sara by the hand. With her palm, Ava smacks the gun from Sara's hands and it clatters to the deck with a dull sound. An elbow comes right as Ava's side but she catches it and spins Sara around, pinning her to her body. "Calm down," Ava urges firmly, trapping Sara's arms over her chest and holding her tight, "You're not in the water anymore."

In her arms, Sara is trembling and Ava feels Sara's legs give way, leaving Ava to support most of her body weight. The water drenching Sara is getting Ava wet too, the cold spreading over the skin of her chest and thighs where they're pressed together. Ava's had these moments herself before, so she knows that Sara's mind is somewhere else right not. What Ava needs to do is draw her back, and quickly. The water was cold tonight and Sara's at risk of hypothermia if Ava can't get her to calm down in time.

“You’re not drowning, and we’re going to walk off this boat when you’re able,” Ava soothes, tightening her grip on Sara when Sara struggles against her. It’s a weak protest because of how badly she’s shaking, but even still Sara is remarkably strong. “I think we’ll have to actually make dinner tonight instead of getting take out,” Ava swaps topics, her mouth right near Sara’s ear, her voice soft and low, “I know how much you love Chinese food but I cannot eat it for a fourth night in a row. At some point even you have to get tired of having dumplings.”

As Ava continues to talk about nonsensical things, throwing in a small tease here and there, she can feel Sara’s body slackening. Under her palm, Sara’s heart is no longer thundering and her breathing is returning to something resembling normal. “You’re safe now,” Ava murmurs quietly, loosening her hold on Sara’s arms now that she thinks there’s no longer a danger of Sara striking at her, “Just calm down.”

When Ava feels Sara straighten up, she also feels every single muscle in Sara’s body go rigid. Slowly and carefully, Ava unwinds her arms from Sara’s body and tentatively steps back to see if Sara can stand on her own now. Sara doesn’t move, her back towards Ava, her body racked with shivers. Every piece of Sara’s clothing is clinging to her body and her hair is tangled and plastered against the sides of her face. Worry flares and peaks in Ava’s chest as she watches Sara, eyes scanning the assassin in front of her, not sure what comes next.

After Ava’s panic attacks, she tends to go silent. They’re embarrassing and she doesn’t know how she might react to Sara witnessing one. “Why don’t you go back to the car,” Ava prompts, clearing her throat as she takes the gun from the ground, “I’ll grab all the gear and meet you there. There’s a blanket in the back that we wrapped the weapons in—use that.”

All that comes is a short curt nod from Sara before she climbs the second ladder leading to the main deck with jerky movements. Ava has half a mind to help Sara up, but she’s sure that is only going to get her yelled at right now. Wordlessly, Ava watches Sara walk from the boat and up the dock, her steps a bit more rushed now. Exhaling out a shaky breath, Ava climbs the ladder herself and takes a look around.

The guard there on the deck is the one that had the dart to the arm. It seems to have struck him in the fabric of his shirt and didn’t puncture deep enough to really take effect. A second dart protrudes from his neck, though it looks as if Sara may have used her hand to slam it there seeing as it’s embedded quite deeply in the skin. Guilt seizes Ava’s chest because she had been the one to suggest Sara remain up here. Maybe if they’d either switched places or done this together Sara wouldn’t have been thrown overboard.

With a quiet sigh, Ava steps off the boat and heads to where she and Sara left the equipment. Maybe Sara was right, maybe they should have just blown the boat up. Because now, Ava has no idea what Sara is going to be like for the remainder of the evening.

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“You have to eat something,” Ava states firmly, once more nudging the bowl of soup towards Sara after it’s been pushed away for the second time, “You and I both know you’re not in the clear yet, so stop being a child and eat the damn soup.” Once more, Sara levels her with a glare and Ava stares back. She shifts on the other side of the counter, not willing to give Sara even an inch of ground on this one.

It was a frantic drive back here with Ava blasting the heat to the point of discomfort as Sara shivered in the passenger seat. Ava had wanted to take her to the hospital but Sara had refused. The

deal was that Sara would do whatever Ava said to get warm without fighting her, and so far Sara has broken that promise at each step. She argued when Ava made her take a scalding hot shower. She protested when Ava threw her warmest hoodie Sara's direction and told her to put it on. She bickered when Ava insisted Sara bundle in a blanket.

And now, Sara is refusing to eat the soup. Despite her frustrations, Ava is worried about Sara, and rightfully so. Sara has yet to stop shivering and Ava swears that her skin is far too pale and her lips are slightly blue. The first thing Ava did when Sara was out of the shower was check for all the signs of not just hypothermia, but for a rapid and severe adrenaline crash as well. Sara's trying to put on a strong front but she's exhausted and Ava knows it.

Neither of them had really spoken about what happened on the deck. Other than the protest of the hospital on the car ride here, Sara had been completely silent. Ava drove as fast as she was willing given how dark it is here, but the entire time she kept glancing to Sara in concern. Sara spent the whole drive staring out the window, her eyes empty and blank, her expression vacant and tense. Ava had wanted to tell Sara she understands, that this has happened to her too, but she was sure that Sara would only shut down more if she tried.

It is a bit of a relief that Sara's fighting her right now because at least she has the energy to fight here. Rolling her eyes, Sara picks up the spoon and dips it into the bowl, taking a very pointed and very dramatic sip of the soup. "Was that so hard?" Ava taunts as Sara snorts before going for another bit. Now relaxing a bit, Ava leans her elbows on the counter and rubs at the forming headache between her eyes.

This is why Ava doesn't work with others, and why she doesn't let herself get close to them either. Getting close to someone else means caring about them. And caring about someone means being worried when things go wrong. Before this, Ava had done her best to convince herself she didn't really care for Sara, but tonight has proven this to be a lie. Ava's not sure what she would have done if Sara had been so panicked that she drowned. She's not sure what she would have done if she hadn't been able to get Sara to calm down.

Opening her eyes once more, Ava looks to Sara who is thankfully eating her soup without any more of a fight. Sara's hair has nearly finished drying, falling in gentle waves over the shoulders of Ava's old college hoodie. It's weird, seeing Sara sat there wearing that when Ava's only seen it on herself. When Sara put it on, Ava had paused, taking in the way that the hoodie fell lower on Sara's thighs than they did on her own and how the soft blue color brought out Sara's eyes.

Her skin still pale, Ava can make out just about every freckle splattered over Sara's skin. They're darker in some areas along her forehead and cheeks from direct sun exposure, making them stand out more. A few cluster near Sara's mouth, some of them even blending in with the contour of her lips. Ava's noticed those before when they've kissed, but only as an afterthought rather than actually studying them. They're details Ava hadn't seen the first time they met because Sara had been wearing makeup. Ava thinks she prefers Sara this way, free of anything to hide behind.

There's a blanket bundled around Sara's body, though Sara's tucked it under her arms so it's surrounding her torso. "You don't really look like an assassin right now," Ava teases, trying to draw Sara back to her normal self. The silence has been unsettling to say the least, absent of Sara's voice filling the space these past few minutes.

"I could still kill you with this spoon," Sara threatens as Ava smiles, "In about fifteen different ways." It's more than just a relief to hear Sara threatening her again. By now Ava knows it's all a jest, that Sara wouldn't ever do something to hurt her. Something about knowing that is a little bit terrifying when it maybe should be comforting instead.

“Glad to see some of that glimmering personality is coming back,” Ava replies, watching Sara’s lips curve upwards as her brows quirk up. But there’s something else Ava wants to say too, seeing as Sara’s in a better position to talk now. “About what you said at the docks, I never had a chance to respond,” Ava clears her throat as she crosses her arms over her chest. Sara’s eyes instantly fall to the soup bowl and Ava watches her shoulder raise slightly. “If I had a kid that I loved enough to continue searching for for six years, I don’t think I would care what they had done,” Ava pushes on, watching Sara’s hand freeze above the bowl, “They’re still looking for you Sara. We both know that.”

It’s giving away the fact that Ava’s looked into Sara more than she has admitted in the past, but Ava doesn’t care. “Well you don’t have a kid,” Sara snaps, her eyes raising to Ava’s own, sparking with anger, “And I don’t want to talk about this. Ever. So stop bringing it up.” There’s something else there in her eyes, something that Ava recognizes this time around. She’s seen that look on her own face enough times in the mirror to know it by name. It’s guilt. Present in the downturn of Sara’s lips, in the guarded stance of her body, in the sorrow in her eyes. Ava knows guilt well; she knows that there’s clearly more to this than she understands.

Humming quietly, Ava just nods her head and eats the sandwich that she made herself. The rest of dinner is spent in complete silence, the only sound coming from the quiet clinking of Sara’s spoon against the bowl. When she’s finished, she takes the bowl to the sink, wordlessly stepping past Ava before walking to the beds and curling in her own. Ava tidies the counters as she looks to Sara, taking in how small Sara seems when she’s tucked in on herself like this.

After everything has been put away, Ava turns down the covers of her own bed before climbing under them and getting comfortable for the night. Her gun is on the nightstand between the two queen sized beds and there’s a knife laid there as well that belongs to Sara. Shifting under the covers, Ava grunts quietly while she finds a good position to sleep in. “Family is personal,” Sara’s quiet voice interrupts Ava as she was about to roll to face the other wall.

Turning her head over her shoulder, Ava finds blue eyes staring right back at her, a pensive look on Sara’s face. “In the League, nobody knows anything about someone else’s family. It’s too dangerous,” Sara continues while Ava slowly rolls over so she can watch Sara as she talks, “Hardly anyone even know the name of the other members. I know maybe three of them, but that’s because we trained together.” It sounds remarkably similar to the Operative—to any clandestine organization where secrecy is key. “There’s so much you don’t understand about the League,” Sara’s voice is a whisper this time.

This is dangerous. They don’t talk about their organizations for good reason. Both of them are aware just how much danger they could put the other in by mentioning these kinds of things. Yet Ava can’t really bring herself to care much right now. She doesn’t have to dig into that, but she’s going to. “I think I’d understand more than you think,” Ava replies with a quiet sigh, propping herself up on her hand, “Try me.”

“I can’t go home, or go back to them. I can’t let them know I’m alive because it would put them in danger,” Sara replies, her eyes focused on her own hand that’s brushing over the mattress in front of her, “And even if they weren’t in danger from the League, going back would give them false hope that I could come back for good. Leaving the League,” Sara shakes her head, her next words uttered much quieter, “It’s not easy when this is all you’ve ever known.”

An ache forms in Ava’s chest because she does understand that, far more than she wishes she did. It had clearly been wrong to assume that Sara loves her job as Ava thought in the beginning. Maybe Sara sometimes feels just as stuck as Ava does at times. “I actually do understand that,” Ava murmurs, her eyes finding Sara’s own across the space between them, “I’ve been doing this seven

years—since I was twenty. There are times where it's hard not to feel as if things won't ever end."

That kind of honesty is a hard thing to share. Yet somehow it feels less daunting because she already knows that Sara understands. Ava can see it in Sara's expression and her body language. Clearly they're not so different after all. "I have things to finish here at the League, more people I want brought down before I'm ready to go," Sara's voice has hardened slightly, her hand forming a fist on the bed, her lips pressed in a tight line, "Once they're dead. Then I go home."

Ava never knew that Sara had a list, though she had assumed Sara was up to something with the information she's been gathering from Ava's jobs. It's not clear what Sara's after. Ava tried finding a pattern but couldn't sort through the mess to locate one. "How many are left?" Ava questions, peering across the darkness.

Sara's jaw works and her eyes are blank as she stares at Ava once more, "Too many to count." Searching Sara's face, Ava just hums, wishing that Sara would explain more. But Sara doesn't. Instead she rolls over, her back to Ava, a clear sign that this conversation has ended.

Silence falls once more, but Ava stares at the back of Sara's head, wishing that she could somehow read Sara's thoughts. Sara's a puzzle. She's confusing and complicated in ways that Ava wants to understand. One moment Sara is shutting her down in the kitchen and the next she's spilling secrets in the dark. One job Sara is taunting and teasing Ava endlessly and the next they're having conversations Ava hadn't had with someone in years.

Ava likes predictability, certainty, and order. So far, Sara has displayed none of those things. By all reasoning Sara should make her uncomfortable, she should make Ava want to turn away from her. But Ava can't. There's something about Sara's variability that is captivating and alluring. Ava's drawn to her in ways she hasn't figured out yet, but she knows that tug is there. Certainly Ava feels that tug whenever Sara is around, and she felt it tonight when she realized Sara was in the water.

When Sara shivers this time, Ava can practically see the shaking of her body and hear the stutter in Sara's breathing. It's warm in the room, but not warm enough. Ava had piled spare blankets high on Sara's bed but they're a poor substitute for body warm. There is a solution of course, but Ava hesitates. She pauses until she thinks of what Sara might do if their roles were reversed. Memories of gentle fingers trailing over her bruised ribs and a palm pressed near her spine come back to Ava and she knows she already has her answer.

With a sigh, Ava shoves her own covers off her body and comes over to Sara's bed, slipping wordlessly under the covers. Sara turns to her in surprise, her eyes wide. "You're cold," Ava states, already feeling how clammy Sara's legs are against her own under the covers, "Body contact is the best way to get warm."

"Oh," Sara replies, her lips curling in a smile as she rolls. Hips press against Ava's side as Sara's fingers move to slide under her shirt. As much as Ava would love to end the night this way, that's not what she had in mind.

Exercising a great deal of self control, Ava catches Sara's hand before it can find her breast. "Not like that," Ava shakes her head, placing Sara's hand in her own space before nudging at her side, "Roll back over again." Heat floods Ava's cheeks and she's thankful the darkness is covering the flush when Sara stares up at her in confusion. Ava nudges Sara again, this time rolling Sara herself.

Once Sara is on her side, Ava takes in a quiet breath before laying along Sara's back. An arm laid over Sara's waist, Ava presses her palm into Sara's stomach to draw her closer. She can hear Sara's breathing hitch as her spine meets Ava's chest, bringing their bodies into complete alignment. That unsettling weightless feeling is back in Ava's chest when she feels Sara's rapid heartbeat against

her own chest. “Stop that,” Ava chides when Sara tenses up in her arms, every muscle going stiff, “Just relax and deal with it. You’re cold and I’m not dealing with a hospital visit because you’re being uncooperative.”

In all likelihood Sara is past the point of danger, but Ava doesn’t want to take any chances. She doesn’t want to risk waking in the morning to find Sara unresponsive in the bed next to her. Even thinking of that makes anxiety flutter in Ava’s stomach and chest. Ava’s fallen in freezing waters before so she knows that it can take quite a while to feel truly warm again. Even when the body is warm, the shivering doesn’t stop, and neither do the memories and remnants of that dread that come from falling in. This should help ease that as well.

“Sorry,” Sara mumbles, her voice sounding a bit thick before she makes a quiet sound in the back of her throat, “Just—not used to someone close.” The vibrations of Sara’s voice pass through their joined bodies so Ava can feel them against her own chest. It’s a strange feeling, one Ava can’t remember having since she was younger and her father would dance with her in the kitchen. He’d always sing songs as they laughed and spun around. That might be the last time she’s been close enough to feel someone’s voice in this way.

“Me either,” Ava replies, tucking herself closer, “But we’ll have to learn tonight.” Ava’s other arm is trapped between Sara’s back and her own body, in a position she knows is going to make her lose sensation of the limb by morning. She could move it, but it serves as almost a barrier of some sorts between the two of them. It’s a pointless barrier but Ava almost needs it here as some kind of last defense to this new and shared closeness.

Sara’s skin is still cold and Ava can still feel the thunderous beating of Sara’s heart. Though that might be Ava’s as well, it’s hard to tell. Hips are slotted against Ava’s own, their legs so tangled under the covers that the temperature is the only clue for which belong to Sara. Moment by moment the tension slips from Sara’s body and she relaxes, leaning further into Ava who continues to support her. “Sleeping with the enemy,” Sara murmurs, sounding half asleep, “Literally this time.”

All Ava can manage is a quiet hum, her mind buzzing with the repercussions of this. The morning is bound to be awkward so Ava hopes that Sara’s tired enough to keep sleeping on and give Ava time to untangle from the bed. Closing her eyes, Ava breathes in the sweet smell of Sara’s coconut shampoo and does her best to go to sleep. It’s not going to come easily when she’s in this new position. So Ava sighs quietly, bracing herself for what is going to be a long night trying to adjust to this—trying to adjust to Sara.

Chapter End Notes

For anyone who wanted to know those songs playing in the club (they’re actually decent/catchy songs), they were “Sesso Occasionale” (occasional sex) by Tananai and “Xverso” (Pervert (the x is the multiplication sign which is per, hence per-verso)) by Tiziano Ferro. They’re pretty catchy, though “Sesso Occasionale” is perhaps more appropriate and less suggestive.

I’m not sure when the next update will come because recently when I have free time, writing just takes too much effort. But it won’t be longer than the period between the

last update and this one. As always thank you to those who have been reading along and feel free to leave thoughts (and literally any smut writing tips, sometimes I struggle so badly with this) or comments here!

Part Seven

Chapter Summary

Sara is a bit distant after the events in Ireland and one evening makes a comment Ava can't really decipher. In the midst of trouble starting at the Operative, Ava comes to a realization at one of the most unfortunate times.

Chapter Notes

Here we are with part seven, and there's just one more part in this section before a transition chapter to the next part. I'm thinking right now this fic is going to end up being close to sixteen chapters at minimum. That's what the outline is looking like, assuming I don't add things as I've been doing this whole time.

Brief reminder of the trigger warnings, this chapter does have the usual violence mentioned as well as experiences of a panic attack. But here is chapter seven and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

London, England — 12:33

Quietly typing up the schedule in front of her, Ava keeps her eyes focused on the office door sitting just off to the right. Working as an office assistant was not what Ava had in mind when she said yes to a month long job, but apparently that's what Henry felt was going to be her best option for gaining valuable information. This time around, she's on the MI6's home turf, something that means taking an abundance of caution.

However it also means that there are some things that Ava doesn't have to worry about. She's been told to terminate this target after gaining the information that she needs from him, and so far Ava's collected over half and now just needs his death to trigger the release of the rest. Henry made it very clear that Ava needed to make this death public. She needs to make it known to the civilians and needs to make it look like an enemy of this company did it.

It's been a month of listening to phone calls, copying data from meetings, following Walter Graves back and forth to different locations, and compiling all information she gathers. This is a finance office, or at least that's what it pretends to be. In reality, this office has been supporting the efforts of war criminals in other countries for three years now. They've been the sole economic benefactor for several international organizations that are actively feeding into conflict in war torn areas. And they're doing so by attempting to bring in Operative related contacts. Naturally the Operative doesn't like that so Ava's here to make sure it stops.

The public will be told that an enemy of the company was responsible for Walter's death, but those who work closely with him will know this was a message from the Operative. This job had surprised Ava because of that. Typically the Operative is not the kind of organization to make such a public notice to criminal organizations. Ava's not sure how to feel about it, but she wasn't given

much choice in the matter seeing as this was the kind of job where all the details were laid out for her, giving her no autonomy.

But it's too late to back out now. Plans are already in motion, Walter is already minutes from his death, and Ava's too deep in to leave. Once he dies, she'll remain here about a week so as to avoid suspicion and then she'll quit. Walter is who she works for, so with him gone, her leaving should appear fairly natural and non-suspicious.

Beside Ava, Marcy, the second administrative assistant is also working on her computer, totally clueless as to the chaotic events that are about to unfold here today. Turning her attention to her own screen, Ava pulls up a small window where she watches a blue dot traveling across the map. It's the tracking tag Ava placed inside Walter's watch after taking it from him upon her arrival here. He's moving steadily back towards this very building, and Ava hums as she checks the anticipated arrival time.

Heels click along the floor and Ava glances up for a moment before going back to her work. Then Ava pauses, lets out a loud sigh, and looks back up again. Sara is coming down the hall, wearing a nice black dress and a grey coat draped over her shoulders. A hand bag rests along her arm and Ava doesn't even have to think to know that Sara is currently carrying at least five weapons inside of it. "Hello," Sara greets, leaning on the desk with a friendly smile as Ava purses her lips, "I have an appointment here with Mr. Graves."

She does not. Ava makes his daily schedules and she would know if Sara had a meeting in there. But if Sara is here in person and is interfering, that means that once more, they're on opposite sides this time. If Ava's here to kill, then Sara must be here to protect. "Of course," Ava aims for a saccharine tone, hoping that Marcy doesn't note the sarcasm present too, "Why don't I take you to the waiting room while Marcy lets him know that his next meeting is here when he arrives back."

Marcy nods her head with a smile, grabbing the phone from the hook as Ava stands from her desk, tucking something into her pockets as she goes. Sara has that wide smile on her face, her eyes twinkling as Ava sweeps her hand down the hallway. With Sara in front of her, Ava rolls her eyes when Sara makes a correct turn without Ava even telling her where to go. "I didn't think I would see you here," Sara lilts, turning her head over her shoulder, "Imagine my surprise when I look up employees here and see that face looking back at me."

"Cut the bullshit, you knew I was here," Ava retorts good-naturedly as Sara laughs, "I'm assuming you're here as some kind of League protection. This guy is all mixed up in the affairs in the Middle East." Surprise flickers over Sara's face, but Ava just lifts her shoulder in a shrug, "You speak more Middle Eastern languages than you do other European languages," Ava replies, "Doesn't take a lot to assume that the League has to be located somewhere in that region."

Sara just hums as they turn a final corner, but Ava pulls her down a different hall at the last moment. It's been two weeks since Ava saw Sara last. They met here in the city, down in a park where the public provided them cover. Sara had the information Ava needed from a past job and Ava had a file from Iain's business that she had finally finished parsing through. The agreement was to trade here in the city rather than waiting to bump into each other on their next job.

Somehow Sara had found Ava's work email address here and had emailed her some bogus advertisement that took Ava to a secure chat server. It was surprisingly discreet for Sara Lance. Ava had been a bit impressed that Sara even knew that method of communication seeing as spies most commonly use it. But they've agreed from this point on, public meetings are the best way to go about swapping information with each other. Ava had reluctantly given Sara the email that she uses to share information with Gary, though she had threatened Sara not to do anything with it.

After Ireland, Sara's been fairly distant. That morning when Ava woke up, Sara had already been gone from the bed, a note left on the pillow and all her things gone. She'd left before Ava even had the chance to give her a copy of the data file. Not that Ava was surprised, she probably would have done the same thing if someone had seen her fall in a body of water and have a pretty bad panic attack. But she was a little disappointed. They'd seemed to be getting closer and now Sara's completely pulled away, back to the mindless chatter and flirting from before.

Ava wishes she knew what it was that's led to Sara doing this. With her hand on Sara's elbow, Ava tugs her into the break room to the side before locking the door and turning around. Sara is leaning against the counter, her purse set to the side, that wide grin on her face. "Ava Sharpe," Sara lilts as Ava comes forwards, bringing them chest to chest, "If you wanted to ravish me in a closet all you had to do was ask. Though this does seem bold for you, with all these people around."

Scoffing lightly, Ava skims her hands up Sara's thighs, searching for any hidden weapons. Sara's eyes are dark, her lips still lifted in that smile as Ava brushes her hands along the inside of Sara's legs. "I thought you got a kick from being watched?" Ava fires back as Sara's grin just grows.

There's a holster right along Sara's left thigh that holds three little knives. Ava glances up with a brow raised and Sara lifts her shoulder, "A lady always comes prepared Aves, you know me." With a single flick of her fingers, Ava undoes it and the weapons clatter to the ground. Sara clicks her tongue in admonishment as Ava continues her exploration, lingering a bit along the inside of Sara's thigh when she hears her breathing hitch.

Sara's pupils are swallowing up the blue in her eyes. It would be so easy right now for Ava to cave, to pull up the hem of Sara's dress right here and now. But she's here for a job, the rest can come after. Kicking the holster across the room where it's out of reach, Ava pins Sara's arms above her, right against the doors of the cupboard. "You've gotten strong," Sara muses, her legs shifting open as Ava presses further between them.

"And you've gotten sloppy," Ava replies with a matching smile, "I saw your work in Rome last week. That was messy—even for you." It made international headlines and Ava knew the moment she saw the targeted office as well as the mentions of the sheer amount of blood and destruction found on scene that it was Sara's doing. He was running for some political position in the region and clearly his campaign has been cut a little bit short.

"They were very bad men Ava," Sara lifts her shoulders in a shrug, breaking free of Ava's hold. Arms settle around her neck, fingers tugging the hair tie that held Ava's hair back in a bun. When her hair cascades down, Sara hums, running her hand through it with her head tilted to the side, "That and they pissed me off."

Before, Ava would have found that kind of comment from Sara to be a sign of her heedlessness. But now it's nothing but amusing. Warmth sparks in Ava's chest as she laughs, Sara joining in with her. "Three political powers all taken out on the top floor of the tallest high-rise in the city," Ava begins incredulously, "Each with a single shot to both knees and the groin—and your reasoning for that is, 'They pissed me off'?"

Really it was the overkill that let Ava know it had been Sara's doing. The moment she read that the men had been shot in the groin and kneecaps, she knew it was Sara likely drawing things out. "You a fan Ava Sharpe?" Sara teases, her fingers skimming down Ava's sides and tugging at the belt around her waist, "I know you don't mind making the really bad targets suffer just a bit. I have this sneaking suspicion that you're responsible for the poisoning of that CEO in Bulgaria two years back."

That had been Ava, and she did poison him with a particularly violent strain of Anthrax when she

learned of the terrible things he had been doing. “You really want to know what I think?” Ava leans in, catching Sara’s hands before they move to her belt buckle. Sara’s eyes are still dark and Ava’s gaze flickers down to her lips before she draws them to her eyes once more. Sara clearly noticed the motion, a smile on her face that Ava’s tempted to kiss away.

“I think—,” Ava begins, raising Sara’s hands back up over her head as she slips her hand in her pocket, “What I really think about you is that you’re trouble.” Sara’s brows raise as Ava leans in, her breath ghosting over Ava’s face, smelling lightly of peppermint. Smiling now, Ava raises her second up and promptly clicks the handcuffs from her desk around Sara’s wrists. “I also think you’re a pain in my ass,” Ava steps back, reveling in the shocked expression on Sara’s face, “And I think you’re not going to win this one.”

A laugh tumbles from Sara’s lips as Ava moves to the side and gathers Sara’s purse as well as the fallen holster. “Babe,” Sara states with a chuckle, the cuffs clinking light as she tugs against them, “I learned how to escape capture my first months in the League—these aren’t going to stop me.”

“I don’t really need to stop you,” Ava shakes her head as she tosses Sara’s weapons to the side, not bothering to comment on the pet name, “I just need to slow you down.” As Sara laughs, Ava heads to the door and unlocks it before opening it slightly. “See you around,” Ava says over her shoulder, smiling at Sara as she stands there with her hands locked over her head, “Babe.”

The last thing Ava hears as she closes the door is the sound of Sara’s echoing laugh. Pulling her phone from her pocket, Ava takes a look at Walter’s location now. He’s not close to the parking deck Ava was going to do this on, but Ava’s now run out of time. Once Sara gets out of those cuffs she will undoubtedly try to stop Ava from what she’s about to do. Sighing quietly, Ava makes sure that Walter is in a relatively remote location before tapping the button on her screen.

This morning Ava laid enough explosives under the wheels of the company car to launch it when they went off. That button press is likely all it took, and it’s not ideal but it’ll have to do. Certainly it will be public—maybe a bit too public. Pocketing her phone, Ava heads back to her desk. She should be able to get her things and get out before she comes face to face with an angry assassin.

London, England — 20:55

“I’m still mad at you for killing the target,” Sara reprimands, her voice low and her hands rough along Ava’s sides. They’re already sprawled on Ava’s bed, all of Ava’s files and computer having been swept off by Sara a while ago. As Ava expected, Sara’s pissed about Walter’s death in the car bombing. Maybe Sara had been right about there being something fun about pissing each other off, certainly Ava thinks so right now.

Humming quietly, Ava draws Sara back in, her fingers already tangled in Sara’s hair. Ava’s lip stings from where Sara bit it moments ago, hard enough to draw blood. It had done nothing but make that heat swell in Ava’s abdomen. “I needed him alive,” Sara lectures between kisses, her body pressing down firmly into Ava’s own.

“Too bad,” Ava retorts, pushing Sara back as she sits up. Ava’s exhausted, and Sara’s already made her come but she won’t say no to kissing Sara. Drawing backwards, Ava settles her hands on Sara’s hips, stroking her thumbs over the sharp hip bones that jut from Sara’s skin. For a moment, Ava slows, her eyes caught on that one scar on Sara’s body that always gives her pause. It’s far too close to her heart for comfort, circular and puckered around the edges as bullet wounds usually are. When Ava looks up, Sara’s gaze is on her, her eyes slightly wide. “How’d you like the cuffs,” Ava teases gently, wanting to get the attention off of her.

“Cute trick, but you’re not going to get away with it again,” Sara replies, still completely shirtless as she straddles Ava’s lap, “That was a one time thing only.” Her lips meet Ava’s again, and Ava smiles into the kiss. Her fingers splay over Sara’s sides, holding her delicately in a way she hasn’t before. A hand is cupping Ava’s jaw, drawing her to tilt her head upwards and she obliges. Sara still somehow tastes of peppermint, the sharp flavour lingering on her tongue and lips. But she tastes of Ava too, remnants of Ava’s arousal on her tongue where Sara had been laid out between her thighs.

Sara grinds down into Ava’s lap, eliciting a quiet sound that bubbles up from the back of Ava’s throat. She can still feel how wet Sara is, the slick slide of skin along her abdomen. “I don’t know,” Ava breaks the kiss to lean back, scanning Sara’s face and her tangled hair, “I feel like I could persuade you otherwise—maybe in a different setting next time?”

This time Sara just laughs before shoving Ava’s shoulder with her hand. Falling back, Ava hits the pillows with a laugh of her own as she stares up at Sara. The lights are low in the room, striking the lighter highlights in Sara’s hair and turning them golden. Sara’s beautiful, Ava always knew that, but from this perspective, with the light shining behind her, she looks ethereal. A few darkening marks color Sara’s neck where Ava had attached her lips earlier, determined to leave the same kind of bruises Sara left on her the last time they did this together.

Silvered scars cover Sara’s torso, a few of them even pink from how new they are. Ava never asks about them, but she wants to. She wants to ask about the lengthy scar tucked along the contour of Sara’s rib and abdominal muscles. She wants to pry the story from Sara’s lips of how she survived that shot so close to the heart. But Ava knows better. Scars are personal, and she’s not willing to cross that line with Sara. Not yet.

“See something you like?” Sara taunts as Ava shakes her head in amusement. Reaching up, she draws Sara back down to her, capturing her bottom lip. They don’t do soft, or caring, that was the rule. But they’ve both broken in in different way. Sara broke it first when she cared for Ava’s injury after Ava took a bullet for her. Or maybe Ava broke it first when she agreed to their deal, when she agreed to work this closely with Sara.

Whoever broke it doesn’t really seem to matter, it’s clear that they’re too far past the line to try and step behind it again. Sex with Sara this evening had been more about just chasing after an orgasm and Ava knows it. Of course Sara had broken out the cuffs, locking them around Ava’s wrists in a moment where Ava was stuck staring at the expanses of bare skin revealed as Sara stripped her shirt off. “Payback is a bitch,” Sara had whispered against her lips. But even with the metal cuffs binding her to the bed, Ava didn’t lack any kind of physical connection to Sara.

She had beckoned Sara towards her the moment Sara had slowly removed her clothing where Ava could see. The moment Sara was kneeling on the bed, Ava had nudged Sara up her body, letting Sara straddle her. A knee had been on either side of Ava’s face and Sara had smirked down at her, “Power bottom—it’s a good look on you Sharpe.” But there had been a tenderness to her voice and a gentleness in the way Sara had held Ava’s head as Ava ran her tongue through Sara. Ava had relished every reaction she drew from Sara, every gasping breath, every tremble in her legs, every clench of her muscles. Her hands had rested over Ava’s bound ones the entire time, never letting go.

Afterwards, Sara had repaid the favour, her body alongside Ava’s the entire time, an arm under Ava’s head—cradling her in a way. Fingers had trailed down Ava’s body but Sara had paused to trail over some of the scars left on Ava’s body from years in the field. When Sara finally did slip inside Ava, she had kissed her at the same time—almost gently, close to tenderly, nearly reverently.

Everything this evening felt vulnerable in a way Ava couldn't bear, so she had buried her face in Sara's neck. Hiding her face had felt like a better option than letting Sara see how she was breaking Ava open. When Sara told Ava to relax, Ava had listened. When Sara had asked Ava to raise her leg, she had listened. It was a dance of surrender and Ava knows it—Sara probably knew it too.

The cuffs came off a few minutes ago and Sara had momentarily rubbed the red lines along Ava's wrist as Ava had stared at the tender action. The marks will likely fade within the day, but Ava's chest had clenched as she watched Sara's fingers dance along her skin with such care. "Did you really carry these around with you all day?" Ava nods to the cuffs that lay discarded along the side of the bed.

"Did you really keep them in your desk thinking I was going to show up?" Sara fires back, her hands planted on Ava's abdomen now. Pursing her lips, Ava doesn't say anything. But her lack of response was clearly enough for Sara who is laughing now. "You wanted to see me," Sara lilts as Ava rolls her eyes, "Admit it Aves, you secretly like when I show up and get in your way. What else would bring excitement to month spent working as an office secretary."

"Office assistant," Ava corrects as Sara's smile widens, "And don't call me Aves." Part of Ava's smile falls as she tells Sara that, not willing to go into why she doesn't like it. Her father used to call her that, and something about Sara using the nickname in a fond tone is rather unsettling. "So did you just break these out to show me you're in control?" Ava lifts her hips up, jostling Sara who's sat across her thighs, "Or are you going to actually finish what you started here?"

Sara's grin returns in full force as she laughs and bends down. Her lips meet Ava's own again, soft and caring and her hand cups the side of Ava's face. Ava's glad that she can move her hands once more. She's glad that she is now free to draw her fingers down Sara's skin or tangle them in her hair. Shifting impatiently, Ava jostles Sara once again. Watching Sara fall apart above her and against her mouth had done nothing but spark Ava's need to feel Sara against her again. "Patience," Sara murmurs, her mouth traveling to Ava's neck, "You waited a month for this job, you can wait a few minutes for me to have a bit of fun."

Ava really can't. That burning feeling in her abdomen never went away and she can feel the slickness of her arousal coating her thighs. But Sara's hellbent on making her wait. Lips map over Ava's skin—stopping to close around her nipple with a flattened tongue, nipping at the skin under Ava's breast, placing open mouthed kisses on her way down Ava's stomach. "This looks like it was nearly fatal," Sara hums as Ava watches on, her chest already rising and falling.

It's a strange thing for Sara to notice right in the middle of this, but Ava gets the feeling that she expects some kind of a response. Sara's body is between her thighs, her fingers tracing over that same scar near Ava's ribs. "It was," Ava replies, shifting her hips up into Sara and sucking in a quiet breath when she finds the friction she wanted. Sara lifts up before Ava can do it again and Ava exhales in a near whine. "Stab wound somewhere in Croatia, can't remember where," Ava continues as Sara traces the thick two inch scar once more, "Put me out of the field for quite some time."

With a quiet hum, Sara moves on and Ava's glad, she doesn't think that she could take more of that concern that had flickered over Sara's face. Sara continues her assault of small nips laid into Ava's skin, trailing her way up Ava's thigh to the juncture of her hip. Her eyes are dark when she looks up, filled with something that makes Ava's breathing stutter slightly. There's no time to think about that before Sara's tongue finally runs through her and Ava's hips lift once more. Every muscle in her body goes tight as Sara explores with her tongue, teasing and nudging Ava ever so close to the edge.

An arm lays flat over her hips, keeping her pinned to the mattress. Ava strains against it, needing more than Sara is giving her right now. She can almost feel Sara's smirk against her, the amused exhale of air that blows over her and makes her jerk again. "Just relax," Sara soothes as Sara opens her eyes once more and looks to her, "I won't tease you too much."

Ava doesn't trust that, at least not until she can feel Sara's hand moving under her chin and fingers finally enter Ava again. All of that burning pleasure is coursing through her again. With one hand Ava grabs the sheets, and with the other she reaches down for Sara's arm, needing that contact with Sara but now knowing how to ask for for anything more. Sara's eyes don't leave Ava's the entire time, her gaze never wavering. Ava should look away, she should flip off that connection but she can't.

Her breathing coming in shallow intakes of air, Ava strains against the arm over her once more before all of the tension in her body snaps. It happens with no warning, and Sara doesn't stop the gentle flicks of her tongue over Ava's clit, nor the movement of her fingers inside Ava. It's overstimulating and Ava squirms away but Sara holds her close with the arm over her hips. Ava's vision swims just as she tips over the edge into her second and much stronger orgasm. Her legs clamp around Sara's head and she uses her foot to nudge Sara away. "No more," Ava whispers shakily.

Her senses clouded, her eyes closed, Ava feels Sara withdrawing from her. Something heavy lays over Ava's thigh but she's too focused on her breathing to look. The tightness of the sheets Ava's tangled around her fingers is almost cutting off her circulation. But it's Ava's focal point to come back to her senses again. That tight and heavy feeling is back in her chest, almost making it hard for her to breathe around. Taking in another shaky breath, Ava finally opens her eyes.

Sara is there with her head rested on Ava's thigh, her eyes still looking up at Ava. There's something inexplicable delicate in her gaze and Ava turns away, her chest clenching. They've crossed a line here and Ava knows it. But she can't say that she won't do it again. Sara makes Ava ache for something she can't name, for something she doesn't think she's had. At least not in a long time.

Blonde hair is tangled around Sara's face and her eyes somehow look even more vibrant in this lighting. Ava reaches out to touch her but thinks twice of it, resting her hand over her own stomach instead. "Does that make up for the fact I hand cuffed you?" Sara teases as Ava lets out a little snort, "I thought as much."

The mattress shifts as Sara gets to her knees, coming up to rest near Ava. With still trembling muscles, Ava scoots to the side, letting Sara fall beside her. A hand lays over her abdomen and Ava's eyes fall to it, watching as Sara traces mindless patterns over her skin. This is a relatively new thing, but Ava wonders if Sara knows how often she does it now.

Sara's curled on her side near Ava, her head propped on her elbow. Their bodies aren't quite touching, but there's less than an inch between them on the bed. "I bet you can go one more time," Sara lilts, her hand trailing down Ava's stomach.

"No," Ava shakes her head, feeling spent and exhausted, "I really can't." And she likely shouldn't, not until she gets a better grasp on whatever has changed between her and Sara. Fingers splay over her ribcage this time, Sara's palm pressed to the same scar she traced earlier. This time she doesn't move, just resting her hand there, almost protectively. Ava's stomach jump as she stares at the hand on her, not sure what to make of it. "Where are you headed next?" Ava asks, needing something to focus on.

"No idea," Sara replies, rolling onto her back and raising her arms over her head as she stretches

out. Turning her head to the side, Ava follows the motions with her eyes. Strong lines of muscle run along Sara's stomach, tightening and flexing. Ava wants to reach out and trail her fingers between the lines of definition, but she refrains. Sharp hipbones raise above Sara's thighs, blanketed in freckles that rest over smooth pale skin. "When do you find out where you're going?" Sara asks, ripping Ava from her observations.

Heat rising to her cheeks, Ava shrugs and turns her head to face the front of the room once more. "I should find out tomorrow, supposedly I'm needed somewhere else again," Ava replies, feeling slightly annoyed that Henry has been sending her on special projects when she's meant to have some autonomy now over where she goes. "All I know is it's a quick job," Ava slips her legs under the covers, feeling exhaustion settle over her, "Some kind of in and out data grab."

Ava's body is heavy and her eyes are so close to closing as Sara curls on her side once more. Turning her head to look at the assassin laying in her bed, Ava feels her lips twitch upwards in an involuntary smile when she finds Sara is playing with a loose thread on the blanket there. Sara isn't one to sit still, that's something Ava's learned with time. "Where do you think you're being sent out to?" Ava proposes instead. Usually Sara has her theories on where she'll be needed next based off of international headlines.

A long exhale falls from Sara's lips and washed over Ava's skin. "I'm banking on being sent somewhere in Norway," Sara replies, her eyes meeting Ava's as her brows draw, "There's some business meeting happening there with some shady executives coming from America and I know at least one of them has dealings with the League."

Sara continues to talk and Ava is listening—she is. But she's paying far more attention to the way Sara moves her hand as she speaks. Or to the fact that Sara is far more expressive than Ava initially realized, her features giving away each and every one of her emotions as she talks. As Sara continues on, Ava is vaguely aware of the way the sound is fading out and of the way her body is slowly sinking into the mattress.

What has to be only moments later, the mattress dips and Ava looks up, startled. Sara's at the foot of the bed already, shrugging her shirt on and reaching down for her pants. "Sorry," Ava apologizes with a yawn, drawing the covers over her chest, "I didn't mean to fall asleep—it's been a long few days." Ava doesn't mention that today was the longest and most exhausting seeing as she spent her morning placing the bombs that killed Sara's protection target.

"In other words I wore you out?" Sara teases as Ava chuckles, reclining back on the pillow and taking Sara in, "I'm not worried about it Ava, you seem exhausted." Humming quietly, Ava watches on as Sara buckles her pants and slips her shoes on. "I'd better head out," Sara speaks, pulling her hair from the neck of her now buttoned shirt. With a nod, Ava's eyes follow Sara to the door where she pauses just before stepping out. "I think you might be dangerous Ava," Sara's voice is quiet and her back is to Ava, obscuring any view of her face, "But I'll see you around."

Nothing about her comment makes any sense, and Ava sits up in the bed to ask what she means. But Sara is gone, the door closed behind her so there's nobody to question. Confused, Ava stares to the door, not sure what the hell Sara meant by that. They've already established that they're dangerous for the other. Any hint their organizations pick up about their little meetings and plots together could have disastrous consequences.

Shuffling her legs under the covers, Ava stands up and flips her locks on the door before going back to the bed. The cuffs remain there along the white sheets, the key sat to the side. Too tired to puzzle through the meaning of Sara's words, Ava shoves them from the bed before climbing back under her covers. Tonight she rests, and tomorrow she meets Henry at MI6 Headquarters to get her

next assignment.

Oslo, Norway — 22:34

Ava's taking her time getting up the stairs, she already knows what she's going to find waiting for her in the board meeting room. The very moment she came across the dead guard in the security room with a dagger in his eye, Ava knew without a doubt that Sara had to already be here. There was of course a note as well. It had been dappled with blood and scrawled out in semi-neat handwriting, left behind on the bloodied keyboard for Ava to find. "Come find me babe," it read, signed off with Sara's initial at the bottom.

Ava doesn't know why Sara insists on calling her those pet names when they've established by now that they really don't irritate Ava like they used to. They do lead to an eye roll of course, how could they not, but otherwise Ava is relatively unbothered by them. Now she knows that Sara is doing it to get a laugh from her, rather than to make Ava consider stabbing Sara as she used to.

With a small sigh Ava tugs open the door to the top floor and turns the corner with her gun in hand. Nobody is up here right now, but Ava would rather be safe than sorry. The halls are dark, all the lights off and doors closed. This is the business meeting that Sara had referenced when they were both in London. It's some kind of summit for stuffy conservative business executives that come from various different countries. Each one is worse than the other and not a single one of their resumes is lacking some kind of egregious human rights violation.

Honestly Ava's not surprised that the League has been hired to take at least one of these men out. Though judging by the dead bodies Ava found in the stair well, she's willing to bet Sara came for all five men currently in the room down the hall. With sure steps, Ava continues walking, her eyes focused on the double mahogany doors only a few meters head of her. There's blood smeared on the handle and a finger print in the midst of the stain that Ava rubs away with her wrist.

Knocking open the door, Ava raises her gun up but promptly lowers it when she finds the scene she had imagined she would come across. "Good, you're here," Sara says cheerily, "I'll take it you got my message?" Ava just clicks her tongue, holding the folded note up between her two fingers as Sara waves her into the room. Stepping over the body in her way, Ava closes the door behind her with a quiet exhale. "You took your time getting up here," Sara mutters as Ava walks across the room.

Sara's dressed in a suit this time around, her hair pinned back with those same sharp rods that Ava once pulled from her hair in an elevator months ago. There's blood on her coat, staining the bottom left corner and splatters of it on her sleeves near her wrists. "I knew what I was walking in to," Ava gestures around the room by way of explanation. Four bodies are on the ground, one by the door, two near the table, and one near the window. All stabbed perhaps a few too many times.

Then there's the man currently sat in the chair, his hands taped to the arms and his legs bound. A white cloth is tied around his mouth that might very well be the piece of fabric that appears to be missing from the shirt of the man near the door. He's looking at Ava with pleading eyes and she just glances to Sara. "This seems familiar," Sara smiles back at her, twirling her knife around her fingers with a deadly kind of precision.

It is familiar, simply because Sara appears to have made a habit of taking men out in business meetings before Ava can get here to prevent her from making a mess. But she's sure Sara is talking about the time Ava had come for a thumbprint and had found her target bleeding out on the carpet. "This time you've certainly taken some more risks," Ava comments, nodding to the camera pinned

in the corner of the room, “I hope you know that we have about five minutes before the patrols find the guards in the stairwell.” Sara shrugs and Ava purses her lips, “That’s assuming they don’t first find the one you murdered in the security room. You could have always just taken down the feeds.”

Asking Sara to refrain from making a mess is like asking the wind to never blow; one could do it, but it would be entirely pointless as the action appears to be something in the subject’s nature itself. By now Ava knows this, and clearly Sara understands that Ava has this knowledge because she laughs. “I could have done that, but it would have taken minutes to destroy the feeds,” Sara replies, pinning her knife into the table as the man in front of them startles, “Killing him took seconds—much more effective.”

Humming, Ava nods to the man in the chair, the American business man, “Didn’t anyone tell you not to play with your victims?” He’s trying to talk now but Ava nudges his foot and levels him with a glare. She knows who he is. Thatcher Lewis, a sleazy business man who built his company off the misfortune of others. Apparently he’s learned nothing with time and continues to commit heinous crime that all somehow escape the knowledge or notice of any American authority organizations.

“Actually, I was taught to always play with my victims, particularly those who find it amusing to benefit from doing evil,” Sara states with that smile on her face, her eyes roaming along Ava’s body. Ava rolls her eyes and clicks her tongue because now is not the time. But secretly she can’t help but be a little thrilled whenever Sara looks at her like that. “This one here,” Sara points to the man with her knife as he flinches, “You can’t even begin to imagine the things he’s done.”

Ava can. She read his file in depth before coming here. She read all of these men’s files—not that it much matters now that they’re all dead or dying. “Torture, sexual violence, murder of all economic rivals—and their families,” Ava lists off as she levels the man with a scathing glare. He has the decency to turn his eyes from her as Ava scoffs and continues on, “Countless drug related deaths involving civilians, weapons smuggling, and more. The list was quite exhaustive.”

“So then you understand that I want him to suffer,” Sara replies, abruptly removing the dagger in his thigh as Ava sighs. Blood spray goes over the table and gets on Ava’s shoes, something she will be talking to Sara about later. It isn’t that Ava doesn’t want him to suffer, she does. There have been times where she too became a little too personally invested in her target’s demise.

However they’re on a time table right now. “Well kill him so we can get on with it,” Ava looks to the screens in the corner of the room, watching as guards in the lobby move rapidly towards the elevators, “It appears we’re out of time for you to play games here. Unless you want to shoot your way out of here, we should be going.”

Ava already has the files that she came for. The only reason she came up here was because she doubted that Sara had thought to keep a close eye on the cameras. And evidently she had been right. “I’ll meet you there,” Sara replies, her eyes still focused on the man in front of her, “I’m not finished here just yet.”

She is though because Ava is not leaving Sara here alone to get caught in the firefight coming for them. And Ava is not going to risk just the two of them taking on at least twenty men with rifles. With an impatient sigh, Ava raises her gun up and fires at the man twice, one shot to the heart, another to the head. “Ava,” Sara admonishes, turning around with an annoyed expression on her face, “Now that was just cold.”

“Worse than torture?” Ava fires back as Sara rolls her eyes before grabbing her plethora of knives lined on the table. “Come on,” Ava insists as she grabs some of the knives laid out and shoves

them in her jacket pocket, “This is why we don’t leave bodies in public spaces. It’s a wonder that you’ve survived this long going about the way you do.”

“Yes what would I do without you showing up and getting in the way of my fun,” Sara drones out sarcastically, her eyes sparkling when Ava turns over her shoulder to glare at her. It’s a half-hearted glare though because Sara has that wide grin on her face. Ava’s own lips twitch upwards and she turns around before Sara can see it, not wanting to deal with the gentle teasing that would come from it. “You’d rather I just leave them all alive?” Sara continues, her voice getting closer as Ava looks to the live camera feeds.

“That is preferable,” Ava mumbles distractedly, silently counting the number of men, “Certainly a better option when the security here is this intense.” So far it appears that the guards have yet to make their way to any stairwells, but Ava knows it won’t be long. Seeing as this was meant to be a quick job, she never pulled up the building blueprints further than the eighth floor where she had just taken the data files from.

Pulling up the schematics, Ava scans the screen while keeping an eye on the cameras. “See, isn’t it a good thing I never took those down,” Sara teases as Ava snorts. There’s a door down the hallway that should take them to the east stairwell. It’ll be close enough to the location where Ava has parked her car. Hands land on Ava’s waist and she startles slightly, her heart rate picking up.

The warm press of Sara’s body can be felt along her back as Sara’s hands roam to Ava’s abdomen. “Sara,” Ava says in warning, looking down to see Sara still has a single unused knife in her hand, “No knives.” A chuckle comes from against her shoulder, the low and throaty sound making Ava’s breathing falter. Determined to focus, Ava uses two fingers to zoom in on the map on the screen. At the same time, Sara has pulled her shirt away from her chest, the knife slipping between the fabric of her shirt and popping the buttons. “Hey,” Ava turns her head over her shoulder and finds Sara looking back at her with an innocent expression, “Do you have a death wish?”

“Only sometimes,” Sara replies, popping another button with a wicked grin. Ava finds the contrast in Sara endlessly alluring and perplexing at the same time. Sara is the same person who runs her hands over Ava’s body with such care it lights Ava’s skin on fire, but now she has a knife pressed against Ava’s skin and Ava’s not scared of her at all. Instead she’s almost annoyed with herself for being more than just a little turned on.

Catching Sara by the wrist, Ava strikes the base of the blade so Sara drops it. After catching the knife herself, Ava lays it on the table out of Sara’s reach. “No knives,” Ava reminds her once again before going back to the screen. On the cameras, Ava watches as the guards begin to file through the lobby and towards the west and north stairwells, meaning they have maybe minutes left here before there’s no more time left to escape.

Sara doesn’t appear to be concerned. The entire time Ava is making sure that their exit route will work, she’s trying to distract Ava—shameless in her efforts. Her hands pull Ava’s shirt from her pants, her lips ghost over Ava’s neck and the shell of her ear, her fingers rake down Ava’s abdomen. Sucking in a deep breath, Ava musters up all her self-control and finds the best path for them. “Here,” Ava points to the map, tugging on Sara’s arm to get her to disengage, “The back stairwell here leads to—”

“The underground parking garage, I know,” Sara replies as Ava looks to her. That smile is still on Sara’s face as she shrugs and takes her knife from the table, “I knew it was there but it’s always cute to watch you do your spy thing. I just wanted to indulge for a moment—witness you in your element.”

“I’m not cu—” Ava sighs, realizing this is a pointless argument as Sara’s smile grows, “You know

what, that's not important. What's important is that we get out of here before those guards realize that every single man in this room is dead." Sara's eyes fall to the man right by the table, the one who actually might not be dead yet. But he won't make it, that much is clear. "Focus," Ava reminds her as Sara looks to her again, "Look here, there's men coming up this stairwell and the north one as well, so we need to get moving."

"Good thing my bike is right by the door," Sara grins as Ava shakes her head, already about to protest, "Come on Aves, I'll drive really slow for you. Live on the edge a little." Ava is a spy, that's about as far on the edge as someone can possibly live. But it's another pointless argument because they do need to get out of here quickly and Ava's car is on the opposite end of the garage. "So, we're doing this together then?" Sara asks, holding her hand out.

Her lips twitching at the corners of her mouth, Ava passes Sara's knives back over that she had in her pocket. "I guess we are," Ava replies as Sara smiles back at her, "Don't let me get shot Lance, I won't forgive you."

"Never," Sara laughs, already heading to the door, "Can't have my favourite spy dying on me, now can I?" Shaking her head in amusement, Ava swipes down on the screen in front of her to delete the past two hours from all security footage. After taking her gun from the table, Ava follows after Sara who's already at the door. "Ready Sharpe?" Sara tilts, her hand on the door knob.

Ava motions to the door, her eyes focused on that glint in Sara's eyes, "After you."

Maribor, Slovenia 18:22

Ava's ears ring as she tucks her body under the desk. She should move. She should get out of here but everything in her visual field is distorted and Ava can't even think straight. Somewhere in the distance she's aware of voices yelling as gunfire goes off. Sucking in shaking breaths, Ava grips her gun tight when a second blast goes off in the building. The vibrations make the floor under her quake as panic flares wildly in Ava's chest.

Ava is in an office—somewhere. She can't remember how she got in here and she can't remember what she was doing before the blasts of bombs rocked through the building. Her mind scattered and her hands trembling, Ava looks around her surroundings. Everything is cast in red and orange hues, maybe from the fire Ava thinks is burning just outside this office. Nausea builds in Ava's stomach. This is too similar to Bucharest and she hadn't seen this blast coming.

The last thing Ava remembers is feeling the entire compound shake as she dropped to the ground and found this desk to remain under. Every muscle in her body feels as if it's locked up while still feeling as if there's an electrical current passing through her. Ava's chest is tight and heavy and she cannot breathe right now. The air feels thin and her vision swims when she turns her head back to the door, dizziness clouding her senses.

When the door bursts open, Ava is quick to raise her gun, firing before the intruder has come in the door. A bullet strikes the side of the door frame as Ava's hands shake but it's the only one that leaves the gun. The magazine is empty now, the gun clicking uselessly in Ava's hands. Blonde hair and blue eyes appear around the side of the door and Ava remains still in place as the intruder comes in. It's Sara, knives in one hand and a concerned expression on her face. "Hey," Sara speaks tentatively as Ava backs up, "Just me Ava—it's just me."

Sara shouldn't be here, should she? Ava can't remember that either. Some piece of the anxiety and dread loosens in her body as Sara comes and kneels in front of her. Gentle hands cradle either side

of her face and Ava thinks Sara might be talking to her. Worried blue eyes scan Ava's face while Ava's mind latches onto the details in Sara's irises. Everything around her goes quiet as she searches Sara's eyes.

Ava needs to calm down, and typically finding something to focus on helps. Sara has countless shades of blue present in her eyes. There's darker hues in the middle, lapping around her pupils, with lighter ones towards the outside. The colors form zigzag patterns there in her iris, little ripples of color breaking up the differences in shading.

"Ava," Sara says her name with a tone of urgency, snapping Ava's focus back to her. Her ears are still ringing and she still feels like she's not breathing properly. "I'm going to go and take care of everything out there, and you're going to stay here," Sara instructs. Ava almost wants to laugh. She's not in any state to move right now and doesn't think she could if she wanted to. "Take this," Sara presses something cold into Ava's hand, another gun, "You shoot anything that comes in that door that isn't me, okay?"

There's a firm quality to Sara's tone, something that reminds Ava of her own training when instructors would lead them in tasks. It's authoritative and commanding, and Ava finds herself nodding her head quietly. Sara's eyes flick over her body once more, but then Sara's pushing herself up to a standing position and leaving. Ava almost wants to ask Sara to stay, to not leave her here alone in this room. There's a fire burning outside—surely this can't be safe for Ava to stay put.

Stretching her legs outwards, Ava uses her feet and a single hand to pull herself out from under the desk. Glass and debris cover the floor, a single piece making Ava's hand sting as she places her palm down over it. This is humiliating and anger surges through Ava's body when she realizes that she hasn't gotten control back over the shaking in her hands. Outside she can hear the voices better, the men yelling to each other or possibly in warning.

Footsteps sound just outside the office and Ava raises her gun, using her knee to support her wrist. As the door opens, the muzzle of a gun appears there along with the sole of a black shoe near the ground. Not even hesitating, Ava fires straight through the door. Sara hadn't been wearing black shoes. The body hits the ground outside with a thump and Ava collapses against the cabinet. That trick won't work again now that there's a body outside the hall alerting others to the danger inside.

Closing her eyes, Ava rests her head backwards, raising her hand up to the spot along her forehead that stings. There's a place there along her skin that stings, and Ava's fingers come away red. Seeing the blood there makes that nauseous feeling in her stomach rise up once more, threatening to make Ava get physically sick. Her mind wants to jump back to the last time this happened. Ava can nearly feel the dust from the debris in Bucharest on her skin, the feeling of something sharp puncturing the skin near her spine. When she closes her eyes again she swears she can still hear the screams of others caught in the rubble.

The door slams open again and Ava scrambles to raise her gun, only to see Sara coming inside. There's blood on Sara's hands that doesn't appear to be her own, but Ava's attention is focused on the red staining her skin. "Come on," Sara urges, her hands reaching down, "We have to get out of here before the damn building collapses."

Ava hadn't known that was a danger. She doesn't want Sara touching her, doesn't want hands brushing over her skin, but Ava's too dizzy to decline help. Sara's hands are firm but gentle as she pulls Ava to her feet. "I can walk," Ava protests when she's standing, hating how weak her voice sounds right now, "Just let me go." Irritation bubbles under her skin and burns through her veins. It's not Sara's fault and Ava shouldn't snap at her, but Ava can't be touched right now.

“Alright,” Sara replies, backing up with her hands raised, “Then just follow me okay? Stay close Ava.” Even the action of nodding her head makes Ava dizzy, but she trails after Sara. Gun still in her hand, Ava’s eyes roam all over the hallway. There’s bodies scattered everywhere, some with bullet wounds, others with daggers in their chests. It wasn’t a fire burning outside but rather the backup lights turning on and casting everything in hues of red. The ringing Ava heard might have been the alarm bells piercing through the otherwise silent air.

Stumbling slightly over a body at the stairs, Ava bumps into Sara’s back. A hand steadies her, palm spread over her waist. “Just hold on to me,” Sara instructs, moving Ava’s hand to the back of her coat, “And stop fighting off my help, you can barely walk.” It’s true, but Ava doesn’t appreciate being called out on it. It’s a small compound, so there’s not very far to walk, but already Ava can see the beginnings of the crumbling walls around them. Destruction lies everywhere to the south side of the building, likely the origin of the blast.

Once they’re finally outside, Ava almost feels as if she can breathe again. The air is cool and no longer humid and packed with dust of a soon-to-be decimated building. Still holding onto Sara’s coat, Ava lets herself be led over the streets and down a connecting alley. There’s no bike there this time, only a car that Ava separates from Sara to get into. Slumping in the passenger seat, Ava closes her eyes and rests her head back.

Her heart is beating far too rapidly in her chest and Ava knows that her breathing must still sound strangled. The car door on the drivers side opens and closes, but Ava doesn’t open her eyes even when she hears Sara turning the engine over. Something presses into her side and Ava does open her eyes this time, only to come face to face with Sara. Hands are guiding Ava’s seatbelt in place, clicking it into the buckle as Ava grits her teeth. “Stop it,” Ava pushes Sara’s hands away, not wanting that kind of help right now, not wanting Sara to see her this vulnerable and disoriented.

“You helped me at the docks in Ireland,” Sara retorts, her eyes bearing into Ava’s own, “Let me help you now. Stop being an asshole.” It’s a gentle tease because Ava’s not really trying to be an asshole. She’s just overstimulated and overwhelmed. Whatever hit her head really does hurt and Ava is still dizzy even now that she’s sitting down. Too tired to argue, Ava bites down on the inside of her cheek and nods her head. “I’m taking you to my place,” Sara speaks decisively, turning her attention to the road as she places the car in drive, “Yours might be compromised.”

Right now Ava still can’t remember why that might be, or what she was even doing there tonight in the first place. Everything before the blast is muddled and foggy. Slipping her hand in her pocket, Ava finds a data drive there, so she clearly got what she needed. Once more with her eyes closed, Ava leans back, trying to silence the echoes of the bombs going off that remain in her head.

Sara drives slow, almost a little too slow. Ava figures she might be doing that on purpose to minimize the impact of the bumps in the road. “You don’t have to coddle me,” Ava snaps, still feeling a little too on edge to be gentle or kind right now, “I’m fine—this just happens sometimes. I wasn’t expecting the bombs to go off. They weren’t mine.”

This is why Ava uses ear protection and why she always makes sure that she has ample time to prepare herself mentally before triggering a bomb in her near proximity. When possible, Ava prefers to not be around the blast at all. Today she has no idea why the bombs went off in that building. “I’m not coddling you, I’m just trying to manage aftereffects,” Sara replies, her tone soft and almost soothing, “And I’m not judging. You saw what being in water does to me, wouldn’t really be fair of me to judge you for this.”

Her words come as a little bit of a relief, and Ava feels herself relaxing into the seat. Rubbing her palms anxiously on her pants, Ava opens her eyes once more and looks out the window. Sara is

taking them in the opposite direction of Ava's own place on the outskirts of the city. In her periphery, Ava can feel Sara glancing at her time and again. "How bad is the head injury?" Sara asks as Ava turns to look at her, "You have blood in your eye."

That might explain why Ava's vision feels so distorted. Raising her hand up, Ava touches the dull pained spot on her forehead and jerks away with a small wince. It's still bleeding, though it seems to be slowing down. Pulling down the mirror, Ava looks at herself there. She looks like a disaster. There's dust all over her shoulders and hair, powdering her in white. Blood drips from the open wound along her forehead, cascading down her left eye and staining the cornea there red. Blinking rapidly, Ava attempts to clear the blood away.

"Hard to tell how bad it is," Ava replies, closing the mirror and sitting back. She hopes that Sara understands what she means by that. Right now Ava's too unsettled and jittery to really assess her injuries. That'll come later when her adrenaline levels crash and Ava's struggling to fall asleep.

"Well," Sara clears her throat, the car revving as she steps down on the accelerator, "Just hold tight, we'll be there soon."

Maribor, Slovenia — 20:12

Now freshly showered and wearing clothing that is not her own, Ava curls her legs up with her in the chair she's sitting in. Sara had picked up her speed on the second half of their drive here to Sara's little flat. It's clear that Sara hadn't expected to have company this evening and she had rushed inside ahead of Ava to try and clear things up. But Ava still saw the dishes in the sink and the clothing on the floor and the bra laid over the back of this very chair.

She didn't mind it though, but Sara's cheeks had been pink when Ava had picked the bra off the chair and threw it to her. Ava had showered first, something that took quite a bit of effort between the pounding in her head and the trembling of her muscles. The hot water had been a balm against her chilled skin and Ava stood there for far too long just trying to use the water to help herself regulate again.

Her hair now smells like Sara's own, like coconut and maybe some kind of citrus. Sara had given Ava a soft shirt and pair of sweatpants to wear to bed. Though her pants had been only just a little short on Ava, riding low along her hips when Ava pulled them on. Even they smell like Sara, and it's been a lot for Ava to process right now. The entire time Ava was moving around or dressing, Sara was watching her warily, maybe even with a bit of concern.

This is breaking another silent rule. They never come to Sara's place for some reason, and yet Sara has brought Ava here without so much as a real protest. In fact she hadn't left Ava much of a choice. Though that might be because Ava's place likely is compromised. Sara had explained what happened to Ava on the way here and Ava had of course remembered her task in all of this as well.

Ava was there to get information on the arms dealer working inside that compound with his men. She'd wormed her way in over the course of a week and had established herself as a regional informant so as to get closer to the boss. Today was the night Ava had taken everything from the servers, and she had been on her way out the office door when the bombs had gone off. Sara was the one to explain that it was a rival group that had rigged explosives along the outside walls to gain access.

Sara was there to take out the arms dealer, and she had seen the bombs go off at the last minute as she was parking her car. She hadn't known that Ava was here until she heard some of the fleeing

men blaming the bombs on the informant—which was Ava. Without a doubt, those from the compound who survived the bombing and Sara’s skills will have tried to locate Ava’s apartment and go through her things. They won’t find anything there. This evening Ava moved everything to another location with the assumption that they’d search for her after she stole intel.

“Here, you should take these,” Sara comes over, her feet bare along soft blue carpet on the floor. Ava lifts her eyes up and finds Sara standing there with a tiny little paper cup in one hand and a glass in the other. Too tired to speak or fight her off, Ava takes the pills and the water before swallowing them down. “Now, let me take a look at your head,” Sara instructs, pushing Ava’s legs so they fall to the ground.

Damp hair falls around Sara’s shoulders, turning the color a shade almost closer to brown than blonde now that it’s wet. There’s a cut along Sara’s cheek, but it’s shallow and Sara’s already laid some kind of cream over it. Gentle hands cup Ava’s face, lifting her eyes up to meet Sara’s own. Ava looks away, already feeling far too exposed after everything that happened in the compound today. Sara’s seen far more of Ava than Ava wanted her to. Now that Ava’s a bit calmer, the discomfort and embarrassment has settled in. “How’d this happen?” Sara murmurs, one hand under Ava’s chin, the other raising near her face.

“Table,” Ava replies quietly, still staring off to the side. She winces as Sara touches the antiseptic cloth to the wound to clean away any extra debris. What Ava does not explain here is that the bomb had sent terror running straight through her chest and it had been her own fault that she smacked her head on the table as she dropped to the ground. It’s just an instinctual thing that her body does now, and it hadn’t been avoidable.

“Here, look at me a minute,” Sara instructs, tapping her thumb along Ava’s chin. Slowly and reluctantly, Ava brings her eyes up to Sara’s. There’s nothing but concern and care there so evident to see in her eyes. It makes Ava ache, low in her chest. “I think you’ve avoided a concussion,” Sara hums quietly, already reaching for the strips of tape to seal Ava’s wound, “Your pupils look okay and you’re responsive. But I’m not letting you leave here until the morning when I know you’re in the clear.”

Ava doesn’t know if she can handle being here in this apartment with Sara and her gentle touch and her overly kind eyes. “So you’re a doctor suddenly?” Ava questions as Sara delicately lays the tape along her forehead, “Since when?”

She didn’t mean to sound as confrontational as she did. Ava just needs something to give the soft undercurrent of this conversation an edge. Ava can’t tolerate all of this quietness between them. Not when it’s making her ache for something she doesn’t understand. “I was going to be,” Sara replies, her tone turning melancholic as she purses her lips, “At least I was going to be before.”

No explanation is needed for Ava to understand what Sara means by that. She can’t see Sara as a doctor, not really. Though she could see Sara helping people, after all she’s done it for Ava more than a few times now. “I was going to be a professor,” Ava reveals by way of an apology for her curt tone, earning a look from Sara who has raised brows, “I thought maybe I would teach History, or English. I hadn’t quite gotten as far as picking a career path when the Operative recruited me.”

That’s not a time in Ava’s life that she really enjoys talking about. University is the one place Ava felt the most lost, and she prefers not to look back on those times. “I think you’d have made a good professor—a bossy one probably,” Sara comments, laying down another strip of tape as Ava snorts, “If you’d been my professor when I was in college, I certainly would have paid more attention in my classes.”

With a little laugh, Ava slaps the side of Sara’s leg while Sara smiles down at her. Sara’s lips are

curled upwards almost delicately, her eyes shining softly. Ava's eyes fall down to her lips, to the freckles tucked around the edges. She wonders what Sara would do if she kissed her right now—just for the sake of kissing Sara and nothing else. “We’d better get some sleep,” Sara says suddenly, backing up from Ava and turning away.

Clearing her throat as her cheeks heat, Ava nods her head. “I’ll be fine here,” Ava remarks as Sara turns down the covers of the bed, clearly about to climb under them. Sara looks to her, eyes flickering all over Ava’s body. “I’ve slept in chairs before,” Ava shrugs, “And it’s not as if you have a couch here.”

“You’re not sleeping in a chair when I’m still watching you for a concussion,” Sara replies, patting the bed, “Get over here Sharpe, we’ve shared a bed before.” They had. And that entire night Ava had laid awake learning every little noise that Sara makes in her sleep. She’d spent a few days with Sara in that room in Ireland before the night Sara fell in the water, but it was different hearing the sounds of her sleep when Sara was that close.

Sharing a bed with Sara after a night like this does not seem like a good idea. “I shouldn’t,” Ava shakes her head, feeling embarrassed, “After—” Ava clears her throat and looks to the side, her leg jumping, “After those kinds of panic attacks, I tend to have fairly violent nightmares.”

It’s an understatement really. Henry made Ava get screened for PTSD after the bombing in Bucharest and Ava barely passed the assessment to get back into the field. Even then it was because she had lied about how bad her nightmares are. Sometimes Ava wakes up on the floor and it can take a while for her to know where she is. “Good thing I’m an assassin and could take you in my sleep,” Sara retorts, not backing down, “Come on Ava, come lay down.”

Sara’s not easy to resist, she never was, and Ava knows she never will be. Sighing quietly, Ava pulls herself from the chair and walks over, feeling stiff and awkward. Staring at the bed and the side tables, Ava tries to determine which side is meant to be Sara’s. When Sara settles into the right side of the bed, that answers Ava’s questions. “I’ll wake you up every two hours to check your status,” Sara speaks, rummaging through her nightstand table, “It’s the common protocol for concussions.”

“I thought you said I didn’t have one,” Ava replies, climbing under the covers and settling on her side. Sara’s back is to her and Ava stares at the wet spot on her shirt that her hair left behind.

“I said I don’t think you have one,” Sara rolls back over, now coming face to face with Ava, “I’m still going to check. It would be really problematic for me if the Operative’s best spy suddenly had a brain bleed mid-slumber and died in my apartment.” Her smile is bright and Ava finds herself returning it as she rolls her eyes. When Ava stretches out, her muscles complain, each of them aching from how tense Ava’s been since the bombing.

Sara’s left a light on in the kitchen area, so it prevents the room from being plunged into complete darkness when she flips off the lamp. The light helps and Ava wonders if Sara did that because she knows how complete darkness makes the memories worse. Still on her side, Ava rests her hand on the mattress between them and takes in a short breath, her leg already jumping under the covers.

Nights after panic attacks are the hardest. Ava has always been an over thinker and it has always been hard to keep her mind from slipping back to her worst moments. Tonight is no exception to that. Ava can feel the heat of the summer air from that plaza she was standing in, she can hear the sounds of the kids laughing across the street, she can see the men running from the building—the first sign of danger.

“Hey,” Sara whispers and Ava jolts back to the present, startled as she looks over into blue eyes.

Sara's closer now, laying on her side and only allowing about six inches of space between their bodies. "Do you want to hear a story of how I once offended a French ambassador in Cairo?" Sara asks, her eyes flickering over Ava's face.

She's doing this for Ava's benefit and Ava knows it. Warmth surges up in Ava's chest, and she realizes once more that Sara Lance is absolutely nothing like Ava once imagined. Her kills might be messy and ruthless, but Sara cares for people. "Yeah," Ava nods her head, resting her chin on her arm, "Tell me what it is you did this time. I'm sure it came from a lack of proper research as usual."

Sara's laugh is warm and bright, something that makes Ava smile. "I wish it was that simple," Sara replies, her eyes shining softly in the dimly light room. A hand lands over Ava's own, drawing Ava's eyes there. She can't tell if Sara meant to do that or not, and she can't ask because Sara's already talking. In low, soft tones, Sara tells the story as Ava continues watching their joined hands. That feeling is back in her chest, only this time, Ava knows what it is.

This is what made Sara dangerous all along. Not her antics, not her sarcasm, not even her ability to make a mess of most jobs. It's the fact that Ava was always interested in her and always will be. It's the fact that Sara has the potential to ground Ava when Ava's spent her entire life unconnected and unmoored. Sara isn't just dangerous, she's reality threatening. And Ava knows, as her eyes as slipping closed, as her mind is soothed by Sara's calm words, as her body relaxes into the mattress—she's too far gone to stop Sara.

London, England — 14:04

Tapping her foot anxiously along the tile in Henry's office, Ava lets out an impatient sigh. She's been here for fifteen minutes just waiting for Henry to get back from whatever meeting he had been at this time. He's more than late, and Ava is more than annoyed. It's rare that Henry pulls Ava back to London when she's in the middle of a job, but that's exactly what he's done this time around.

She had been a week into her cover in Amsterdam tracking a banker who has been up to no good when she got the call to fly here. Whatever it is, it can't possibly be good. Henry was already not pleased about the compound bombing in Slovenia. It had gotten international attention seeing as the bombing happened in a remote and residential area. Ava had explained that it wasn't her bomb, that she had no idea that was coming, but Henry had been angry nonetheless.

Ava had of course removed all details of how she actually got out of the building, never once mentioning Sara's name at all. But apparently she didn't have to, because Henry had noticed that some of the men killed had been killed in the way Sara's other victims have been. She's worried that's what this is about—that Henry is somehow going to guess what Ava's been up to with Sara these past months.

Henry is smart, but not even he is smart enough to accurately assess the situation Ava's fallen into with Sara. Ava likes Sara, in the kind of way that ruins a spy. She's not just attracted to Sara, she's attached to her. Slovenia had only revealed that. That evening, every two hours on the mark, Sara had woken Ava from her sleep to flash a light in Ava's eyes and check her basic responses. It had pissed Ava off to no end at the time, but Sara had just laughed through Ava's grumpiness.

She wasn't really mad at Sara, she was just mad at being woken. The second time is when Ava had mumbled an apology for her short behaviour since the bombing. "I understand it Ava," Sara had soothed, her hand landing over Ava's own in a way that could only be intentional, "Really I do."

The third time Ava had woken to find that she had done something very embarrassing in her sleep. It was a little cold in the apartment, and apparently Ava had sought out warmth in her sleep, pressing herself along Sara's side. Their legs were tangled, Sara's arm was around Ava's body, and Ava's head was resting on her chest. Ava had all but jumped away from Sara, her cheeks heating furiously as she mumbled her way through the responses. After that, Ava went back to sleep facing away from Sara.

By the time morning came, there was no need for Sara to wake Ava for the final check because Ava had hardly gone to sleep after the last time. That entire evening, Sara's words spoken one night in a hotel had rung in her head, calling out the fact that spies and assassins don't do feelings. They're certainly not supposed to. But clearly it does happen because Ava cannot get Sara or her blue eyes off of her mind. She doesn't even know what city Sara is in right now—all she knows is that they're set to meet in Prague next week for Ava's new job.

When the door opens, Ava straightens in her chair, turning over her shoulder to find Henry coming inside. "Apologies for being late," he begins as he hangs his hat on the hook and roams his cane over the ground before reaching his desk, "Meetings at Downing Street never are quick, are they?"

"No, they're not," Ava replies diplomatically. She's only really been to a meeting there once, and she was working a job so she's not sure that can count. "You never said in your correspondence if I am meant to travel back to Amsterdam after this?" Ava asks, watching on as Henry slides into his seat, "I had unfinished business there and don't like leaving the job half done."

Sliding his glasses off his face, Henry rests them on the desk before leaning back. Ava instantly pauses. Henry never takes this position unless he's about to say something of great importance. "We've sent someone else in to wrap up because I needed you here," Henry begins as Ava hums quietly, her chest clenching nervously, "We're planning something big in Brussels in two weeks and I need your input. Word is that the League is sending someone there to take out a CEO of a data company."

Confused, Ava leans back in her own chair as she scans Henry's face and his level stare. "You want me to go to Brussels?" Ava asks, her brows creasing, "We don't do protection of CEOs, unless somehow this particular CEO is someone working for us?"

"He's not," Henry shakes his head as Ava purses her lips, "In fact we don't mind that the League is taking him out because they'd be doing us a favor in doing so." Henry shuffles the papers on his desk before passing them over to Ava, a small stack about fifteen page long. "I want you to look over this instead," he continues, "We're planning to take out a different enemy, and we need it to look natural so there are no consequences that come back on us."

Leaning forwards, Ava takes the papers and lays them in her lap. The head of MI6 herself has drafted this up and approved this, so clearly it's a significant issue. Flipping through the pages, Ava takes in the building schematics of a warehouse outside the city. Everything is here, from gas lines to sewage, to the exact furniture lay out. "You want my take on how I'd blow the place up," Ava realizes when she finds the section detailing the electrical plans, "It's a trap for the assassin."

"Indeed," Henry replies as Ava's stomach drops, "As of four days ago, one of our main political allies was found murdered in his hotel room in the States. We have reason to believe it was the League, and based on the bullets fired, we believe we also know which assassin." Ava relaxes slightly into her chair. Sara rarely uses guns and it's certainly not her noticeable signature. Killing in a hotel room is not very public, and Sara's need for public scandal is usually the classic sign that she was the assassin on the job.

The plans in Ava's lap are already incredibly detailed, and she knows instantly how she would do

it. "Fake a few gas leaks in the area before," Ava hands over the file, laying it back on Henry's desk, "If you're careful about it, you could flood that whole warehouse with gas and all it would take is a match struck to bring the place down." It's something Ava's done before, and it's one of the most effective ways to take out multiple targets without gaining the attention of the authorities.

Causing a few leaks prior to the day of the murder should absolve any suspicion that this had been a murder plot. Or at least that's what works over three-fourths of the time in Ava's experience. "Perfect," Henry nods his head, "We want you there."

"Why?" Ava instantly asks, watching as Henry pops his knuckles one by one, "I have a job in Prague, then in Cambodia."

"And you would still keep those," Henry nods his head as Ava frowns, "This would happen between those jobs, a quick two day trip to Brussels. We believe that you might have a vested interest in the outcome of this particular scheme." Instantly Ava's nerves are back and her stomach drops as Henry lets out a chuckle. "Word is they're sending the Canary, and we plan to get rid of him for good," Henry states.

Ava's stomach rolls violently she stares at the papers there and realizes that she just gave Henry the plot to kill Sara. Even if she says no, Ava doesn't know if she can actually stop this plan. Whatever the case, Ava has to be very careful what she says next. "What happened to not targeting the League?" Ava asks, aiming for a curious tone, "I thought that there was an agreement to stay out of the other's way."

Henry nods his head, folding his hands over his chest. "That was true, until the Canary seems to have taken a rather personal interest in fumbling with your jobs," Henry states as Ava sucks in a quiet breath. She never should have told Henry the trouble she was having in the field, but Ava had no idea that the Operative would try something like this. "I had assumed this is something you'd be thrilled about?" Henry challenges, raising a brow as Ava's attention snaps up to him, "After all, we know the Canary was there with you in Slovenia, and he might have been responsible for that bomb."

Sara wasn't and Ava knows it. Sara doesn't know how to work with bombs at all, that much had been made clear in Ireland when Sara had nearly touched the wrong thing one evening. "Well, of course I'll be glad to have him out of my way," Ava manages out, keeping her tone level, "I just simply worry what might happen if the League gets wind that this was my doing. It's not as if they'd let me get away with something like this."

The issue of Sara's safety aside, Ava has no idea why Henry would throw Ava into the League's spotlight through a plot like this. Local authorities might think that everything is an accident, but surely the League would know better. And Ava wants to know just how Henry came across this information about Sara being present for this CEO job. Nothing about this is settling well with Ava at all. She might be a bit paranoid, but this feels like it has the potential to be a trap for her as well. If Henry has found out about Ava and Sara, it might very well be.

"I'll take care of that on my end," Henry waves his hand in the air, tapping the papers on his desk, "I understand that you have a plane to catch out of here, so I won't keep you, but take these with you. I'll send further information of the job when you're finished in Prague."

It's a clear dismissal, one that Ava rarely receives these days. This could be because Henry is always short after meeting at Downing Street, or it could be because he knows. Ava can't help but be more than just a little paranoid and on edge right now. Clearing her throat, she stands from her chair and takes the papers. "Email correspondence?" Ava checks and Henry nods, already rubbing the bridge of his nose, "I'll get in touch once my job is done in Prague."

With that, Ava gathers her things from the chair and quickly steps into the hallways. Outside, other agents walk around and Ava keeps a careful eye on each and every one of them. “Fuck,” Ava mutters as she stares down at the files. This is the breakdown Ava had been waiting for. There was no way her and Sara could get away with running jobs alongside each other without someone noticing. Now not only has the Operative noticed, but they want Sara dead.

Stepping into the elevator, Ava sucks in a deep breath and jabs the button for the lobby floor. Prague will give her time to sort through this mess. But one thing is abundantly clear to Ava, her organization wants Sara dead and Ava’s about to break all of the rules for an assassin. She won’t let Sara die, she just has to figure out a way to make it look as if she did. It’s not going to be easy, but nothing ever is in this business.

“Damn,” Ava whispers as she tips her head against the elevator wall. It’s too late to take back everything she’s done that landed her here. And even if Ava could, she wouldn’t want to. For better or for worse, she’s really in this with Sara now—whatever this is.

Chapter End Notes

I should state here that no characters (Sara and Ava) are going to die in this fic at all. Things might get a little complicated in the upcoming chapter, but nobody is going to die at all. Just putting that out there. But as always thank you to everyone who has been reading along and feel free to let me know what you think!

Part Eight

Chapter Summary

Ava rushes to make a plan for Brussels and explain it to Sara. However it's becoming abundantly clear to Ava that each time they meet, more lines are being crossed. Ava's always been paranoid, but she can't shake the feeling that this isn't going to end well for either of them.

Chapter Notes

Here we are with part eight. It's now been a month since I started this challenge and AU-gus is quickly turning into what might very well be a year long project but, this has been so fun. Updates might come less frequently seeing as I've recently gotten back into the swing of busy life once more. But I really like these stories so if I start one, it is going to be finished even if it takes a while.

After this chapter comes the bridge chapter and then we're into the second part of the story which should be roughly as long if not a little shorter. As another reminder, this chapter has all the same trigger warnings as those that came before it. But I do hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Prague, Czech Republic — 13:01

Tapping her foot anxiously, Ava shifts on the bench and one more does a scan of the area. As of two hours ago, Ava should have left the country and been on a plane headed for Brussels. She had lied to Henry, telling him that there was a matter to handle here in her flat that she had been staying in. Seeing as the Brussels job isn't meant to start in any capacity for another two days, Henry hadn't seen an issue with that. He had barely even questioned her really. Instead he had just reminded her that this means she has to fly commercial which means ditching her weapons behind.

What Henry doesn't know is that Ava has lingered to meet with Sara. After a week spent planning everything out, Ava has come up with a rather complex solution to her problem. It involves a lot of moving pieces, but this is what Ava does best. To the side, movement draws Ava's eye and she looks up to see it's just a kid and his family coming to settle on the lawn in front of her. The park is a massive one, filled with couples and families and most importantly, lacking any real cameras.

Ava's off to the side sitting on a park bench with a newspaper resting near her, taking everything in. She's been on edge ever since learning that the Operative has plans to take Sara out. After doing a little bit of digging, Ava had learned that this has never once happened before. Never has the Operative gone after the League like this and Ava doesn't like the implications. This means that her very organization is changing and is completely willing to void a decade long agreement with the League to stay out of the others' affairs.

Even after getting her hands on some very classified information, Ava hadn't been able to

determine who it was that signed the kill order. That is also rare, and it means that nobody wants this coming back on them. Which begs the question of why Ava's been sent in to do something like this in the first place. The location of the execution is a private one, but the League has extensive allies and contacts and undoubtedly would be able to trace this back to Ava in some way or another.

"Really," a voice breaks Ava from her thoughts. Snapping her head up, Ava looks to Sara who is standing there wearing a maroon blazer with a white shirt and brown slacks. Her hair has been curled and neatly pulled from her face. It's not the first time that Ava's seen Sara wearing professional clothing, but it is the first time she's seen her wear an outfit like this so effortlessly. It's a good look on Sara, certainly better than her usual all black outfit. "Let me guess," Sara throws herself down on the bench before pointing to the newspaper, "Data file in a newspaper?"

Raising a single brow, Ava nods to the paper with a small smile. Slowly and without breaking eye contact, Sara lifts the paper away before glancing down. There's a paper bag underneath that contains the bagels that Ava stopped for before coming here. "I believe you once said that was your favourite," Ava smiles as Sara instantly reaches inside the bag and pulls out the bagel, "Want to apologize for jumping to conclusions now?"

"Never," Sara retorts with a grin, her mouth already half full. Making a face, Ava looks forwards again, scanning the grassy hillside in front of them. This isn't the first time they've met on a park bench like this, but it certainly is the most dangerous meeting so far. Ava had been very careful to make sure that she wasn't tailed in any way on her way here. Recently her trust in her own organization has dwindled, and meeting with Sara means accepting that Ava is playing with fire.

Still trying to piece together her thoughts, Ava turns the actual data file over in her pocket as she twirls it between her fingers. "You look more angsty than usual this afternoon," Sara mumbles as Ava glances to her with a frown, "I mean you usually have that pinched expression on your face but it's really standing out right now."

"I don't have a pinched expression," Ava argues, narrowing her eyes before recognizing Sara's playful smile and instantly working to smooth out her features, "It's just been a complicated two days since I saw you last." When Ava saw Sara last, it was in the police building Ava had come to break into. Some suspect had been taken into custody and among his personal belongings were some files on the Operative. She hadn't expected him to get arrested before she could steal them from his house, but it had almost been easier to get them this way.

Sara had been there as well, pretending to be the man's attorney when in reality she was here to kill him. Thankfully Ava had been gone before the chaos broke out in the cells when the police realized that he was dead. Though this time around, Sara had at least agreed to be subtle, using a needle filled with air to induce a heart attack. It will be nearly undetectable in the reports, which saves Ava the trouble of having to explain why she lingered in the city when the Canary had been at work.

Part of Ava's deal to Sara here is that is Sara found an untraceable way to kill the man, Ava would then help Sara into the accounts from his home computer. All of that data is now on the drive in her pocket. "It's taking longer than expected in terms of breaking through encryptions," Ava sighs, removing the copy of the files from her pocket and handing it to Sara, "I have two jobs in the upcoming days, one is quick but the other in Cambodia is going to be a bit longer. My schedule hasn't left me with a lot of time to get this done."

"I think I'm in Cambodia too in five days," Sara replies, removing her phone from her pants and holding it in front of her. Ava can't repress her laughter when she leans over to see that Sara has

literally created a calendar just for her jobs. It's certainly not a very secure way of tracking jobs, but Ava never really expected Sara to care about that. "Okay so, then I'll go to Cambodia and just get your intel for you," Sara shrugs, tucking her phone away as Ava turns to her, "What is it that you need."

This is not what was proposed in their deal to each other about gaining information. Though Ava is almost tempted to say yes because there is every possibility she'll need some time after Brussels to regroup. "I can't just not go to Cambodia," Ava shakes her head, folding her arms over her chest as she looks around them, "I have preplanned tickets for the trip and someone will certainly notice if I don't show up."

Henry had been quite specific about the plan to get Ava out of Brussels after the job there. He doesn't yet know that Ava has absolutely no intentions of using his contacts seeing as she doesn't trust him right now. Instead Ava has her contacts in the city monitoring those who work for the Operative to make sure there is no secret plan to kill her as well. "So I guess we both go to Cambodia and you just work on this while I do the job," Sara replies, not seeming bothered that she's essentially suggesting collusion here, "Seems better than wasting both our time on something one of us can do."

Ava's inclined to agree with Sara here. There's no sense asking what client Sara has been sent to take out. Given their history of being placed on the same jobs, it's likely the same CEO in the city. "Okay," Ava nods her head, her foot still tapping along the ground, "But before we talk about what I need there, I have something else to discuss with you." On the bench, Sara turns to her, a frown already tugging at her lips.

It's not often that Ava is this serious with Sara, and she usually would fight more about Cambodia and they both know it. "Not here," Ava shakes her head, keeping her voice low, "I have to go handle something in regards to a weapon supplier here, but meet me later." Ava stands from the bench and smoothes out her shirt and pants. Sara hasn't moved, still sitting there with her brows drawn, her bagel laying forgotten along her leg. "I'm assuming you know where I'm staying?" Ava checks and Sara nods, "Good, meet me there at eight. And bring something strong to drink, I don't have anything hard."

Ava is aware that what she's saying is only just confusing Sara, but she is not inclined to have this kind of a conversation out here where so many people can hear them. There might not be cameras around that Ava can see, but she would rather do this in her own space where she knows everything is clean and free of any surveillance. "Ava," Sara says just as Ava is about to walk away, "What's this about?"

Shaking her head Ava looks around them, silently gesturing to the people around. It's one thing to talk cryptically about jobs out here and another to explain what's happened. Anyone could hear them out here and this is something that Ava needs to explain in a far more private place. "Just trust me and come at eight," Ava implores, buttoning her blazer before looking to the side, "Use the email chain if you can't."

In Slovenia Ava had given Sara the same email she uses to keep contact with Gary. It was inevitable that Sara find it eventually, and Ava really doesn't mind Sara knowing how to reach her. That's how they had known to meet here as well as making their plans for the police building. Sara had known rather clever League trick of embedding details and information in false email advertisements and she had taught Ava how to do the same. It should help them avoid any kind of surface suspicion should someone get into their mail.

When Sara nods her head slowly, still looking concerned, Ava just dips her head before turning

around. Sara's going to have to wait and live in suspense for a few more hours. Ava has one more thing to plan for Brussels before she's ready to explain her plan. All she can do is hope that Sara is going to be cooperative with this. If not, there might not be anything Ava can do to save her in the future.

Prague, Czech Republic — 20:08

Sara is staring at Ava's wall and Ava is staring at Sara. Her nerves are going wild in her chest and Ava cannot seem to stop drumming her fingers along the counter as she sits perched in a barstool. It's been ten minutes since Sara got here. She had come in with that frown still on her face and a bottle of vodka in her hands. At Sara's insistence, Ava had a shot or two because Sara sarcastically remarked that Ava might have an aneurysm if she didn't relax. She wasn't wrong, Ava certainly feels like her whole body has been crammed full of pressure.

"So," Sara muses, her eyes focused on the wall as she folds her arms over her chest, "I can see that this is clearly a plan, but what exactly am I looking at?" When she turns around, Ava takes in a quiet breath before looking at the wall herself. It's covered with surveillance footage of the warehouse the Brussels job is meant to take place in as well as the building layout and all the schematics that Henry had given to her. But Ava's included her own correspondence with some local contacts there.

Everything has just been thrown up on the wall where Ava had been moving pieces around and formulating her idea. Though to Sara, it must look a mess. "A plan," Ava nods her head before tilting it to the side, "Hidden inside of a plan, hidden inside of another plan."

An amused expression stretches over Sara's face, her eyes twinkling brightly in the kitchen lights before they turn away from Ava. Soft looking waves spill over Sara's shoulders, tumbling only a few inches past her shoulder blades. Ava hadn't realized how much Sara's hair has grown since they first met. All the way back in Moscow it had only barely fallen an inch past Sara's shoulders. It's a small but jarring reminder of just how quickly time passes and how much has changed since they sat at that bar swapping curious glances and sipping strong martinis.

"So in other words, some serious spy shit," Sara teases, her attention once more on the wall. Humming quietly, Ava does her best to relax in her chair but that feels impossible. Sara doesn't know that she's looking at the Operative's plan for her death and Ava doesn't know how to tell her.

Having an organization as powerful and expansive as either the League or the Operative after someone isn't what anyone wants. Ava can't remember the last time someone in the Operative failed to take out a target when needed or failed to get information. She can only imagine that the League's success rate is similar. "I have a job where I'm meant to posing as some kind of an assistant," Ava begins, clearing her throat quietly, "But in reality, I'm there for an entirely different reason."

"Right," Sara nods, stepping closer to Ava's wall and flipping up the electrical plan. Nimble fingers run along the building layout there, tracing over the gas main that Ava's highlighted at the very back of the building. "You're going to a meeting with a CEO and some kind of foreign trader," Sara's head has turned towards Ava's job brief tacked to the wall, "Presumably you're meant to kill someone when you're there."

Something heavy lodges itself in Ava's stomach as she lets out a strangled hum. This entire time Ava has been planning this, she hasn't been able to stop herself from wondering what might have

happened if Henry hadn't called her in. If he had never given her this intel and this job, then Ava wouldn't have been any the wiser to Sara's dead. Sara would have just disappeared, end of story.

So long ago Ava had wanted Sara out of her way and out of her business. They've been at this nearly a year and a half and Ava can't imagine what things would be like if Sara weren't popping up everywhere. She's the closest thing that Ava has to a friend in this line of work. "Yes, I'm supposed to kill them," Ava clarifies, "But that's where that third plan comes in. I'm not killing the person that I've been sent after, I'm killing someone else. They're not the real target, they're just a pawn."

When Sara turns around this time, Ava can see the understanding beginning to dawn on her. "You're going against your brief?" Sara questions, her brows furrowed as her eyes sweep over Ava's face. Nodding slowly, Ava taps nervously at the counter as Sara comes a step closer. "So who's the target here?" Sara asks, turning back around once more. Ava watches Sara's eyes fly over the information there on the wall. There's nothing on the wall naming the city, but Ava knows that Sara is able to understand where this is going.

Again Sara turns to Ava, her face blank, her eyes locked on Ava's own. Silence falls between them and Ava taps her fingers along her own leg now as nerves swell in her chest once more. "This is me telling you that you're not going to Brussels," Ava states plainly, nodding to the board, "For whatever reason the Operative wants you dead. They've put a lot of planning into this and some of our best are there now scouting everything out. The moment you step into that role as the foreign investor, your identity is known to everyone in the Operative and you'll never get away."

"Why?" Sara asks, coming closer. She's changed clothing since they were at the park, and Ava's eyes fall to the soft blue shirt Sara's wearing. It scoops low on her chest, revealing swaths of pale skin scattered with tiny little freckles. They're the same freckles Ava has traced her lips over countless times now. Sara's collarbones stand there delicately at the base of her neck, almost fragile in their nature. These are details Ava has seen before, but she hadn't ever noticed until now. Now it's as if she's stuck in this pattern of continual noticing when she's around Sara. It's terribly distracting and right now Ava needs to focus.

Drawing her attention back to Sara's eyes, Ava lifts her shoulder in a small shrug. "Well I assume it's because you have been in the way of Operative missions," Ava sighs, running a hand through her hair in frustration, "Though I honestly don't know why they've just decided to track you down now. They don't even know that you're a wo—"

"No," Sara shakes her head, coming a step closer. Sara's body is now brushing along Ava's knees, her hands falling on Ava's thighs. Ava is wearing shorts, so she can feel the warmth of Sara's palms against her bare skin. Her eyes fall to Sara's hands, watching as Sara brushes her thumbs back and forth over the outside of Ava's knees. Somehow that contact is both calming and anxiety-inducing in this moment. "I meant why would you do all of this?" Sara nods over her shoulder to the wall, "Why twist yourself in circles instead of just letting me go there?"

Ava's never been a fan of direct eye contact, and right now it feels like Sara is looking through her rather than at her. It's more than just a little intimidating, so it takes Ava a minute to gather her thoughts. Everything in Ava's chest has gone tight. She could just admit it. She could just say out loud what she's sure Sara knows. Something about Sara's asking feels staged, as if this is some kind of a test. The entire time she's staring at Sara, the thumbs along her legs don't stop moving in a comforting motion. "What would you do if the roles were reversed?" Ava challenges quietly.

The instant Sara's lips purse and she takes in a slow breath, they both have their answer. Neither of them know how to do this, but Ava's not stupid. She knows that Sara cares for her in some

capacity. Sara might not like Ava with the same deep ache Ava finds herself experiencing around Sara, but at the very least, she knows they're friends. Ava knows without a shadow of a doubt that if their roles had been reversed in this, Sara would have done the exact same thing. They're different people, but Ava's spent enough time around Sara to know that despite Sara's act, she really does care for others.

"You'll get caught," Sara states, her tone light enough to make Ava's lips lift up. It's a gentle taunt to clear the heavy mood, and it works. Whatever test was or wasn't present, it's gone now. Some of the tension in Ava's body lets up as Sara's lips curl up as well.

"I won't," Ava shakes her head, reaching out and drawing Sara closer between her legs, "Spies and their shadows." A smile forms along Sara's lips, slow but genuine. Ava used to hate when Sara would joke about that and now it's nothing but funny. Now it's this expected little inside joke as well as a convenient way out of hard conversations. She wonders if Sara thinks the same about that sentence. "After I do this, you're going to have to change some things up," Ava tugs lightly on Sara's shirt, her tone low and serious as she stares at Sara, "The Operative knows your work, you're going to have to work to be unnoticed. At the very least for a while."

The Operative won't ever know that Sara isn't the one dying in that warehouse. As far as they're concerned, the man that Ava's killing there that night is the Canary. Already she's chosen one of her shadiest contacts in the region and had arranged the meeting with him and the CEO. Her contact thinks that Ava is there to kill the CEO when in reality Ava will at some point step from the building before lighting it on fire. The ignition should take seconds.

Everything has already been handled in terms of his background. "When the dust settles, I'll reveal the photos I took days before of the man that died in the blaze," Ava states, nodding to the wall once more where the email sits with her and her contact, "The Operative will scan every known database looking for his name and identity, but they're not going to find it. This afternoon I wiped everything from existence that contained hints of who my contact is."

"To mimic League members," Sara nods her head in understanding as Ava hums quietly. Sara's close enough that Ava can smell the scent of coconut coming from her hair. When Sara looked over her shoulder earlier, some of her hair had come to the front of her body and now rests along her shoulders. "I think I get it now," Sara turns her attention to Ava once more, her eyes piercing Ava through, "I always thought the name Director was dumb, but they were right in some things." Ava doesn't want to hear about her nickname and how cold she is. Her stomach feeling tight, Ava withdraws her fingers from Sara's shirt. "Not that you're cold," Sara continues on as Ava takes in a quiet breath and looks to her, "Just, your authority. You're impressive."

It's a real compliment, something Sara doesn't really give out that often. Heat rises to Ava's cheeks as she drops her gaze down, her lips already lifting in a small smile. She feels stupid and light in a way she hasn't since she was in high school and had a ridiculous crush on the girl next to her in math. This is not behaviour becoming of a spy, so Ava does her best to shove that down. "Well," Ava lifts her shoulder in a shrug before playfully pulling Sara into her, "Can't let my favourite assassin die, can I? Then who would come along and fuck with my plans?"

There's an expression on Sara's face that Ava can't read. But she only sees it for a few seconds before hands land on either side of her face and Sara is kissing her. This time Sara's lips are gentle, moving slowly against Ava's own as Ava threads her fingers into the hair at the nape of Sara's neck. Humming quietly, Ava leans into the kiss, feeling the remnants of that pressure in her chest melt and fade away to nothing. When Sara pulls back, her eyes are bright and her lips are still lifted in a little smile. "And what was that for?" Ava teases, her cheeks likely still flushed.

“For you finally admitting I’m your favourite,” Sara shoots back as Ava laughs, “And because watching you in spy mode turns me on.” Her laughter only intensifying, Ava just shakes her head in amusement as Sara points to the wall. “You laminated your own emails Ava,” Sara continues as Ava’s cheeks heat, “I was already wet the moment I saw that, forget about the rest of it.”

“You’re so stupid,” Ava shakes her head, “And to think I once thought you were suave and charming. Turns out you’re just an idiot.”

But Ava likes Sara this way. She likes the silly things that Sara says and does now that Ava will actually laugh at her. Sara’s smile is nothing but proud as she backs up, pulling Ava up and out of her chair. “You know, I heard that spies do well in the shadows,” Sara lilts, tugging Ava by the front of her shirt towards the bed as Ava grins, “But I think we need to see how well you do in the sheets.”

“I think we already know the answer,” Ava tilts her head, coming chest to chest with Sara. A need is already forming in Ava’s abdomen. A need to tangle herself together with Sara for the rest of the evening and feel all the ways that Sara is still so alive. A need to remind herself that this plan is going to work. A need to remind herself that Sara’s not going to die and Ava’s not going to get caught doing this. Just a need for reassurance that Ava knows Sara can somehow give her.

“Maybe we put it to test just one more time,” Sara shrugs, her nose brushing Ava’s own, her breath ghosting over Ava’s lips, “Fully flesh out the research into the matter.” Before Ava even has the chance to reply, Sara is bringing them backwards. The mattress jumps as Ava falls on top of Sara, already laughing. Seconds later, Sara flips their positions and kisses Ava to silence her. This time Ava allows her too, never letting Sara go as they move up the bed.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia — 14:03

The car door slams behind Ava as she slings her bag over her shoulder and checks the address listed on the scrap of paper in her hand one more time. This is the place that Sara told Ava to meet her in, all the way out the outskirts of the city. It’s certainly off the beaten path and is more than a little run down. But it’s perfect for what they need. They needed somewhere remote, and this will do the job.

Hardly anybody is walking around here, something Ava can appreciate because she’s not in much of a mood to school her features right now. Everything in Ava’s body aches and she is so exhausted after spending three days in hiding and then on the flight here. Removing her other bag from the side of the car, Ava tucks it under her arm before heading towards the quiet little building sat in front of her.

Everything in Brussels had gone to plan with a minor slip up that had happened on Ava’s second day in hiding. Ava had arrived for the meeting and had fooled both her contact and the CEO before slipping from the room and lighting the place up. She’d stayed close by to make sure that the building burnt and there were no stragglers. That meant camping out on a nearby building for about three hours straight. It had been a long and boring stretch of time that she spent on her stomach staring through the scope of her rifle.

But the Operative was fooled as far as Ava can tell. Henry had called her upon her arrival here in Cambodia to congratulate her on a job well done and he had mentioned that the higher ups were very pleased. As far as Ava can tell, the League won’t ever know that this plan ever existed. In order to make sure there were no loose ends left behind, Ava had remained in the city for another three days. In those three days she never once stayed at a location for more than six hours so it

meant constantly moving hotels and surroundings.

It had been nothing but exhausting, and Ava is more than ready to crash for a few hours. Walking up the stairs, Ava winces as her shoulder twinges under the weight of the bag. The door with the correct number appears to be at the very end of the hall. It's positioned by three exits which is likely why Sara had chosen this particular room. Key in hand, Ava carefully undoes the lock before stepping inside.

Sara had left that key for Ava at a drop point near the airport that Ava had stopped at first. It's lucky for Ava that Sara thought to do that because Ava's not even sure where her lock picking kit is right now. Shoving the door shut again, Ava drops her bag right by the door and takes in the space. There are two queen sized beds resting along the wall and a small kitchen area with a table that's been littered with papers and files.

Slowly, Ava walks over and flips over the top file to reveal the face of the target she was meant to come here for. But Sara's taking care of getting the information Ava needs, so Ava is free to stay here and catch up on a little bit of sleep. The right most bed along the wall appears to be the one that Sara hasn't used, so Ava lays across that one. With stiff movements she climbs up to the top before slipping under the covers and curling in on her side.

Brussels had been one of the most demanding jobs Ava's been on in a long time. It's not often that she has to keep on the move like that, but it had been necessary just in case the League or the Operative got any ideas about trying to track her down and kill her. Though now Ava supposes she can say that she's placed some trust back into the Operative. Her contacts had been watching the Operative allies in the city and they hadn't seen anything that looked like they might be targeting Ava.

With a yawn, Ava draws the covers around her body before reaching out and clicking out the light. Sara never said when she would be back but right now Ava doesn't much care. She needs to get some sleep after so many days spent restless and awake. The covers are soft and already warm from Ava's body heat. There's not much danger here but still Ava shoves her gun under the pillow just in case. Shifting once more, Ava closes her eyes and does her best to get a little bit of rest.

Some time later, Ava becomes aware of something rustling around in the background. With a start she wakes, sitting up in the bed as the covers fall down to her waist. "Didn't want to wake you," Sara says from the kitchen, a smile on her face as she organizes the files on the table, "I figured if you were tired enough to fall asleep with your travel clothing on, nothing good could come from me waking you up."

She's not wrong. Ava certainly wouldn't have been pleased with the disruption. But at the same time it's a bit unsettling that Ava hadn't naturally woken to the sound of the door opening. Sara is already wearing lounge clothing for the evening and there's no longer any light coming in the windows. A quick look at the clock reveals that Ava had just slept about six hours. And yet it still doesn't feel like it was enough.

It's strange, waking to another person in the same space as her, and even stranger that Sara is that person. As many times as they've met up in hotel rooms and flats, Ava still isn't used to sharing a space with Sara. Right now, Ava feels heavy and dull, her senses still cloudy and her body more than ready to curl up and go right back to sleep. "Didn't sleep much in Brussels," Ava yawns, stretching her arms over her head before letting them fall into her lap once more, "I haven't been on the run like that in years. I think I somehow forgot what it was like."

Ava is hardly placed in some of the longer job position that other Operative spies are hidden away in. Some of the spies working for this organization have been at their jobs for years, some of them

for decades. There are spies in the American White House and in the British Parliament that have served the longest roles. When Ava had learned of this in her training, she had been nothing short of startled to hear these truths. But it was then that she decided that long-term jobs were not for her.

This role that Ava has at the Operative serves her well, though even she has to admit to being a bit worn down recently. Brussels certainly took it out of her. It's been years since Ava was last on the run like that and she hadn't missed any part of it. Constant movement and paranoia takes its toll not only physically but mentally as well.

Sara should already know the basic rundown of the warehouse aftermath seeing as Ava had embedded the details in an email to her the other day. It was all in code, referring to their past jobs that they've shared, but she's sure that Sara understood it. "And the Operative?" Sara tests, now leaning on the table with her arms folded over her chest, "Have they said anything to you yet about the man that was killed there in my place."

They have, so Ava nods her head before leaning back against the pillows once more. "They're completely convinced that he was the Canary," Ava replies with a rasp, tracing patterns along the ceiling with her eyes to try and force herself to stay awake, "I tried telling you before but, my organization has no idea that you're a woman." Ava's lips quirk in a little smile, "I can't tell if it's a sexist and bad thing that they assumed your gender was male, or if it's a genius way for you to hide your identity."

Ava is of course aware of the statistics that state male killers tend to be more physically violent. However from the start Ava had been unclear as to what gender she thought the Canary was. She hadn't assumed male or female, though she had of course been leaning towards the idea that the Canary was a woman solely based off of who Sara was killing and how. "I think it's sexist," Sara snorts, shuffling around in the kitchen, "But in this case it just so happens to work in my favour. Not anymore though."

Humming quietly, Ava nods her head, her eyes already beginning to slip shut once more. Sara is talking still, but the words barely register in Ava's head as she tries to force her eyes open but to no avail. It's only when the mattress dips down that her eyes fly open and she comes face to face with Sara. "God, can't you make some noise when you move," Ava breathes out, the fear settling as she leans back again, "You're an assassin so you should know better than to sneak up on someone with a gun under their pi—"

Fingers touch Ava's neck, effectively ending her sentence. The words die right in her throat as she takes in the anger on Sara's face and the tender touch along her skin. Swallowing thickly, Ava looks up into the fury she can see lighting up in Sara's normally gentle blue eyes. "Who did this?" Sara asks, her voice low and hard, her eyes focused on Ava's neck.

There's bruising there that Ava thought her high necked shirt would be enough to cover, but apparently not. When Sara rolls the neck of the shirt down, Ava watches a series of emotions flicker over her face ranging from anger to concern before landing right back on anger again. "It's nothing," Ava replies in a hoarse voice as she shrugs Sara off, feeling too exposed under Sara's intense stare, "It'll heal in a few days."

"This is not nothing," Sara retorts, her voice still tight as Ava's stomach clenches, "This looks terrible. I just thought that your voice sounded different because you woke up, but this—" Her voice trails off and bright blue eyes flicker to Ava's own, still lit up with fury and wrath. And yet the fingers along the column of Ava's throat are trailing over her skin with nothing but care and tenderness.

Given Ava's recent revelations about Sara, being this close to her and being touched in that way is

not something Ava should be exposed to. She might like Sara and want to be with her, but that doesn't mean that Ava can cave into this. The job in Brussels and the Operative's will to see Sara dead has only gone to show why getting close to someone in this line of work is dangerous. "My second day there, some of my contact's men got wind of what happened," Ava explains as she shuffles away from Sara, the hand falling from her neck, "They thought I had something to do with it, and they were right."

"Want me to go and kill them?" Sara asks. It's almost said as a joke but Ava can practically feel the waves of anger and fury burning off of Sara's body. Ava doesn't really know what to do with the fact that Sara feels that level of protection towards her.

"I already did," Ava states, watching as Sara's eyes meet her own. A tiny smile tugs at Sara's lips as she shakes her head. Blonde hair tumbles down into Sara's face, hiding some of her features as Ava leans back in the bed. Sara is always beautiful, but Ava prefers her like this. She likes the way that Sara is different now behind closed doors when it's just them here. Sara is nothing like Ava thought that she was and if she had known this side of Sara she never would have spent so much time avoiding her and trying to hate her.

Though then again, Ava's not convinced that she actually ever hated Sara in the first place. At least not in the true sense of the word. "Come on," Sara swats Ava's legs under the covers with a smile on her face, "I made some food when you were busy passing out. You've spent the day on planes and you should eat."

Ava's really not hungry, especially not when Sara's standing there looking at her with that teasing gleam in her eyes. "Is it even edible?" Ava asks, throwing her legs over the side of the bed. When Sara laughs from the kitchen, Ava looks down at her own outfit with a small frown on her face. She really did fall asleep in her traveling clothes and now there are creases in her nice tan slacks. Sara's mumbling out some response from the kitchen but Ava can't really hear her when she crosses over to where she dropped her bag.

Sweatpants are folded neatly on top and Ava pulls them out along with a shirt before carrying her bag to the dresser off to the side. A peek inside the drawer reveals that Sara has already shoved her things inside, and in no particular order. "Are we playing house?" Ava calls out, ripping open another drawer that her things can go into.

"I thought it would be best to just share a space while you're working on all of this," Sara replies as Ava hums and carries her things to the counter, "You don't have to stay here if you don't want, I know you like your own spaces."

Sara's not looking at Ava as she speaks, her back facing out as she stirs something in a pot on the stove. Her voice had a bit of an edge to it, and Ava wonders if Sara expects her to turn this down. They've shared spaces before out of necessity. This is not that. "I'll be fine here," Ava shrugs as she unbuttons her shirt with a single hand. Sara turns, her lips lifting into a smile as her eyes scan Ava's chest where the shirt has fallen open. "I'm too tired for that," Ava shakes her head when Sara starts her way.

It's not as if Ava doesn't enjoy having sex with Sara, but recently it's felt just a bit too vulnerable. "I kind of figured," Sara responds with that same little smile before turning back to the stove. She looks far more relaxed than Ava's ever seen her. Or at least this is the first time that Ava has noticed it. Ava wants to ask what's changed about Sara not wanting to share a space together. Not even a few months ago Sara was still reluctant to let Ava even so much as come over to her place.

Humming, Ava takes a seat in the stool and rests her head down on the counter. She's a spy playing house with an assassin. Ava can't help but wonder how long they're going to be able to

continue getting away with this. Brussels has been handled but Ava can't help but feel that isn't going to be the end of things. It could just be paranoia making her gut churn, or maybe just the simple fact that Ava doesn't know what comes next for her and Sara now that they've broken all the unspoken rules.

They seem to be making new ones. At least that's how it seems when Sara turns her head over her shoulder with those twinkling eyes and that little smile. Her cheeks flushing warmly and her heart faltering, Ava returns that smile with one of her own before glancing down. They'll figure it out, they have in the past. For now Ava's going to choose to ignore all the warning signs flaring in her mind and churning in her stomach. For now she's just going to try and enjoy where she's at.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia — 17:45

Staring at the computer screen in front of her, Ava sighs heavily before bundling her sweater further up near her nose. These files have been a pain in the ass to get into, but she's finally gotten through the last obstacle in her way. Gary did help of course, seeing as he knows far more about this kind of thing than Ava does. Recently she's been trying to keep him away from all of this. This world that Ava lives and works in has become increasingly dangerous and Ava doesn't want to bring someone like Gary into the mess.

But these files revealed a bigger clusterfuck than Ava thought was possible. She's not sure why Sara wanted or needed this seeing as this company contained details of the League's finances. Apparently that's what had gotten the man in Prague murdered. He had been digging into the League's allies, though Ava sincerely doubts he was aware of the mess he was really getting into. However he really was on their trail, and now this information only exists on this singular drive that Ava has plugged into her computer right now.

Or at least it will only exist here for a few more seconds. An upload is in process on the computer, one sending all of this information to her secure bunker in Croatia. There's no telling when something like this might come in handy should the League get wind of the fact that the Operative attempted to take out one of their best killers. This life is all about evidence and counter-evidence, but this time around Ava is going to have to be cautious in storing it. That means not even revealing to Sara what it is that she's done.

When Ava turns over her shoulder, she catches sight of the clock in the kitchen that lets her know it's only just five in the evening. Sara should be back relatively soon, she did say that this was going to be an easy kill. Ava had of course reminded Sara of the stipulations that have come after Brussels, and she can only hope Sara had gone for something subtle. Turning back around, Ava watches the blue bar move across the screen at a snail's pace. Somehow the internet here is worse than the connection Ava has in her bunker when she's underground.

Hearing the key turning in the lock, Ava glances in the mirror above the computer with her fingers laid over the gun on the table. Blonde hair covered by a hat appears there in the door frame and Ava sighs, letting herself relax. "Come take a look at this when you put things away," Ava instructs, hiding the window of her upload behind the main page, "Your man from Prague was getting into a lot more than he was letting on. He has nearly an entire folder on League allies and assets around the world."

There's nothing but silence coming from Sara which is certainly unusual. When Ava glances up again she can only just see Sara's head where she's sitting on the bed. Spinning around in her chair, Ava pushes up to stand and walks over. Instantly it's clear that something has gone very wrong today. There's blood covering Sara's undershirt and staining her fingers. Bruises cover Sara's

knuckles and she is not in good shape. “What happened?” Ava rushes out as she snags the first aid kit and kneels on the ground in front of Sara.

Snapping into action, Ava begins assessing which of Sara’s injuries are the worst. But that’s difficult given the amount of blood on Sara’s clothing. It’s hard to tell what blood belongs to Sara and what doesn’t. “Had a bit of a brush up with the security when I was there,” Sara winces as Ava carefully shoves her jacket from her shoulders, “Turns out they didn’t like that I was there to kill their boss.”

Ava had done some preliminary research into this company so she knows that the kind of security teams Sara faced today were no joke. “No I imagine not,” Ava comments as she uses the fabric scissors to cut Sara’s shirt from her body. Pulling the sides off, Ava is relieved to find that other than some bruises along her ribs, there is no sign of real injury along Sara’s torso. The blood covering the shirt wasn’t hers. Letting out a quiet thankful sigh, Ava brushes her fingers along Sara’s ribcage, gauging Sara’s reactions to see how badly she’s hurt.

But Sara’s not looking at Ava, rather she’s staring off at the wall with her jaw clenched. Neither of them are used to the other taking care of them like this. Ava remember just how daunting it was to feel Sara’s fingers along her skin. It’s a scary thing to do—turning over a momentary piece of trust to another person after so long spend alone. Moving quickly, Ava checks the few bruises there before she moves on, not wanting to risk agitating Sara further.

Sara’s face is another story. Her cheekbone has split, likely from the impact of something hitting her quite hard in the face. Already the skin there is mottled with colorful bruises and there’s a similar discoloration along Sara’s jaw. Blood spray arches over Sara’s face, splattering her cheeks and foreheads. It’s dried by now and Ava is sure that Sara made quite a spectacle walking around like this for so long. “Did you hit your head?” Ava checks, slipping her fingers along Sara’s jaw and raising her head to the light.

Both of Sara’s pupils are reactive and they’re both the same size. Another wave of relief courses through Ava. She’s meant to leave in two days so she needed Sara to not have a head injury. Ava’s not even sure what she would do if they learned Sara did, though she already knows she would likely try to find a way to stay—at the very least. “No, just kind of winded from the fight and then the trip back,” Sara admits, letting out a quiet sigh, “I wasn’t prepared for that kind of a conflict there.”

They had both found a way for Sara to get into the building unnoticed, but clearly it hadn’t been a foolproof one. Guilt churns in Ava’s stomach; surely if she was there she could have done something to prevent Sara showing up like this. With a small nod, Ava leans back on her thighs and gets out what she needs from the kit to clean Sara’s wounds. Though honestly Sara could probably benefit more from a shower to clear all of this away. “Are you able to stand?” Ava asks, pushing off her knees and rising to her own feet.

“Am I able to stand,” Sara mocks playfully, smiling all the while, “Yes Ava, I am able to stand.” She definitely won’t be able to stand for long, that much is clear when Sara wobbles slightly on her feet. Reaching out, Ava holds both of Sara’s elbows to steady her before she falls to the bed again. “I can stand with assistance,” Sara amends as Ava smiles, “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“Of course not,” Ava shakes her head in amusement, “Come on, you need to wash all that blood off so I can see where you hurt yourself this time.” A light scoff falls from Sara’s lips, but she doesn’t resist when Ava begins leading her towards the bathroom. Sara probably could do this on her own, but Ava’s not keen on watching Sara stumble around the room. It’s not lost on her of course that Sara is letting her help with this.

Inside the bathroom, Ava leans Sara against the vanity before twisting the small rounded knobs that turn the water on. With her hand under the spray to check the temperature, Ava glances over her shoulder where Sara is now closing her eyes even as she stands. “Hey,” Ava says teasingly, flicking some water in Sara’s direction, “You can sleep after you get clean but I get the feeling we’ll get some complaints if you get under the sheets covered in blood.”

A grumble of disagreement comes from Sara, but her hands fall to her pants where she undoes her belt. Sitting on the edge of the tub, Ava watches on as Sara tugs her belt free before carelessly shoving her pants down her legs. Each inch of fabric lost reveals more pale skin and countless amounts of freckles scattered all over Sara’s body. Ava’s never met someone with as many freckles as Sara does, and she supposes that she always has found them charming. Even back when she was convinced that she hated Sara, Ava had been fascinated by the sheer number of dark flecks that adorned her face and body. They make Sara look younger almost, softer in a way.

Bright blue eyes find Ava’s own, but Ava doesn’t even try to hide the fact that she’s staring. She never has around Sara, there’s no point. Sara knows just how attractive Ava finds her. There’s no harm in revealing that, but there is harm in revealing Ava’s other thoughts. Somehow it’s the more innocent ones that feel the hardest to admit. Like the way Ava wants to wipe the blood from Sara’s face herself. Or the way Ava hates that Sara showed up in this state. Or the way that Ava’s already gone against her own organization for Sara so there’s not much she would say no to if Sara asked for help. Those things already terrify Ava to think, so she knows that she can’t possibly say them.

Sara’s eyes don’t leave Ava’s own, her lips twitching upwards as Sara reaches behind her own back and undoes her bra. With slow movements—likely for show rather than being due to pain—Sara uses a single finger to nudge the bra straps down her shoulders before letting the bra fall to the ground. Now completely naked, she stands there with her hands braced on the counter. Ava’s eyes roam Sara’s body, taking in the juxtaposition that is Sara Lance.

The soft curves of her waist are offset by sharp hipbones that Ava’s bit her teeth into. The smoothness of Sara’s pale skin is contrasted with dark freckles and interrupted by scars that Ava has pressed her fingertips into. Right under the gentle swell of her breasts are lines of hard muscle that Ava’s raked her nails down countless times. “Feeling like you need to get clean too?” Sara challenges, a single brow raised as Ava stands from the edge of the tub, “Maybe we could get a little dirty along the way.”

Her eyes still caught on Sara, Ava steps just one more pace closer with a smile. “You’re stupid,” Ava tells her as she flushes, a lame insult that in no way matches her real thoughts. But Sara laughs all the same before she brushes past Ava and carefully steps into the shower with stiff movements. Seeing as there has been an invitation to join, Ava’s not going to turn Sara down. After grabbing another towel and settling it along the toilet, Ava strips her own clothing off before tugging open the curtain.

Already standing under the spray, Sara is watching Ava expectantly as Ava steps inside. Humidity has already formed inside the curtain, and it blankets Ava’s skin in a damp kind of warmth. Sara prefers to keep the room cold at all times so Ava has been bundled in sweaters since getting here. The heat inside the room now is more than comfortable. Certainly what’s comfortable is the way that Sara is watching Ava now, her eyes roaming Ava’s body with shameless intent. This is what Ava is used to by now.

Yet showering together is new, and Ava doesn’t know what she’s meant to do right now. Sara has already tipped her head under the spray and the blood is rinsing from her body, turning the water pooling at their feet a light red color. Her eyes not leaving Ava’s own, Sara reaches for the bottle of shampoo settled off to the side. Taking Sara’s cue, Ava swaps places with her under the water and

gets her own hair wet.

Nerves bubble in Ava's stomach as she watches Sara lathering her hair. This somehow feels more intimate than having sex ever has. Ava knows every sound that Sara makes as she's reaching the peak of her orgasm. She knows how Sara's finger dig into her skin as she urges Ava on, she knows how Sara never can keep a steady rhythm with her hips nearing the end, and Ava knows that Sara has no problem telling or showing Ava exactly what she wants and how she wants it.

But Ava didn't know that Sara rubs the shampoo between her hands to create suds there before spreading it over her scalp. She didn't know that Sara roughly scrubs at her own head to create a small mountain of bubbles in her hair. And Ava certainly didn't know that Sara piles all of her hair on top of her head while it's still white with the shampoo. It feels as if she isn't meant to know these kinds of details. Something thick and hard has formed in Ava's throat, robbing her of a proper chance to breathe.

They're not the kind of people who get to lead these kinds of lives where they play house and take showers together like this. Ava is used to pretending for her job, but this kind of pretending has only hurt so far. To Ava, she thinks there is a fairly good chance that Sara might like her as well. For some time now they've been doing this little dance around each other. But neither of them have said a thing about it. They both know that this kind of thing goes without saying. This will only ever be pretend.

Clearing her throat to try and ease some of the ache, Ava swaps places with Sara under the water again. Silence has fallen between them and for the first time in a while, it feels heavy. While Ava rubs shampoo through her own hair, she watches as Sara tips her head back under the spray. Water cascades down Sara's neck and chest, forming rivulets and streams of water that break off to run down her sides, her belly, her thighs. Little beads and droplets settle along her arms and Sara's hair has turned almost a shade of brown. "See something you like?" Sara challenges.

Blue eyes are locked onto Ava's own, never blinking, never yielding—not that Ava expected anything different from Sara. Humming quietly, Ava swaps with Sara once more to rinse her own hair out. "Yeah," Ava replies truthfully, quietly. It's just a single word that falls between them as Sara takes a step towards her. There's still soap in Ava's hair and suds running along her skin when Sara brings their bodies together. Lips descend on Ava's own and she really could care less about the half-done state of her hair.

Ava needed this. She needed this familiarity, even if everything is now different about the way Sara kisses her. They don't rush anymore, not like they used to. There are no more hands shoved down the fronts of pants in offices or fingers tugging up edges of dresses in safe rooms. Now they undress each other in full, or in this case, revel in their already bare state. Even with everything new about this, Ava would know the feel of Sara's body by memory alone. She presses her fingertips into familiar hipbones and her hand already knows how Sara's jaw will settle into it before Ava rests her palm along Sara's cheek.

Ava's palms skate and skirt along Sara's slippery skin as she tilts her head to deepen the kiss. The water-warmed skin of their chest slides together as Ava backs Sara against the wall. "Fuck that's cold," Sara breaks away from the kiss when her back meets the cool tile along the shower walls. Nodding her head, Ava leans in and kisses her again, reveling in Sara's quiet hum. There's a small split in Sara's lip off to the side that tastes of iron when Ava's tongue runs over it. Soothing the mark with a gentle kiss, Ava backs up and takes Sara in.

Her eyes are so blue and so dark in the bright, harsh light. Water beads and rolls down her chest and Ava follows the line that one droplet takes before it disappears between their bodies. Fingers

trail over Ava's neck, mapping out the bruising there as Ava's breathing falters. Seconds later, lips make the same journey, a hand cradling Ava's jaw. There's a tenderness in Sara's touch that Ava hasn't felt in a long time, and it's already beginning to break her open. It's as if Sara is trying to erase any signs that the bruising along Ava's neck was ever there at all—an attempt of healing that Ava's not sure Sara can give her.

Sucking in a harsh breath, Ava goes to nudge Sara away, but Sara doesn't move. "I wish I could kill them twice," Sara mumbles, her nose brushing the column of Ava's throat, her breath warm along Ava's skin. That heavy feeling drops down in Ava's stomach once again, her fingers tightening their hold on Sara's waist. "If I'd been there they'd be dead before they even saw it coming," Sara continues, her lips meeting Ava's skin in a feather light kiss, "Nobody hurts my friends and gets away with it."

That word lands hard in Ava's chest, striking her behind her ribcage and twisting her stomach in a knot. Friends. Something they named themselves a while back and something Ava has come to hate. She wonders if Sara is playing pretend right now too, if it's easier for her to call them that. Ava certainly thinks that's easier than admitting the truth. Friends don't do this. Not even friends with benefits.

Feeling far too vulnerable to allow Sara to continue her path, Ava nudges Sara away and succeeds in dislodging her this time around. "Good thing they're already dead," Ava comments, her eyes flickering over the unreadable expression on Sara's face. For a spy, Ava sometimes does a pretty poor job of understanding what it is that Sara is thinking and feeling. Sara's the one puzzle that Ava has yet to solve in it's entirety. Sara's not predictable as Ava once thought, she's wild and spontaneous in nearly everything that she does—predictable only in that manner.

With a small shake of her head, Ava casts all of that off for now and draws Sara into her once more, kissing her softly. Hands raise and twist into Ava's hair, pulling her in impossibly close. Sara is warm and soft, her body pliant against Ava's own as she arches up into Ava. The water is striking Ava's back heating her skin and making everything between them slick. A quiet moan tumbles from Sara's lips as Ava kisses her over and over and over again.

When a hand descends down Ava's stomach and fingers slip inside her, the water has gone slightly cold. But Ava doesn't notice; her senses have narrowed to just Sara. To the feeling of her fingers moving inside Ava as a quiet sound bubbles from Ava's throat. To the scent of coconut shampoo that fills her nose when she buries her nose in Sara's shoulder, her back arching into Sara's chest. To the taste of iron along Sara's lips when Ava leans in to kiss her once more. To the sound of Sara's soft stuttered breathing when Ava's hand finds Sara's nipple between them. To the sight of Sara's dark blue eyes when she feels the burning of her approaching orgasm. Surrendering to the game of pretend, Ava lets everything else go.

Lahore, Pakistan — 11:51

Ava rarely finds herself on jobs in the Middle East and she always feels so out of place when she comes here. Arabic is not a language that Ava is well versed in, though she likely should be at this point in her job. Here the language is all around her and Ava can understand bits and pieces here and there, but she's losing so much in translation. However Ava isn't here to immerse herself in the culture or the language, she's here for a job.

An American business man has been hiding here in this country after stealing information from his own company. He came here with plans to meet and sell everything over to some CEO from Russia of all places. The Operative has no idea what the man stole, but the company in America is

one of their allies so Ava's been sent to recover the information at all costs. However there has been a bit of a block in her job.

Seeing as the American is here to commit treason, he is rightfully being more than a little paranoid. There's no security with him, but he's been using the busy markets in the city as a place to find refuge and cover. Already Ava has nearly lost him twice in the stalls and shops and she is getting tired of his evasive maneuvers. It's not as if they're particularly good, it's that there are simply so many people around that it makes it hard for her to keep her eyes on one man at a time.

A woman bumps Ava from the left and Ava lets out an impatient sigh. Crowds never were Ava's favourite place to be. She much prefers being off in the sidelines. There's more than enough cover here, and certainly nobody is really paying attention to Ava and what she's doing at the moment. But still it's unsettling.

Movement through a small alleyway catches Ava attention and she looks down it just in time to see a man on the other end raising a gun in the air. Several shots are fired off and Ava swears under her breath as she watches her target disappear into the masses of people currently running away. Everyone is screaming and Ava just sighs in exasperation before removing her own weapon from her waist band. This is a peaceful area and the entire time Ava's been here she has seen no trouble.

Given that her target has fled the scene, Ava may as well see what this is about now. Ducking down the alley, Ava makes her way towards the continued pops of gunfire coming from the other end of the alley. When she reaches the end, she carefully looks out to see there is a man in a suit laying prone on the pavement, splotches of blood covering his neatly pressed white shirt. Retreating in the distance are two men dressed in all black and further down the road in the other direction Ava catches sight of a very familiar head of blonde hair.

This is what Ava gets for not checking her email the past few days. There is every likelihood that Sara let her know in advance that she was in the city too but Ava never saw it. With her gun in front of her, Ava makes her way to the storefront she had seen Sara dive into. Halfway there, Ava steps in something and glances down at her shoe. A puddle of red blood stains the pavement. It's not large but whoever was shot is losing blood and fast. Trace amounts of the red substance trail along the ground in the very direction Sara had been moving in.

Swearing under her breath, Ava follows the trail. At the end of the path, Ava's heart rate picks up when she finds a smeared and bloodied handprint around the door handle for the store. With a tug, Ava opens it just in time to see one of the men in all black coming from the back entrance. The moment she pulls the trigger he drops the ground, the shot echoing in the little shop. A very frightened woman stands there behind the register and Ava sighs before waving her from the shop. The woman scrambles out from behind the counter before fleeing from the shop and down the path that Ava came from.

Arguably, Ava should not have tried to follow Sara. Not here in this city where there are plenty of enforcement officers that could easily take her into custody. But there's no question in her mind that the blood trail she's following to the back corner of the shop is in fact Sara's. If she doesn't help Sara, this could turn out to be a very serious wound. Turning the corner, Ava finds Sara sat against the back wall, her right leg stretched in front of her. "Well," Sara muses, her face looking a little too pale for Ava's liking, "If it isn't my favourite spy."

The wound on Sara's leg is already coloring her light colored pants. Sara's hands are stained red from holding pressure against the bullet hole. Fear tightens around Ava's chest because she knows that if Sara doesn't get help soon she's going to lose too much blood here in this store. A sound comes from behind Ava, a flash of black just in her periphery. Turning her gun around, Ava fires

twice and the second man falls to the ground, the gun clattering near the shelf. “Now I have to get a new gun,” Ava laments with a small sigh.

“We both know you carry more than one,” Sara remarks, smiling despite her dire situation. With a small scoff, Ava kneels on the ground beside her. Wary blue eyes find Ava’s own, but when Ava gives her a look, Sara concedes. Her hands come away from the mark on her leg, giving Ava her first look at the wound.

It’s not as bad as Ava originally thought. She expected to find that the bullet had gone through the center of Sara’s thigh, but instead it’s just off to the side. That doesn’t mean the bullet didn’t strike an artery or at least close to it, so Sara’s not safe yet. “You’re an idiot,” Ava tells Sara fondly, placing her bag on the ground before handing her gun to Sara to keep watch, “And you’re incredibly lucky that I was here.”

“Well, I think it’s the other way around,” Sara counters as Ava strips her jacket off and sets at tearing off a piece of fabric, “I knew you were in town and I was on my way here to find you. But apparently those men had been following me since my job so—”

A small cry falls from Sara’s lips as Ava presses her bundled jacket into the wound to staunch the blood flow. “Sorry,” Ava murmurs, taking the strip that she had ripped off and slipping it under Sara’s leg, “Distraction is the best method of getting something painful over with.” Or at least that’s what Ava has been told. Henry was the one who taught her that the evening that he had ripped a knife from her shoulder back when she was doing supervised jobs freshly out of training.

Pushing the jacket into Sara’s leg with one hand, Ava brings the two sides of the strip together in the middle. “So this is your fault then,” Ava prompts as Sara takes in a shaking breath, her neck straining as she tips her head back in pain, “What I’m hearing sounds a lot like you admitting that you lured the danger here with you.”

A choked laugh comes from Sara, her fingers flexing where she has them laid along her other knee. Bullet wounds to areas with a lot of muscle are a pain in the ass and Ava knows it. Sara’s going to feel this one for a while, and she is undoubtedly in a world of pain right now. But crisis management is what Ava does best, so there’s no sense in worrying about Sara and her pain for the time being. “I didn’t bring anything,” Sara retorts, her voice thick and quiet, “They started it by firing on me after I killed their boss.”

That certainly sounds like Sara started it. With a small snort, Ava tightens the knot around the temporary bandage as Sara grunts quietly once more. “Can you walk?” Ava asks, pushing to her feet and reaching down for Sara.

“I can manage,” Sara replies, her lips pressed in a tight line. It brings Ava no joy in what she does next, but she has to do it. Without a single warning, Ava jerks Sara to her feet, both her hands grasped tight around Sara’s own. Another strangled sound comes from Sara as Ava steadies her. “You’re a dick,” Sara mutters, her head facing the ground. Sweat is forming along her brow and her cheeks still lack any kind of color. But Ava knows better by now than to offer Sara sympathy. Neither of them enjoy that much when they’re injured.

“Might want to watch what you say to the person saving your life,” Ava teases gently, earning a little laugh from Sara, “Come on, let’s get you out of here. Slings Sara’s arm around her shoulders, Ava wraps her arm around Sara’s waist. In this position, Sara’s injured leg is along Ava’s own, allowing Ava to support nearly all of Sara’s body weight. They really do need to get out of here just in case any others come back for them. “Where are you parked?” Ava asks as she pushes the back door open.

Sara shakes her head as they step outside into the still empty streets. “Three streets this way,” Sara points through the long alley in front of them, “The League had already arranged my departure given the nature of my job but I made them come here. Things got really ugly, and apparently my target’s men hold a grudge.”

That much is abundantly clear. Carefully walking over the raised streets, Ava keeps her eyes on Sara as they go. She really is in pain, but she’s doing her best to hide it. Now that they’re close to relative safety, Ava’s concern and worry has returned in full force. It was stupid of Sara to come here instead of just getting out of the country and Ava is going to lay into her for that when they get to the end of this alley.

It’s slow moving and Ava spends half their time looking behind them to make sure they’re not leaving any blood trails behind this time. At the very end of the alley is an empty road that seems to be some kind of trash disposal area. There’s a tipped crate off to the side that Ava rights with her foot before settling Sara on it. “We seem to be getting fairly even in our efforts to save the other,” Sara muses, wincing when Ava kneels in front of her and stretches out the injured limb, “Guess you just can’t let me die can you?”

There’s something about the question that feels charged. Ava glances up to find Sara’s eyes trained on her. Her face is still pale and sweaty, but she looks almost vulnerable and raw. “I think we established this with the Brussels job,” Ava shrugs, tightening the bandage around Sara’s leg where it came loose from the walking, “If you died, who else would show up and single handedly ruin months of work.”

“I’m touched,” Sara laughs, tipping her head back as Ava checks the fabric of her coat to make sure Sara’s not still loosing blood at a rapid pace, “Though it’s totally because I’m the best sex you’ve ever had, right?” The comment catches Ava off guard and she finds herself laughing a little too loud for someone who is meant to be hiding right now. Shaking her head in amusement, Ava rolls her eyes before shifting her attention back to Sara’s bloodied leg.

“Put pressure on this,” Ava instructs, guiding Sara’s hand over her own injury. Sara makes a face before only barely pressing down on the fabric so Ava sighs, “More than that Sara, really press hard.”

“I love it when you take control,” Sara teases, her eyes sparkling as Ava fights off her own smile and nods to the wound once more. Now with Sara holding the wound, Ava carefully tears a scrap of fabric from the shirt that she has on currently. “You should go find a hole to hide out in after leaving me here,” Sara continues while Ava ties another knot around the base of the makeshift bandage, “I was coming here to warn you, there’s a bomb in the office building three blocks from here and it’s going off tonight.”

That’s not where Ava’s job is. Her job left the market when the shooting started and Ava will have to track him down again. But three blocks from here is close to where she’s staying. Lifting her head up, Ava meets Sara’s eyes, only slightly confused. “It will be loud,” Sara explains with a little shrug, “From what I heard before taking out my target, it’s enough to level the building.”

In other words it’s loud enough for Ava to hear in her flat this evening. Sara’s not warning Ava because of the danger, she’s warning her because she knows bomb serve as a trigger for Ava. “You came here when you were being followed to warn me of the bomb?” Ava asks, her movements stalling as she rests back on her heels.

Sara doesn’t nod or say anything, but instead she glances to the side. That’s enough of an answer for Ava, and she takes in a quiet and shaking breath. Sara risked her life here for Ava. But not even because Ava was in danger, but because Sara knew that Ava would hear that blast and be scared.

“Well,” Ava clears her throat, turning back to her task even as her stomach flips in that weightless way, “Next time around, just send me an email. I don’t need to follow blood trails to you so you can relay the message again.”

A tiny little laugh breaks free from Sara’s lips as Ava glances up to her with a shy smile. “Deal,” Sara nods her head as Ava finishes tying off the last of the bandage. That should do at least until Sara is able to get some real help. “You should go,” Sara tips her head over her shoulder towards the alley, “They’ll be here soon and you don’t want to be around when they show up.”

No, Ava does not. But she’s also not keen on the idea of leaving Sara alone. “I’ll linger in the area and come back in fifteen minutes to make sure you’re gone,” Ava finds a middle ground as Sara hums in agreement, “Keep holding pressure on that until they’re here, and make them take you to immediate aid when you’ve been picked up.” A roll of Sara’s eyes comes as the response, but she’s smiling as she does so.

Down the street Ava hears noise that might very well be the sound of a car coming their way. Standing to her feet, Ava brushes her fingers over Sara’s hand. “Stay out of trouble,” Ava reminds her as Sara smiles over her shoulder with that tiny little smile. “After all,” Ava continues as she walks backwards into the alley, “Can’t lose the best sex I’ve ever had in my life.” When Ava turns back around she can hear the sound of Sara’s laughter echoing off the surrounding walls and buildings.

“I knew it,” Sara calls, sounding nothing but elated as Ava tucks her hands in her pockets with a smile. When Ava hears the sound of tires coming over the road, she ducks inside a little alcove just along the alley. Sara might trust the League to get her out of here, but seeing as Ava saved her life, she might as well see this through. No harm in lingering to make sure that Sara really is okay. Later this evening Ava will send Sara an email of her next few jobs, though this means Sara likely won’t be out in the field for a period of time.

That’s okay though. The one thing Ava knows is that Sara always shows up some time or another. Now, that knowledge is absolutely nothing but a relief. Tucked in her alcove, Ava listens to the sounds of car doors open and Sara speaking rapid fire Arabic. It sounds as if she’s swearing at the people who have come to get her which doesn’t surprise Ava. Still listening in, Ava remains still and waits it out so she can know that Sara has made it away safely.

Helsinki, Finland — 14:03

The moment Ava’s phone begins ringing inside of her bag, she already knows who it is. There is exactly one person on this planet who would dare call Ava on her personal phone after having been told not to do that. Throwing her fake boss a small apologetic look, Ava silences the ringing before slipping from her chair and moving out of the meeting room. A few dirty looks are thrown her way but Ava doesn’t pay them any mind.

Though if Sara is calling, Ava already knows that it can’t be for anything good. Closing the door behind her, Ava walks to her desk before sitting down and picking up the call. “*Hey babe,*” a voice says from the other end of the line, sounding just a little winded, “*Did you miss me?*”

It’s been about a month since Ava has either seen Sara in person or heard her voice over a phone. They’ve been keeping up via emails with each other, though about a week ago Sara had just dropped off and disappeared. Ava’s here to take date from this company, so if Sara is calling, Ava can already imagine what her role in this is. “Please tell me you didn’t already accidentally kill my target,” Ava mumbles after looking around to make sure nobody can hear her, “I really need to get

this done so tell me you didn't kill the CEO."

"I think that might be a little impossible for me to do right now," Sara replies, her breathing sounding strangled as her voice falters. Ava had mistaken her original assessment of Sara's voice. She's not winded, she's hurt—and from the sounds of it, badly. Instantly Ava sits up straighter in her chair, worry plunging and carving through her chest.

"Sara," Ava says quietly, her heart picking up in her chest, "Hold on, just—give me a minute to get somewhere quieter." A little mumble comes from the other side of the line as Ava makes her way to the break room down the hall. Nobody is inside when Ava jerks the door open and steps in, just a silent space there for her to occupy now. Flipping the lock, Ava sets her tablet on the table. Panic is flaring in her body as she opens her tablet and stares around the room. "Where are you Sara?" Ava asks her gently, her throat already feeling tight.

"I don't know," Sara confesses as Ava swears under her breath and takes in a shaking exhale, *"Guess you were right about being caught. Someone managed to get the better of me in a fight and now I don't imagine I have long."*

Ava doesn't need to ask what Sara means by that. It even sounds like Sara might be close to dying already. Dread pools in Ava's stomach, the pressure of it so overwhelming it hurts. Her hands shaking, Ava lays the phone on the table before beginning a trace on the number Sara is calling from. "Okay," Ava replies, not liking the way she can hear the tremor in her own voice, "Just hold on Sara, let me get the location and I'll find my way there and—"

"There isn't time Ava," Sara replies, sounding so broken that it makes Ava's heart stutter painfully inside her chest. When Sara breaks out into a cough, it sounds wet and raspy and Ava thinks that she might have a punctured lung. This isn't good. Sara is far worse than Ava thought. "I don't have long," Sara continues on as Ava's eyes instantly burn as she rapidly blinks, still choking on that thick feeling in her throat, *"It just felt right to end this with you—can't leave my favourite spy hanging now can I?"*

"You better fucking not," Ava breathes out, her jaw working as she taps the screen in front of her, willing it to load faster. The trace is moving slow but Ava has an estimated location. Already she can tell that Sara is five hours away. It's not close but Ava can get there in time. She can tell Henry there's some emergency. He won't like it, but Sara can't die. Ava isn't going to let her. "You better hold on," Ava tells Sara, her voice still shaking as she swipes tears from under her eyes, her stomach plummeting, "Who else would always get in my way with you gone?"

Sara's laugh is choked and strangled, resulting in yet another series of brutal sounding coughs. Letting out a trembling breath, Ava closes her eyes, desperation welling in her body as she taps the table nervously. Ava feels useless sitting here. She feels useless just listening to the sounds of Sara's impending death. *"Some other beautiful assassin you can't keep your hands off,"* Sara finally replies, her words sounding a little slurred. Ava wants to tell her to shut up. There is no other assassin like Sara. There's not even a person in this world like Sara. All of that time Ava wasted trying to not like her seems stupid and pointless and trivial now.

"Ava," Sara's voice is rushed now, the sound of clanging metal coming in the background, *"I'm so sorry. Time's up."*

"Sara," Ava chokes out, her throat restricting and her heart pounding and her stomach twisting, "Sara don't you dare—" But that's all Ava gets out before she hears the sound of Sara's whimper and the dial tone is going off in the room. Frozen in place, Ava stares at the screen of her tablet. Ten seconds. Ten more seconds and she would have Sara's location. Ten more seconds and she could be on her way to wherever Sara is.

Everything in her body feeling numb, Ava falls backwards into the chair behind her. All of the air in Ava's lungs has left, the pressure in her chest and stomach shoving it up and out of her body. Her arms and legs buzz with an almost painful panicked sensation as the dial tone continues to ring out. The electronic sound filling every space inside the room, filling Ava's ears, filling the empty space in her chest. "Fuck," Ava whispers, choking around the words as she presses her fist into her stomach to relieve the ache there.

But this can't be reality. How many times has Sara nearly died or rushed into things and lived? Not even a month ago Ava saved her from bleeding out in a market place. Sara comes back. She always does. That's one of the things that Ava has come to adore about her. She'll come back this time because she has to. They didn't go through everything in Prague, then Brussels, then Cambodia just to have things end like this.

On the tablet in front of Ava, the cell signal drops completely and Ava's breathing catches once more as she stares to the screen. When Ava brings a shaking hand to her mouth, she feels something damp against her own cheeks and holds her fingers out in front of her. Moisture is there along her skin—she's crying. Choking on a quiet sob, Ava stares at the two devices laid in front of her. "Damn it," Ava bites out, dropping her head to her chest and holding her arms around her body, "God fucking damn it Sara."

Everything is burning and crashing through Ava's body, making it hard to breathe. This is her fault too. She and Sara had been dancing around each other for so long now that one of them was bound to get in trouble for not being careful. They've been on this collision course with their jobs for quite some time now, but every time they manage to find a way out. Ava has no idea what happened to lead to Sara's capture but she'll find out.

Sara can't be dead. Plain and simple. This isn't the end. It just can't be. Ava needs it to not be the end. Somewhere out there Sara is still alive and Ava's going to find her. This job here in Finland just got a little bit shorter. Ava's done playing cautious for the time being. The moment this is done she's off to Sara's last location in Venice. Standing up, Ava takes a moment to shove down everything else and regroup. It's time to get this done and then move on. It's time to bring Sara back to safety.

Chapter End Notes

Just another reminder, neither Sara nor Ava are going to die in this story despite what a certain narrative might say. That's a spoiler I am definitely giving away. I won't ever kill them off in my stories (with the exception of the Ghost AUs but they're not really dead and gone in those). I just felt like that was worth throwing out there again. And I won't lie, it takes them a while to get their shit together but it would feel wrong to rush them seeing as they're meant to be a little emotionally stunted. But I hope that you enjoyed this and as always thank you to those still here reading along!

Part Nine

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of the call from Sara in Finland, Ava scrambles to try and pull pieces together. It's not long before she comes to the understanding that Sara had been right all that time ago—nowhere and nothing is ever safe.

Chapter Notes

So here we are with part nine which is kind of a transitional chapter to the overarching plot of the second part of this story. I'm aiming to get the next chapter up tomorrow but it might come Sunday instead depending on how much I can get done. Either way there will be something up soonish.

I'm a bit prone to sometimes forgetting some plot points, so if someone sees/notices something that doesn't make sense or doesn't follow feel free to let me know. This has turned out to be longer than I thought it might and I've been adding things as I go so I'm bound to lose/drop/forget something along the way. As always, same trigger warnings apply. But thank you to everyone who has been reading along and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Budapest, Hungary — 16:55

When Ava stretches out, several pops resound along her spine, releasing the pressure that has been gathering there as she sits here in this chair. Already Ava has been here for fifteen minutes and she is about another three minutes from walking from this office and leaving town. Henry had called Ava here under some kind of emergency meeting. Or at least it must be an emergency seeing as he called Ava when she was meant to be taking some time off.

It's been two weeks since Ava received the phone call from Sara and everywhere she's looked has been a dead end. The call had originated somewhere near Gdansk, Poland and it's where Ava had gone after bumping up the timeline of her job there in Finland. Twenty-four hours after receiving that call she was on a plane with a plan of attack. The city itself is not very large, but Ava has three contacts in the area or who knew the area that she had called upon.

Seeing as Ava never learned any details of where Sara might have been held, looking for her quickly became like searching for a needle in a haystack. Ava checked warehouses and abandoned basements. She tracked locations that her contacts said some of the criminals in the areas hide out in. Ava had even scoured through hours of camera footage using the programming that Sara had made available to her.

The one and only lead Ava has is that Sara had been seen a week before that call came through. The software had found a blurred image of Sara walking inside a storefront with her coat collar lifted around her neck. In the photo, Sara's face was barely visible but Ava knew it was here. It

was the last time she appeared on any security cameras spread throughout the city. Ava had gone through all the other partial matches and not a single one of them showed Sara's image.

That storefront had been where she went immediately after getting the address, only to find that it was another dead end. The back of the store emptied into an alleyway where a car easily could have parked. Ava checked cameras after that and found two cars that she followed using the footage, but both of them eventually passed through blind spots and disappeared. The most she gained from that were the two license plates. But even those had been a bust seeing as one of them never even existed in the first place.

Really what she has learned from this is that Sara wasn't just caught, she was apprehended. This was a professional hit and whoever took her knew exactly what they were doing. The entire time Ava had just sat there at her computer, dread pooling in her stomach. At each step, Ava kept finding more and more evidence that led to the conclusion that Sara likely hadn't survived her encounter with whoever took her. They were clean, professional, and organized.

"Ava," Henry speaks, interrupting her thoughts. There's a file tucked under his arm as he approaches her with his cane already extended and shuffling over the ground. "I heard that you had gotten here a bit early," Henry continues as Ava fights the urge to roll her eyes, "Fiona should have told you that you could go inside already."

She did tell Ava that, but Ava prefers the openness out here in the halls as opposed to the closed walls in Henry's office. "I was just waiting for you," Ava lies, standing up and smoothing her hands over her blazer before buttoning it, "I can't stay here long, there's business I have to finish attending to before I move to my next job."

Ava does her best to keep her agitation from her voice, but she doubts that she's doing a good job of it. Somehow it's as if Henry just knows when Ava would really prefer not to be bothered. The only good news is that she had already been here in Hungary following a lead from where Sara was said to have been recovering from her gunshot wound in Pakistan. Still, there is work to be done out in the city and she would rather get on with it.

Henry motions with his hand towards his office door and Ava sighs quietly before walking inside. Everything inside is as it was the time before that. Henry never has been one to change things up. It's far more personable than his office in the London office, the shelves here crammed with his personal books and photo frames of his family. "I've called you in regarding a follow up on one of your jobs," Henry begins, shuffling to his chair before sitting down, "I could have done it over the phone, but due to the sensitive matter of the subject I thought that in person was best."

Humming quietly, Ava takes her seat in the chair in front of the desk and stares at the file and envelope resting in the center of Henry's desk. "As you know we've been dealing with increased League presence in the field," Henry sighs as Ava nods her head, "They seem to be violating the principles of our agreement to remain out of each other's way. Brussels was an effort to get rid of one of their key players."

Instantly Ava stiffens when she hears the word effort. "Effort, sir?" Ava parrots back as Henry leans in his chair, her stomach twisting, "Was Brussels not a success? We eliminated the Canary there. I made sure of it."

Silence hangs in the air as Henry looks off to the side. Frowning, Ava can feel her throat restricting as lead-like heaviness hands in her stomach. "Brussels was not a success," Henry states as Ava goes rigid, "We're not sure who that man was that we took out, perhaps another of the League that was placed there in the Canary's stead. But there was a recent hit in Pakistan not too far to where you were located. Reports from Interpol revealed startling similarities between the execution of a

diplomat there and the Canary's past work."

Ava hadn't ever looked into Sara's job in Pakistan. She hadn't thought to do something like that. Sara had of course said that things got ugly and Ava had seen the evidence of that herself. But she hadn't read the news or any reports before she was moving on to her next job. "You believe that the Canary is still operating in the field," Ava forces her tone to remain level as Henry nods, "And I'm assuming this meeting has been called because you wish for me to go after him again."

"Her actually," Henry comments as Ava's blood runs cold. Her breath catches in her chest as Henry nudges the file towards Ava, his eyes staring right at her. "It appears that our own bias kept us from seeing what was under our nose this entire time," Henry proceeds as Ava takes the file, attempting to steady her hands as her breathing falters, "We don't have clear photos on her face or a set identity, but take a look."

Ava doesn't want to. But she pries the file open and looks to the first set of images there. They've been taken somewhere here in the city, that much is clear. Ava recognizes some of the landmarks. In each of the photos, Sara's bad leg is still wrapped tight with bandages and a split, and there's a man accompanying her as they walk the city. They're admittedly terrible photographs, but Ava knows without a single doubt that these are of Sara. "Women are constantly overlooked in this world, something that can be weaponized by those of us in this profession," Ava clears her throat and replies diplomatically, "Clearly the Canary has been quite successful in doing that."

The Operative is now a step closer to identifying who Sara is. As soon as Ava is out of here, she's going to call Gary. Someone needs to keep an eye on Sara's family. If the Operative can't get to Sara, Ava wouldn't put her organization above doing something to threaten the people that Sara loves. There might be a few strings that Ava can pull to erase any connection of Sara's identity to them, but that is going to take some time, and she is going to need a considerable amount of help.

Henry just hums, tapping his fingers along his desk. "Well we've recently stopped that little problem," he states, condescension dripping from his tone, "She has always been a cocky killer and one of our local teams caught up with her in Poland."

The moment the words are spoken, Ava's chest spasms violently. Her fingers tighten around the file in her lap, creasing the edges. Every muscle in her body has gone rigid and cold as Ava struggles to take in a deep breath. The hit in Poland was professional and clean. It was too clean for some band of criminals to have performed on their own. Desperation wells up in Ava's body, hot and angry. "You mean to say that she's—" Ava pauses, clearing her throat and forcing her tone to remain even, "The Canary is no longer active?"

When Ava glances up, Henry is looking her direction with a thoughtful expression on his face. "I mean to say that she's dead," he replies as Ava does her best not to choke on the bile rising in her throat, "As of four days ago we received confirmation that the Canary died in Gdansk. There was proof sent, but I hope you'll understand I didn't find it fitting to bring that to this meeting."

Proof of execution involves either taking photos or removing some piece of the body. Sometimes it means both. Ava's stomach churns violently, her eyes closing as she sucks in a quiet and strangled breath. Sara was sent here to Henry, or at least a piece of her way. If confirmation only just came, that means Sara hadn't yet been dead when Ava was in the country, or the day she called. Ten seconds had meant the difference between Sara's life and her death. Ten seconds longer on that phone and Ava could have gotten to her in time.

"I had assumed this would be good news for you," Henry muses as Ava opens her eyes, feeling the burning sensation rising in her throat and limbs, "Seeing as she was constantly in your way, this should be a relief."

To Henry, it should. And right now Ava needs to act as if it is before he gets suspicious. “I’m simply thinking of how Brussels was such a waste of time,” Ava snaps the file shut before throwing it to the desk, masking her grief with anger, “Three days spent hiding out and weeks spent planning all to kill the wrong person. I understand we likely took out a League member in Brussels, but for me this was—”

“Personal,” Henry interrupts as Ava glances to him, nerves settling in her chest, “Yes, that’s precisely why I called you here to relay the good news myself. I know just how meddlesome the Canary has been in your field work.” There’s nothing in his tone to suggest that he is trying to lead Ava down some kind of confessional path. This has happened before where Henry has called her either here or the London office to personally fill her in on the details of a case that had been bothering her.

This time around though, Ava wishes that he had done this over the phone. Right now Ava is struggling to keep her composure when everything inside of her feels as if it’s falling apart. Brussels was for nothing. All of Ava’s efforts to keep Sara safe and she still failed. The Operative still found her in the end and now there’s nothing Ava can do. There’s not even any sense in questioning how Henry knows that Sara is really dead. If confirmation from an operative comes through, it’s never wrong.

Swallowing thickly, Ava hums and tries to shove down some of the rising pressure in her throat. “Well I appreciate you bringing me in,” Ava buttons her blazer once more, her tone flat as she stands from her chair. The envelope remains on the desk with her name on the back, and Ava takes it, “I’m assuming this has details of the next job?”

Indeed,” Henry nods his head as he leans back in his chair, “You’re going to Minsk again when you’re ready. There’s nothing urgent there, but I advise you not take any longer than two more weeks to clear up any remaining matters from your leave before heading there.”

Stiffly nodding her head, Ava pockets the envelope before adjusting her bag around her shoulders. “I’ll make contact when I’m in the city,” Ava speaks, already turning towards the door, hoping that her pace isn’t too rapid, “Thank you again,” Ava falters for a moment, her eyes closing, “For letting me know of the Canary’s demise.”

Not bothering to linger any longer, Ava steps outside the office and closes the door. Her stomach lifting violently, Ava presses her hand to her chest. Walking rapidly, Ava finds the nearest bathroom on the floor and slams the door. Not bothering to lock it, she steps to the trashcan and gets sick. Every last content of her stomach comes up as Ava grips the edges. Her stomach heaves afterwards, wracking her body with spasms that ache and burn. Fumbling for a towel, Ava finds it and wipes her mouth.

In the mirror, her reflection looks pale and sick. There’s tears crowding the corners of her eyes and a single one snaking down her cheek. Ava looks as destroyed as she feels. This is her fault, some of the blame falls back on Ava for this. She failed. All of her running around and all of her investigating was for nothing. She had been in the same country as Sara but hadn’t found her, and now Sara is dead.

But not only that, Ava let herself get close. She let Sara into her life and got used to having her there. Now there won’t be anymore playful flirting with their victim in the room, no more games of pretend in shared spaces, no more park bench meetings with Sara and her bright blue eyes and that far too loud laugh. It’s all done now. Gone. Another wave of nausea slams through her and Ava clings to the edges of the trashcan as she closes her eyes. “Damn it,” Ava whispers, shaking her head, “Damn.”

Minsk, Belarus — 08:45

“I think that it’s time you let me have that,” Dmitriy says gently, reaching over to try and take the bottle Ava has tucked under her arm. Jerking away, Ava levels him with a glare, her mind already spinning and reeling from all the vodka she’s had so far. Only when he holds his hands up in silent surrender does Ava relax, sinking back into the couch and staring blankly to the far wall.

They’re here in his house because Ava had shown up in the city and hadn’t known where else to go. In two weeks Ava had contacted Gary to see what he could do about purging Sara from existence and she had kept up the search her contacts were performing in Gdansk. Nothing came from it of course. Operative spies are damn good at their jobs, Ava knows this. Not a single clue had been left behind to explain where Sara had been taken, not a single hint left behind that might suggest she wasn’t really dead.

It took a good three days for Ava to process everything that Henry told her. Sara’s tougher and stronger than anyone Ava knows, so it had been hard to accept that she could really be dead. In Henry’s office Ava had been convinced he was telling the truth, but he wasn’t there so he might not know everything. After all he also thought the Canary died in Brussels. But Ava’s been scanning the Interpol reports and can’t find anything that might suggest Sara’s alive. And there’s been no further correspondence from Sara.

Five days ago is when it finally sank in and Ava had smashed a plate off her desk when she hit her final dead end in locating Sara. It was the phone signal that Ava had tried to force back online. But either the phone was dead or someone had destroyed it. Since then Ava’s just dwindled and tried to come to terms with what has happened. Unsuccessfully. There’s been a lot more drinking than there should have been and Ava had gone to her contact in Croatia when she was there three days ago to use his shooting range.

Ava handles change because she has to—it’s a never-ending part of this job. Working as a spy means living life inside of rotating doors—constant movement, constant flux in everything around her. What she doesn’t handle well is loss. That’s what this is, a loss of something that was and a loss of something that never will be. So vodka has been her friend and Dmitriy is her commiserator. “Your house is nice,” Ava blurts out, staring at the warm and homey decorations around her.

It’s her first time ever coming inside here. Normally Ava stays away from the personal lives of her contacts in this way, never trusting their homes or families. But Dmitriy has always been different. He had all but dragged her here when Ava had shown up in the shop still a bit hungover from the night before. There’s three days left until she starts her job here, so tomorrow is for getting sober. Today is for drinking until the pain stops. It’s not healthy but Ava never claimed to be in the first place.

“I can’t really take credit for that,” Dmitriy shakes his head with a fond smile, glancing to the photo frames hanging on the wall, “Alina always had an eye for decoration—this is all her doing.” Ava figured as much. She’s seen the dark cellar that is Dmitriy’s shop. But still this is a real home. It’s nothing like the generic flats or hotel rooms Ava lives most of her life in. This place has character and memory embedded in it’s very walls. Places like this make Ava long for something similar, which is why she makes a point to never come somewhere like this.

Dmitriy is looking over at Ava with kind eyes when she glances up. They’re too kind considering how raw Ava still feels, and she raises the bottle back to her lips to introduce a sting to blanket that softness threatening to take over. “So,” Dmitriy clears his throat, leaning back in the little leather

armchair to the side, “Your friend, the one who was with you the last time—she’s dead.”

Those words cut through Ava and lodge somewhere deep in her sternum. Nearly choking on the liquid burning down her throat, Ava just nods. “Apparently,” Ava breathes out, tilting her head back and staring at the ceiling, “I shouldn’t be bothered, but I am. I kill people and take their secrets and ruin their companies. But somehow she’s dead, and I only knew her over a year and a half but. I’m—” Ava cut off, gesturing to herself with an unsteady hand.

It’s almost embarrassing how impacted by this Ava is. She and Sara weren’t even anything to each other. They were friends, but Ava’s reaction has been as if they were something more. All they ever did was pretend. Ava hoped, but that’s as far as things got between her and Sara. This job requires a great amount of bravery and courage, and yet Ava hadn’t even been able to utter a simple sentence to Sara to let her know that she mattered to Ava. She could somehow express it in her actions but the words would tangle in her throat on the way up. Now it’s too late anyways, those words have to just stay there to die in her chest.

“You were young weren’t you, when your parents died?” Dmitriy prompts as Ava stiffens slightly and turns her head to look at him. Ava doesn’t talk about her parents, but she did mention them once when she had been out drinking with Dmitriy two years ago. Far too much alcohol had been consumed that night and Ava had been making a rather cold joke about her family. Just barely nodding her head, Ava leaves her chin tipped against her shoulder as Dmitriy hums. “So then this loss, it’s your first one in a while,” his voice is gentle when he speaks, “It’s going to hurt. You let someone in and now she’s gone.”

Ava did let Sara in. That’s the problem. She knew things were going to come back to bite her in the ass one day but she never expected it might look like this. Ava always thought that she would be the one going down for this, either because the Operative learned of her relations with an enemy, or because the League decided to target her. Never once did Ava consider that the Operative might be the one to try and kill Sara just for doing her job. It’s made Ava call into question what she thought she knew about her organization and their priorities.

“I need to get my hands on the files from Gdansk,” Ava murmurs, thinking out loud as she turns her eyes to the ceiling again, “Someone had to have ordered that hit on her, and I need to figure out who it was so I know who not to trust.” It couldn’t have been Henry, he’s not far enough up the ladder. Likely it came from whoever sits above him, though Ava has no idea who that might be or how to even look for that name.

Every spy is issued a number, even those higher up. Ava’s has always been twelve and Henry’s has always been one-hundred-four. They’re completely random, meant to resist any kind of attempt at cracking the pattern behind the number assignment. However that was to keep enemies from finding a pattern, not to keep it from members of the Operative themselves. Ava knows all the rules and regulations as well as the protocols, surely somewhere there has to be something she can use to figure this out.

When Dmitriy holds his hand out, this time Ava does pass the bottle over. It’s only eight in the morning, she really shouldn’t get terribly drunk before noon. “The last time I saw you, I thought you still hated here,” Dmitriy comments as he settles the bottle on a table far from Ava’s reach, “The two of you were having a stand off in my shop and I was convinced things might come to blows.”

They might have if Sara had been there to kill Dmitriy as Ava had expected. But even then, Ava’s not sure that she hated Sara. At this point she’s not sure that she hated Sara at all. “Turns out you were right,” Ava shrugs, letting out a quiet sigh as her stomach rolls, “There are really thin lines

between hate, lust, and just wanting something you aren't allowed to have. I think I could have done it—with her.”

Ava's not even sure what she means by that. Dating doesn't exactly seem plausible considering her occupation. Really it's more that she could have see herself trusting Sara one day, she thinks that she had started to. Sara made Ava think. She forced Ava to consider things that Ava hadn't before, like what life outside of this job might look like. It's not as if Sara did tht on purpose, but she made Ava feel things that in turn led to Ava aching for something she hadn't thought she wanted before. Stability and rest and just something constant—something that isn't a life on the run.

“You could do it on your own too,” Dmitriy suggests, his brown eyes staring right back into Ava's own, still kind, still soft, “I scaled everything back when I began seeing Alina. But even if she had left me, I realized at that point that the path I was headed down was destructive and I didn't want that for myself. What I do is dangerous yes, and I could be caught, but it's better than what I had before.”

That's not an option for Ava. Dmitriy had a stable family before he began his business, Ava didn't. Even if Ava left and tried to settle down somewhere she wouldn't even know where to begin. Just thinking about that makes her nauseous. As tiring as this life might be, it's also comfortable and familiar. Right now Ava can't stand another massive change. “I don't think I can,” Ava shakes her head, feeling her body tense up. They're getting into topics that are too touchy. Pushing off the couch, Ava balances there unsteadily on her feet for a moment before looking to Dmitriy, “I believe you said something about going to get tea?”

An amused smile lifts Dmitriy's lips up as he stands as well. “I think that it's best we get tea here,” he gestures to the kitchen as Ava frowns, “We might get some looks with you stumbling down the streets drunk at eight in the morning.”

He has a point there. That and Ava thinks a private place is best for her right now given everything else. “Yeah,” Ava hums and nods, walking into the kitchen with a sigh, “That's a good call.”

Gdansk, Poland — 18:09

Keys in hand, Ava stands outside the hall of the apartment complex staring at the door in front of her. She's been here about five minutes, not moving. Surely anyone who has seen her here must think that she's gone crazy, and maybe Ava has. It feels like she has. It feels like Ava is paralyzed. This is her final clue in Sara's disappearance and death, one that Ava hadn't expected she would get.

Two days ago when her month long job in Minsk had ended, Ava received a call from her contact here. Apparently there was an apartment here in the city that had been paid for but whoever rented it was behind and he found out through local channels. The woman in the office said that the person who leased the place had blonde hair, blue eyes, and far too many travel bags. To Ava, that couldn't have been anyone else other than Sara and the countless weapons she carries with her everywhere.

So she came back here to see what's inside. Ava's hoping there's nothing here. She's hoping that she's going to walk in to an empty apartment, a sign that Sara came back for her things. If there's nothing inside, that means Sara came back for everything. It means that she escaped and Ava can keep looking. If not then Ava doesn't know what she'll do next. There is nothing left after this except the reality of acceptance that has been staring Ava down.

All Ava can do if this doesn't work is throw herself back into her job. After the loss of her parents Ava shut down and immersed herself in her school work, this is just a different variant of that. Sara had been this jarring force that shoved Ava outside the reality she had formed for herself in this job. It's not as if Ava didn't know how to form connections with people, she just hadn't wanted one as strong as she had with Sara until she found it. Now Ava's just not sure what's supposed to come next for her.

Taking in a deep breath, Ava turns the key in the lock before shoving open the door. It catches in the frame, letting out a harsh sound as Ava pushes it all the way open. Inside there isn't a single light on, but Ava can see enough. Her heart clenches in her chest as she takes in the clothing spread haphazardly on the ground and the half-open bags of weapons tossed carelessly on the dresser and bed. The air inside smells stale, as if nobody has opened this door in quite some time.

It's been about a month and a half since Ava learned of Sara's death and that seems to be how long everything has sat here, untouched, unmoved, undisturbed. Stepping inside, Ava closes the door behind her before turning on the lights. They flicker a few times before coming on in full, yellow light filling the small space. A crutch leans against the closet door, the same one Ava saw Sara with in some of the surveillance footage she had gone through when searching for it. It's been abandoned here, and Ava never saw Sara with it in the final video she has of Sara.

Her heart stumbling in her chest, Ava mechanically begins cleaning up the clothing from the ground and tossing it in the duffel on the dresser. It's the same light blue duffel Sara's toted with her to every city she and Ava stayed in together. There's no initials marking the bag as Sara's, but rather a rip in the fabric along the right side that has been sewn together with medical sutures. Ava smooths her fingers over the rip before moving on, her body tight and tense.

There's knives laid out on the bed and Ava finds another two under the folded pillow. A quick examination under the nightstand reveals another knife tucked there as well. Walking around the room, Ava finds five more hidden away in the places she has learned Sara stashes things away in. The knives fall with a metallic clang into the weapons bag before Ava zips it up as well.

All that's left is the computer plugged in over at the desk. With a quiet and heavy sigh, Ava swipes it from the table, only for something to fall at her feet. It's a piece of folded paper with Sara's handwriting neatly scrawled along the front. Her name rests there, or more accurately Sara has written the number twelve along with the date. When Ava bends down to retrieve it, she finds the date is the day that Sara was taken.

Ava's stomach flips over as she carefully opens the note with stiff movements. *"I'm being followed,"* the first line reads out as Ava's heart squeezes in her chest, *"I'm not sure who it is, they're good at hiding. But they're onto me. I'm going to try and follow them instead tomorrow. If you're reading this, I must have failed."* A shaky breath falls from Ava's lips as she digs her fingertips into the fragile notebook paper. *"If that's the case, you always were my favourite spy,"* the note concludes, *"It looks like in the game of Spies vs. Assassins, spies win."*

That's all that's there, aside from Sara's neatly signed name at the bottom and the same lipstick print that Ava found all the way in the beginning of this on that first note. Ava never wanted to win anything. Not even in the beginning, certainly not now. This doesn't feel like winning, it feels like the exact opposite of that. And now to learn that Sara likely knew she was heading into danger and did it anyways. Ava doesn't know what to think about that. For starters she wishes that Sara were alive so she could yell at her.

But it's almost fitting in a way that Sara never stopped being exactly who she was until the end—curious to a fault. Letting out a quiet and pained sigh, Ava folds the note twice before tucking it in

her pocket. Not that she would have ever told Sara, but she kept the notes Sara left for her whenever she carried them away. Ava should have burned them but she never did. They're in her bunker in Croatia, the place where Ava is about to take Sara's things to. Leaving them here just invites the possibility of the League coming to look for Sara. That and Ava's not ready to part with the remaining reminders of Sara.

Walking back to the bed, Ava shoulders one bag and slings the other over her arm. Whenever the leasing office comes up to take a look at the place, they'll just think that the occupant bolted. They'll never know that Sara was kidnapped and likely tortured before her death. But Ava will know. That's knowledge that she has to live with—knowledge that her own organization did this to one of the few people Ava's ever really given a damn about.

It's time to close the door on her time with Sara though. There's no changing this. People die in this line of work and it's time that Ava do her best to move on. This was the last lifeline that existed between Ava and the possibility that Sara might be alive somewhere out there. And it's just snapped. Tossing the keys to the dresser, Ava walks out the door, leaving it wide open for anyone to look inside the empty apartment.

London, England — 15:13

Henry is late and Ava is getting increasingly frustrated with his tardiness. She's here in his office where she's meant to be receiving her orders for the next job. It's been two months since Ava returned to Gdansk and since then she hasn't stopped moving. The Operative has been in a state of crisis after a massive data leak happened a month and a half ago, and with that crisis came a new lack of freedom for Ava.

Gone is her autonomy in choosing which jobs she takes on and when. That had been quite the blow to suffer seeing as that is the one thing that was helping Ava stay sane for those two weeks after Gdansk. Now she's exhausted and burnt out, still suffering from severe jet lag after two weeks jumping around in the States. Henry has been using Ava as a buffer between the Operative and some of their deep cover spies. He tried to phrase it kindly, but really all it's meant is that she has been carrying new information to those in the field and making sure that the data leaks didn't blow their covers.

It's been an unmitigated disaster and Ava is more than ready for everything to die down so she can go back to some sense of normalcy again. Stretching her back out, Ava listens to the satisfying pops that come from her spine. With her eyes closed, she leans back into her chair and folds her arms over her chest. If Henry is going to insist on keeping her waiting then Ava is going to insist on getting some sleep in his office until he arrives.

The door knocks open almost minutes later, leaving Ava more agitated than she had been when she closed her eyes. Suppressing the urge to groan, she turns over her shoulder to find Henry hanging his coat on the rack. "Next time you should tell me a later time when you know you're going to be in the office," Ava snaps, not having it in her to bother with pleasantries, "I came here only to get these files from you and I had been hoping to get the evening flight out but it's too late for that now."

"I had a meeting that I wasn't able to escape," Henry replies, sounding almost amused. Ava on the other hand is not amused. Henry always seems to have meetings on the days that Ava is showing up. Sometimes she's convinced that this is something he's doing on purpose. When Ava was in training, one of the exercises they would run involved being stuck in a small room for far longer than they were told to remain there. Every single recruit ended up angry and frustrated by the time

the instructor arrived back, letting them know just how pissed off they were.

It had been a test of sorts. Anger and frustration are the best emotions to evoke if someone wants to draw a response out of another. But Ava knows this little trick that the Operative uses, so surely Henry wouldn't bother trying to use it on her. "Why am I here?" Ava questions as Henry makes his way to his desk, his cane bumping her shoe as Ava moves her leg, "You could have sent the instructions to me instead of making me come all this way."

"No, I really couldn't have done that," Henry shakes his head as he sinks into his chair, "The next place I'm sending you to check in on requires your absolute discretion, and it's a local job." Only slightly interested, Ava narrows her eyes in Henry's direction before humming for him to continue. "As you know, we have spies everywhere, including our own government," Henry begins as Ava nods her head, "But what we try to keep quite is just how far up the chain of command we have placed those spies."

There's an envelope on the desk that he slides across to the edge. Still looking to Henry, Ava frowns as she takes the paper in her hands and untucks the top fold. There's just a single name there along with their job title and an address. Ava knows this address quite well. She imagines just about every British citizen does. "We have a spy in Buckingham Palace?" Ava asks incredulously, staring at the job title there as Henry nods his head, "You're meaning to tell me that the Queen's Treasurer is an Operative spy?"

It's not like Ava didn't know there are spies inside Downing Street—two for that matter. But this is something entirely different. "That's correct," Henry replies as Ava raises her brows and lets out a quiet laugh of disbelief, "He was recruited shortly before taking up the position and has been very valuable in his role. However we fear that the data leak that has gotten out might have compromised certain thing. I want you to dig up what you can find and alert him personally."

"No," Ava instantly shakes her head, understanding exactly where this is going, "I am not setting a single foot in that Palace." Henry lets out a quiet sigh and Ava groans quietly. The one thing that Ava does not do in her role is take jobs that have anything to do with major spearheads of government. Henry had once asked Ava to attend a White House Correspondent's dinner in the States and she had firmly refused. Her target was one of the attendants and she had just bugged his phone so she could listen to the table conversation from a distance.

"We need to make sure that his position is secure," Henry pushes on as Ava sinks into her chair, accepting her fate, "I would send someone else but you and I both know that nobody can get in and out as fluidly as you can." There are times where Ava hates that fact that she has made a living of blending in so well people don't notice her. It means being sent on jobs like this. "Besides," Henry continues, "Maybe your strong dislike for the Palace will provide extra incentive for you to complete this job as quickly as possible."

It definitely will. Ava just has to first find a way of getting in. A gardener might be her best bet, maybe even an electrician. But it's not going to be easy. "Fine," Ava concedes, crumpling the paper before tossing it into Henry's garbage can, "Then where do I go after this. I know you so I know there's something else lined up."

Ava hopes it's somewhere considerably less stuffy than the Palace. "Nothing is planned after this. We have other spies handling the final loose threads of the data leak—but it appears we're in the clear now," Henry says proudly, a small smile on his lips, "This is the quickest that we've handled something of this caliber, so once you're finished with this, you're free to choose where to go as you please." Relief washes over Ava as she tips her head back with a quiet sigh. "Though I might remind you to be careful," Henry clears his throat as Ava looks up, "The data leak, some of your

contacts were exposed. We handled it, but do you know a man by the name of Gary Green.”

There was no mention at any given point that Ava’s contacts had been revealed. Gary is an outside contact and has never had anything to do with the Operative, Ava has made sure of it. That fog of suspicion is back again as Ava looks to Henry. “Yes,” Ava states in a monotone voice, watching Henry’s reactions carefully, “He’s a stateside contact that I’ve had for years now. But he shouldn’t be in any Operative records. I keep my contacts clean.”

“But do they keep themselves clean?” Henry asks as Ava tips her chin up. Turning in his chair, Henry spins to the table off to the side and grabs a folder laid out there before handing it to Ava. “It appears that he attempted to contact you through an official channel years ago,” Henry reveals as Ava skims that very information laid out in the file, “He was unsuccessful, but I’ve warned you about keeping outside contacts of this job Ava. To do this job—”

“Is to do everything alone,” Ava finishes, feeling more than just a little irritated again, “Yes, I know Henry.” Leaning back in his chair, Henry clicks his tongue as Ava snaps the folder shut and throws it to his desk. “But you also told me to never trust anyone, and that has to mean casting doubt on my own organization, doesn’t it?” Ava continues, watching on as Henry’s brows raise behind his glasses, “Surely I can’t just pick and choose who to give trust over to?”

Ava swears that Henry looks some kind blend of both amused and proud as he nods his head and folds his hands over his chest. “Surely not,” he replies with a small nod of his head, “Though once more, I will warn you against placing any kind of trust in outside contacts either. I’m well aware of the fact there are some you favour more than others.”

There’s something in his tone that Ava does not like at all. Her mind can’t help but jump straight to Dmitriy and his little shop in Minsk. Straightening in her chair, Ava takes in an angry inhale. “Is that a threat?” she asks, her voice low, her eyes trained on Henry’s face.

“Not one that comes from me,” Henry shakes his head as Ava hums, not trusting that, “But there have been comments made. You’re skilled Ava, and that skill does not go without being noticed. Just make sure that you’re being paid the right kind of attention by the higher ups here.”

That sounds like even more of a threat. Dread drops low in Ava’s stomach as she hums quietly, taking this end conversation as her cue to leave. “Spies aren’t meant to have attention paid to them,” Ava remarks as she stands from her chair and straightens out her blazer, “Seeing as the Operative just suffered a massive data leak, you’d think that their focus would be elsewhere. I’m just a piece in all of this, a pawn, not a queen.”

“But a game is far more difficult without the pawns,” Henry counters as Ava’s headed towards the door, “They may not be the most powerful, but they are the soul of the game. Losing one to any kind of opposition limits our ability to turn tides of a war.”

Tugging open the door, Ava looks to Henry once more and purses her lips. “I never did like chess,” she comments, watching as Henry tips his head up, “And I like metaphors even less.” Not saying anything more, she closes the door behind her and heads for the elevator. Ava doesn’t know what that was about or where it came from, but she doesn’t like it. The fact that Henry made reference to assets being seized by opposition is not something that has settled well with her.

She understands the insinuation—Henry thinks that she has flipped. This job at the Palace isn’t an honor given to Ava because she’s the best candidate for the job, it’s a test. The Operative is gambling her loyalty and Henry just gave that away. It’s not a test Ava is going to fail, not even if she is suddenly calling into question her limited trust in the Operative. Stepping inside the elevator, Ava presses the button and lifts her head. Time to finish up a war.

Zadar, Croatia — 22:31

Skimming the documents on the screen in front of her, Ava sips the tea in her hand and folds a single leg up under her in the chair. Currently she is trying to make sense of this mess of information she's been deciphering for about two hours now. It's taking far longer than Ava expected, and nearly everything has been written out in codes and codenames. Not that she anticipated to find anything different when it comes to filtering through Operative files and data.

As it turns out, the date leak had been very beneficial for Ava's purposes. Each city she was sent to, each spy she was asked to check in on offered her more information. It's been a month since Ava saw Henry in London and four months since she saw him in Hungary. In that time, Ava's had limited slivers of peace scattered here and there between jobs. Not even three days ago she finished her local job early and has been taking her time in reporting her findings back to the Operative.

Ava needed this time to herself to finally come here to her bunker where she could go over everything herself. Every copy of every file that she recovered for the Operative now sits on her computer, and it's a small mountain of information. Backups were saved to Ava's own personal drives after each job so she could bring it back here, but she hadn't realized just how much she had collected until now.

Everything has been organized by date, the only problem is that things are so heavily encrypted or redacted that even Ava is having trouble making sense of things. But she has narrowed the basics down. There are three individuals running the Operative, ironically named One, Two, and Three. Ava knew there had to be some kind of a pattern present in the numbering, but she hadn't expected it to be so glaringly obvious. It's almost laughable that the three heads of a clandestine organization would be so lacking in creativity.

But there's something strange about the manner in which these reports are created. From what Ava can gather, the three heads do not know the true identity of the others. They're kept independent and unaware of just who they're working with. It's clever in some ways, dangerous in others. So far Ava has learned that it was One who had orchestrated both hits on Sara. They had been the person responsible for sounding the rally cry against the League and the other two had promptly fallen in line.

Beyond that, Ava's learned nothing of their identities. There's some kind of coordination that happened a few years back ordering another hit of a League member. But that was called off at the last minute and no conclusive information explains what happened as a result. It was also One who suggested the kill that time as well. Whoever One is, it appears that they're far more vocal in these kinds of things than the others are. However there's nothing here that might suggest anything of their true identity.

With a small sigh, Ava closes out that window, tired of staring at codes and numbers. Instead she pulls open her files that she has been storing about the League. Anytime Sara has asked Ava to do something for her, Ava had kept copies and backups. Overtime she had laid out a relatively cohesive mapping of just where the League's allies and friends rest all over the globe. It's taking some time the past few days, but Ava has constructed a vague list that she has divided into political allies, economic allies, and then miscellaneous allies.

Scanning the list there, Ava already knows several of these companies listed in the miscellaneous category, and not a single one of them are run by good people. The Operative might employ some criminals as weapons supplies and the like, but the League clearly has no reservations what kinds of people they make friends with. There's everything here in front of Ava, ranging from mass

murderers to arms dealers to human traffickers to chemists and scientists. Every single one of them are being investigated by the International Criminal Court. Ava has them all here, and yet, it would take a considerable amount of proof to bring them down.

It's dangerous to have this information, but Ava hadn't wanted to throw it all away. Given the fact that she has no idea if she's even safe right now from her own organization, having something on all the players in the game won't hurt. The League has been emboldened recently—by what Ava doesn't know. All she knows is that there are several high profile politicians that were murdered in the past two months and each kill seems to point towards the League.

Not once has Ava heard or seen a single mention of the Canary on any report from any organization. Whatever hope she had of Sara being alive flickered out a long time ago. Four months is certainly long enough for Sara to have popped back up if she were alive. Ava sent one final email out to Sara after she left Gdansk, just in case. But no reply ever came.

Exhausted and feeling a migraine forming, Ava leans back in her chair and lets out a quiet sigh. There's an email from Gary flickering on the corner of her screen, a reminder that she was meant to call him an hour ago. Snagging her phone from the desk, Ava kicks her feet up and dials his number. The tone rings a few times before Gary picks up on the other end of the line. "Gary it's me," Ava begins, tapping her fingers along the edge of her desk, "What was it you needed to tell me."

"I finished doing what you asked me to," Gary speaks, sounding a little timid, "But are you sure about this?. The moment that you do this, she ceases to exist the way that she did before. Nothing will be tied to her and it would be hard to undo this."

"She already doesn't exist anymore," Ava replies, her throat tight despite the fact she's told herself that she is over this, "Erasing Sara Lance means protecting her surviving family members. Right now the Operative is out for blood for some reason, and I wouldn't put it past them to try and drag Sara's family into this. Erase her Gary. Everything you can find."

What they're doing is not erasing Sara Lance so much as they are reinventing her. Gary is wiping any photos of Sara Lance from the internet and instead creating nearly identical fabricated articles about Sarah Long. Seeing as there are too many mentions of Sara on blogs and other outlets after her mother started the crusade to find her, deleting Sara's life in full isn't an option. So they've made Sarah Long instead. Sarah Long comes from Central City and also sunk on a boat. From there she just disappeared.

All of Sara's records will now show up under the new name, including medical records, a new social security, and photo identification. Should the Operative try to dig into her life as Ava suspects they might, they won't find a single thing that ties Sara to Sara Lance and her family. Any traffic footage run through a database will come back with the new identification and the fabricated reality that Ava had Gary help her create.

"I did the other thing you asked me to do," Gary speaks, the sound of his keyboard clacking coming through the speaker as Ava lays her phone on her chest, "There have been no reports of any suspicious activity in Star City that might tie back to either the League or the Operative. I checked the cameras you said to look at and each of her family members are safe from harm. All alive."

It's a relief to know that at least one part of this entire mess has remained untouched. Sara's family won't ever know that she was alive all this time, but Ava thinks that's a small mercy in some way. They won't have to cope with the knowledge that she was alive and then died, for real this time. Now Ava thinks she might understand Sara's reluctance to tell them the truth when she was still

working for the League. Nowhere is safe—that's what Sara said to her that one time.

Nodding her head, Ava clears her throat and swallows thickly. "Good," she says, her voice sounding strained even to her own ears, "Send everything over Gary. I'll take care of the rest from here." Not waiting for a reply, Ava hangs up, too tired and worn out to continue a conversation any further.

Lately tired is all Ava's been. She can't stop thinking about what Dmitriy said about getting out of this life. He had really drilled it into her over tea that she could leave the Operative if she wanted. Of course Dmitriy doesn't understand the full impact of this job and just how untethered from a normal life Ava has been all these years. And yet, this past month, Ava's been tempted to find a way out. She's not sure how that would work; surely she can't just barge into Henry's office and tell him that she's quitting. Ava's never heard of spies that left, only of spies that died.

It's been something that's weighed on her mind, finding some kind of path to be free of all the running. All running has done has made things worse when it all catches up. Sara's death was the catalyst of Ava looking back and realizing that maybe this life on the run doesn't suit her as well as she once thought it was. Ava's just clueless on how to stop.

The computer chimes with the email, a little box hovering in the corner of the screen once more. Clicking on it, Ava pulls up the file and then drags everything over to the window she has open. Erasing Sara is Ava's job, which is why she didn't let Gary do it. He set everything up, now all Ava has to do is pull the trigger. It's the final loose thread in this mess, the final goodbye.

With a slow inhale, Ava tips her chin up and hovers the mouse over the button. Her eyes scanning the new profile, the history, the details, the small image in the corner of a younger Sara, Ava steels herself silently. Two years ago almost to the day is when Ava met Sara in the bar. Months spent arguing and fucking in secret rooms. Then months spent trying to learn to coexist. And finally months learning that maybe connection with another person wasn't so bad in the end.

Ava doesn't regret any part of her time with Sara—she can't. In the beginning Sara pushed Ava to her limits but somewhere along the line she started to push Ava to realize things that she hadn't considered as an option before. Now Ava just has to figure out where she takes things from here. Everything after today is up to her. Letting out her air in her lungs in a steady exhale, Ava presses the button and erases Sara Lance from existence, ending this two year long dance. It's not the conclusion that Ava wanted, but in this business maybe it was the one she was always going to get. Either way, things are done—it's time to move on.

Chapter End Notes

So, once more, just for clarification because I think it's always important to have that kind of thing—Sara is not dead. And she is coming back. I always love the movies where you think someone is dead and then they just pop back up out of nowhere so, that's what we're doing. Also, the overall summary of this fic kind of spoiled that but I'll spoil it again because I get angsty reading fics where it's not clear if someone might die. But nobody is dying here.

Not sure if anyone else watches 'The Crown', but that comment about there being a spy in Buckingham Palace was definitely inspired by an episode from that so, lol,

shamelessly plugging my current interests into a fic. Also, I know very little about chess, so if those references to the game/pieces were wrong, definitely correct me.

As always thank you so much to everyone who has been reading along. I love getting to read your comments and everything you've thought so far so thank you for those. But I hope that this chapter wasn't too morose, it just was needed to kind of flip tracks a bit. It'll get a little rough but then it'll get soft, I promise.

Part Ten

Chapter Summary

After being injured on the job, Ava comes back to her room to find a ghost waiting there for her. Nothing ever is as it seems in this job which is something Ava thought she learned along time ago, but she wasn't expecting to stumble home to someone she thought died.

Chapter Notes

So here we are at part ten, and I honestly have no idea how long the remainder of this story is going to be. Somewhere close to the length of the first part, though likely a bit longer. From here on out, the chapters may be slightly shorter just to make them more manageable to write (though they always end up being about the same length after I go back and edit).

As always, the same trigger warnings apply to this story. Thank you to everyone who has been reading along and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

New York, USA — 22:11

Stumbling into the elevator, Ava collapses into the corner and leans back with a muttered swear under her breath. The lights coming from the ceiling feel distorted, the mirrors along the wall are not helping Ava's stilted view of reality. Everything around her is spinning slightly, her vision blurred and the chills already beginning to sit in. Fumbling at the wall in front of her, Ava slams her hand down on the button panel, leaving a streak of red behind. There's a dull and throbbing ache in her side, a result of the bullet that pierced Ava through not even a half hour ago.

It should have been an easy job. Ava should have been in and out. She took this job in New York because it was simple and it gave her some time here in the states to look around and think over what she wants next in her life. The job itself should have only taken a day. All Ava had to do was break into the warehouse that the gang she was targeting used as a base of operations. By all reasoning, it should have been easy, simple, uncomplicated. Ava had a plan and it took exactly fifteen minutes for that plan to go to hell.

Seconds after she entered the compound, everyone inside had jumped to action. That made it easier for Ava to find her way to the office in the back where the computer was. It made it far easier for her to get the information off the server seeing as nobody was paying much attention to her at all. What Ava hadn't known is that a rival gang had come by and that's what the commotion was about. She hadn't known that there was someone watching the back door that she snuck out. Ava certainly hadn't known that the man there was instructed to just shoot on sight.

The bullet struck her in the hip, piercing through flesh and muscle and burning the entire way through. Ava knew the moment she felt that pain rippling through her body she was in trouble.

She's still in trouble now. The bullet hasn't nicked anything vital as far as Ava can tell, but she's lost a lot of blood—too much blood. It's stained her pants red and Ava can feel it running down her leg, likely tinting her socks as well. Already her senses are beginning to dull to the things happening around her.

With a pained grunt, Ava continues to hold pressure to the wound, her hands slippery against already blood-slicked skin. The elevator is moving too slow. All Ava needs is to get to her room, get her false identification, and then get across the street where a hospital sits. Simple, other than the fact she has to do those things before passing out from the blood loss. Already Ava is aware that her breathing is too shallow. She's been shot before and has been in this kind of critical condition before, so Ava knows that she has a time window for treatment that is rapidly coming to an end.

The moment the elevator doors open, Ava lurches out, her gait uneven. Pain snakes through her body with each step, burning through the wound in her side and spreading to her hip and thigh. There's a possibility the bullet nicked some kind of nerve that is responsible for the widespread pain. Ava can't really tell what it's hit. Around her the walls shift as she walks, slowly making her way to the door at the very end of the hall. Ava's keys are in her pocket and she fumbles with them as she leans against the doorframe. They nearly slip from her slick fingers but Ava catches them before shoving the right key into the lock and twisting it.

Inside, everything is dark, but there's a single light on by the couch. Ava's heart lurches to her throat when she sees who's sitting there waiting for her. Bright blue eyes look back at Ava, a pair of eyes that she has to be hallucinating. The blood loss must be bad if Ava's seeing things now. Sara is dead. She can't be here sitting on the couch because Ava scanned the report that the Operative received of her death. A punctured lung, broken ribs, multiple fractures sustained throughout her body. Death through blunt-force trauma. That was the official decree.

Ava's breath is trapped in her lungs, her vision narrowing down to those blue eyes and the constellations of freckles she knows rest over Sara's cheeks. In her chest, Ava can feel the rapid and uneven beating of her heart as well as all of that ugly sorrow that tangles around her heart. Frozen in place, Ava waits for the vision to disappear. She's had dreams before where this happens, so she knows that eventually Sara will disappear.

But this time Sara goes nowhere. Instead she's standing up, a shocked expression on her face that Ava knows far too well. Her visions are far more accurate now than they have been before. Usually Ava's dreams never quite get the shade of Sara's eyes right. "Ava," Sara rushes out, her eyes wide and focused on Ava's pants, "Is that your blood?" The apparition sounds like Sara—convincingly so. It's a cruel trick of her imagination, something that sets off the burning behind Ava's eyes.

"You're not real," Ava breathes out, shaking her head. But that only makes the room spin more. Her legs going weak under her, Ava steps to the side where she collapses to the bed, hitting the soft mattress. "I'm dying and I'm seeing you," Ava stares to the manifestation of Sara who stands there in the low light, looking painfully alive. That ache in Ava's chest rises up, the same one she told herself a month ago in Croatia that she was done feeling. She had put Sara behind her, and now Ava herself is dying, seeing visions of the one person who ever really challenged Ava.

Something flickers over Sara's features, something Ava might be able to read if she wasn't in this state. "I'm real," Sara says, hands on Ava's shoulders, eyes scanning Ava's body. Ava can barely feel the touch along her skin. Whatever window she has is rapidly closing and Ava knows it. The blood loss has slowed, but she's in danger of passing out from what she's already lost on the way here. Or maybe it's slowed because there's not enough left in her body for a continuous outflow of blood. Ava's not sure. "Ava," Sara shakes her head, grabbing a bag from the floor, "Fuck."

Sara's ghost sounds worried. Another series of swears are muttered and Ava becomes aware of fingers ripping her shirt from her body. It hurts and Ava cries out quietly, pressing her hand to the wound. "Hey no," Sara soothes, her voice gentle and calm, "Don't do that, give me your hand." Too far gone to be anything but compliant, Ava lets Sara tear her hand away from the wound. The hand around Ava's feels abnormally hot—that or Ava's is too cold. When fingers press into the wound along Ava's stomach, she can't help but wince.

The pain is beginning to fade, and Ava can feel her eyes flickering shut as the room stops spinning. "Ava," a stern voice says, making Ava jolt as her eyes fly open, "Don't you dare close your eyes just yet."

But Ava can't help it. Her limbs have turned to lead, her head feels as if it's been filled with granite. The pain and hurt has begun to melt away, replaced instead with a heavy and numb sensation settling all over Ava's body instead. "You're not real," Ava shakes her head again, her words coming slowly, her voice sounding slurred even to her own ears, "I looked for you, everywhere. But you died and I couldn't get to you on time."

A pained expression crosses Sara's face, looking so real that it makes that ache sound off in Ava's chest once more. This Sara has the same drawn brows and the same tightly pressed lips that her Sara had whenever Ava said something Sara didn't like. But this Sara isn't her Sara, she's just some cruel hallucination Ava's mind is presenting her with due to the severe lack of blood loss. "I'm real," Sara replies quietly, her voice catching, "And I am so sorry Ava, but I will explain when you wake up okay?"

"Wake up?" Ava asks groggily, feeling a hand slip behind her neck as she's lowered onto the bed. The touch is gentle and tender, and Ava can't help but sink into it. The last time Ava was touched like that was months ago, back when Sara was alive and not coming to Ava through blood-loss induced visions. They were in Cambodia, after their shower, after they had tangled together on the bed completely spent and exhausted. Sara had been tracing her fingers mindlessly over the inside of Ava's arm as Ava had watched on, enraptured by everything Sara was doing.

Another quiet swear comes, jolting Ava's eyes open once more. Sara is hovering above her now, hair lit up from behind. Each stray strand is turned gold in the amber light coming from Ava's nightstand. Once more, Sara is ethereal and otherworldly, sat above Ava and cast in shadows and beams of light. Her eyes are that same shade of electric blue that Ava keeps thinking she sees in every passing blonde these past few months, hoping desperately and uselessly that they're Sara.

"You need stitches, and blood," Sara murmurs, occupied with something laying on the side of the bed that Ava can't see. Her vision has blurred everything in the background, the only thing in focus now is Sara's face. Blonde hair tumbles into Sara's eyes, catching in her lashes as she looks down. "Fuck," Sara mutters, shaking her head. There's a hand on Ava's stomach, pressing where she was shot and Ava thinks it might be trembling.

When Sara holds something up, Ava's not too far gone to know what it is. Sara has Ava's bag of poisons, and in her hand is a little needle Ava uses to fill her darts with the neurotoxin. But Ava doesn't want to be stuck with the toxin, she wants a few more selfish minutes with Sara here before the illusion fades. This will all be gone when Ava wakes, and she wants to hold on just a bit longer. "No," Ava tries to shove Sara's hand away, missing and instead striking Sara somewhere near her side, "Don't—don't do that Sara."

But even in Ava's dreams, Sara always was stubborn, always needing to do things her way, never listening to Ava. A sharp pinch catches Ava right in the side of her neck. Instantly Ava's vision swims, her breathing catching in her throat as she feels the toxin taking over. "You're going to be

okay,” Sara whispers, her eyes shining softly. A hand sweeps over Ava’s forehead—delicate, tender, affectionate, unreal. “Go to sleep Ava,” Sara murmurs again, a thumb rubbing right near Ava’s temple as her eyes flicker and her lips part, “I’m going to fix this, I promise.”

Ava’s breathing is evening out, her body sinking further into the mattress. She can still feel a hand on her stomach, the other on her head where Sara’s thumb is stroking at Ava’s cheek. Sara might still be talking, but those are the last words Ava hears. Feeling as if she’s floating, Ava closes her eyes and everything around her just disappears and fades away.

New York, USA — 04:51

The first thing Ava is aware of is the pain in her side. It’s dull and throbbing, taking over any of her other senses. Letting out a small whimper, Ava tries to curl in on herself to ease some of the ache. But she finds herself unable to move, her limbs barricaded with something on either side. Grunting quietly, Ava does her best to open her eyes. This takes too much effort, her lids stuck closed and feeling as if they weigh far more than they do.

“Easy,” a quiet voice whispers as something brushes over Ava’s forehead, “Keep sleeping. You need more time to rest.” Her mind and body both feeling as if they’re swimming, Ava just hums. She doesn’t think she could do anything differently right now. Rest seems to be the only option. Every one of Ava’s thoughts is muddled, something that sparks a bit of anxiety that courses through her. Struggling to breathe properly, Ava tries to move her limbs, forcing them to comply with the wishes of her brain.

A hand lands on her chest, pressing down into her breastbone lightly. Ava stills at the touch, feeling the rapid rise and fall of her chest with each breath. “You’re okay,” the voice soothes, the tone gentle and melodic, “Just sleep again, I’ll be here.” Ava can’t even make out who is talking to her right now, but the words ease the panic that was building up behind her ribcage. Surrendering to the placations, Ava leans into the touch along her cheek. It’s warm and comforting and sends her right back to sleep as she was before.

When Ava wakes next, the pain is less evident, less overwhelming. It’s still there but it’s as if the edge has been taken off ever so slightly. This makes it easier for her to try and force her eyes open. Everything is slightly blurred as Ava comes too, her eyes focusing first on the light across the room where a lamp sits. It’s the only light source here, the only thing casting beams of light onto the bed. Ava’s legs are covered by soft grey sheets, but she can see her toes wiggling as she stretches her limbs out.

Swallowing thickly, Ava becomes aware of the fact that her mouth and throat feel as if they’re made of sandpaper. Everything feels uncomfortable and Ava wants to close her eyes once more to sleep again. She doesn’t understand what’s happening, her mind far too clouded and far too muddled to make sense of any of this. Ava should either be unconscious still, or she should be dead. She never made it to the hospital, or if she did she doesn’t remember that. But this is the inside of her flat here, the same flat that she stumbled into.

Ava remembers Sara being here. She remembers the series of dreams that her brain gave her as some kind of mental anesthetic against the pain. Her heart jumping in her chest, Ava turns her head to the side, hoping with every ounce of irrationality that Sara might be there. But the side of the bed is empty. Nobody sits there, and the second pillow hasn’t been touched. It’s still turned sideways as it was this morning when Ava got out of bed. It had been a hallucination. Ava can’t decide if she wants to laugh or cry at the fact that her mind had been so cruel to her.

Reality is back once more, the delusions having faded away and Sara gone with them. With a strangled breath, Ava closes her eyes once more, willing the pain away as she tries to get some sleep. However she got here, however the bleeding stopped, Ava doesn't really care. She's too tired and too uncomfortable to give a damn about anything. When sleep comes, Ava surrenders to it once more.

The final time Ava wakes, the first thing that she feels is not pain, but rather a pressure above her right hand. Struggling to open her eyes, Ava feels a bit of panic rising up in her body. The light is still on, Ava's feet are still under the covers, she can still feel that dull ache in her side. Everything is accounted for. Except for whatever is touching her head. There's a weight along Ava's left palm, something warm and soft. Feeling far more alert than she was the last time, Ava turns her head to the side and instantly the air leaves her body.

Sara is laying beside her, a head on that same pillow from before. Her eyes are closed, her body curled towards Ava's own. The pressure on Ava's hand comes from Sara's own palm pressing it into the mattress. Something heavy and tight forms and builds in Ava's chest as her eyes map over Sara's face. She can still see thousands of freckles spread over pale skin. That same scar sits tucked just along the underside of Sara's chin and there's a dimple just above it. Dark lashes rest over Sara's cheeks, her lips parted as she sleeps on.

This time Ava does want to cry. Her breathing stutters in her chest as she wiggles her fingers under Sara's palm, testing out reality. Sara's skin is warm and there are callouses along her fingers in all the places Ava remembers. She knows the way those fingers feel running over her skin. Ava knows the feel of Sara's palms skirting her sides, her back, her breasts. Her mind contains the memory of the delicate way Sara used to trail just the tips of her fingers over Ava's scars, or along her spine, or the insides of her thighs.

But Ava can't tell if this is real. While she's alert, she's not sure that she's coherent. This could all be some dream. Or it could be some hellish reality that has come after Ava herself has died. With her other hand reaching out, Ava tries to roll over, only to be stopped as pain lances through the wound along her torso and paralyzes her movement. A small sound of pain escapes her lips before she can stop it, and suddenly blue eyes are snapping open. "You're awake," Sara breathes out, sitting up, her eyes wide and her lips parted.

Shrinking backwards into herself, Ava stares up at Sara, not trusting this. Everything hurts and yet hope is still bursting and bubbling in Ava's stomach and throat and chest. It's overwhelming and overpowering and it's making Ava feel sick. "Are you here?" Ava asks, her voice quiet, her eyes searching Sara's face. Several emotions flicker over Sara's expression at once, a spinning wheel of feelings that Ava can't even begin to follow. When the silence between them lapses on for too long, Ava pushes again, "Are you real?"

Guilt. That's the expression Sara's features are stuck on now. Horrible waves of understanding course through Ava all at once. This isn't a dream and neither was the apparition that Ava thought she had returned to when she came back to her hotel room. Everything Ava had worked to accept over the past months was wrong. Somehow, somehow, Sara lived. But she never came back to Ava. Hurt and shocked, Ava tries to sit up only to be stopped by the pain rippling through her body. Instantly Sara reaches to her but Ava flinches away. "No," Ava shakes her head, feeling the way her eyes are burning as she looks to the side, "Get out Sara. Right now."

Ava might be groggy but that doesn't mean she doesn't understand what's happening here. Everything might not have hit her but she knows what this means. All that time Ava was looking for Sara and grieving her, Sara was alive—hidden away. All of this time that Ava spent grieving the loss of someone who finally understood her and understood this life and Sara was out there

with a beating heart and breathing lungs. She was alive and she hid herself away. “Ava,” Sara tries, but Ava shakes her head once more, tears burning in her eyes that she won’t let fall, “I’m not leaving when you’re like this. That’s final.”

There’s an edge to Sara’s voice that Ava doesn’t like. Ava can’t do this. She can’t be here in front of Sara when there is every chance that she’s going to cry. But Ava won’t cry in front of Sara now that she knows this entire time Sara was staying away from her. Right now Ava doesn’t even know how to begin processing this. There are so many horrible contrasting emotions burning through her.

Sara is alive so Ava is relieved, how could she not be. But that relief is halted by the betrayal that comes with the knowledge that Sara never told Ava she wasn’t dead. Those reports that Ava read were fabricated lies, something that makes elation burst through her only to be ripped to shreds by the anger that Sara would keep the truth from Ava. Every moment Ava felt as if she failed Sara fades away, but instead it’s replaced with a new kind of grief—the loss of some common understanding and sense of care Ava thought existed between them.

“I looked for you,” Ava whispers angrily, her voice rising even as it sounds strained, “I went to Gdansk Sara, twice. I scoured the city for you and turned over every single stone that I knew to look under. I had to sit in my handler’s office and hear that you died.” Ava can feel her voice about to break so she pauses and swallows, “I had to read a report that detailed how they broke you before they killed you.”

Except Ava hadn’t read it, not really. She couldn’t. Henry had sent it over shortly after their meeting and Ava had skimmed it before burning the damn thing in her trashcan. But she never read all of the details. That would have killed Ava. And she never looked to any of the attached pictures, not wanting to see all the ways they broke the body that Ava had spent so much time tangled under sheets with. The most Ava did was look at the official cause of death. Even that had gutted her and Ava had nearly gotten sick before slamming the file shut once more.

“I know,” Sara murmurs. Instantly Ava looks to Sara once more, finding her eyes cast down on the bed, her lips pulled in another tight line. Her words land hard in Ava’s chest, piercing her heart and pressing on her throat. Ava’s breath catches in her lungs when Sara turns her face away, those same blonde waves of hair blocking her expression from view.

“You knew?” Ava asks incredulously, anger and desperation and so much hurt welling up in her chest. When Sara says nothing, but continues looking off to the side, Ava’s eyes prick with tears. Too tired to do this, Ava leans back once more, shaking her head. “You knew,” Ava states, resigned and accepting. This answers her question then. Sara was more to her than Ava was to Sara. If Ava meant something to her, Sara would have come back or she would have at least sent some kind of a signal.

During their time together Ava taught Sara countless methods that spies use to convey information in discreet ways. She showed Sara how to use drop points, how to call pay phones near a spies location, how to send coded messages via mail and email. Even before that, Sara certainly didn’t have a single issue finding Ava and leaving her little letters on bodies or calling Ava’s personal numbers. “Ava,” Sara says again but Ava just shakes her head, “Can you let me expl—”

“Explain what Sara?” Ava asks, turning back around, frustration and hurt tumbling through her body. Sara still isn’t looking at Ava, her eyes fixed on the comforter that she’s now twisting her fingers around. “Is this just what you do to the people in your life that give a damn about you?” Ava pushes, knowing that she should stop but not understanding why Sara wouldn’t come find her, “Do you just let them think you’re dead, some fucked up way of running away from your

problems?”

“That is not what I was doing,” Sara retorts, her lips pulled in a frown. Her features have shifted to something that resembles hurt and Ava feels bad for throwing Sara’s family in her face like that. But what Sara has done here is not fair and Ava can’t understand why Sara would let Ava think that she cared only to turn around and do this. “I will explain everything when you’re better, but you really should try to calm down,” Sara pushes off the bed, walking over to the dresser before coming back with her phone in hand, “You lost a lot of blood. I stitched you up but you’re going to be miserable for a while.”

That much is clear. Though Ava’s not sure that it’s going to be difficult entirely on the physical side of things. Pushing everything down, Ava works hard to school her features as Sara looks over at her. The one thing Ava won’t let Sara see is just how badly this has impacted her. Dmitriy hadn’t been wrong. Ava’s not experienced loss the way she did when she heard Sara died in a long time, and it stuck with her. Even now that she knows Sara is alive, all of that sorrow still lingers.

Struggling to find her composure, Ava just clears her throat and stares back at Sara. When Sara comes back to stand near Ava’s side, Ava follows Sara’s gaze to something hooked on the headboard. A hanger sits there and there’s a bag of blood and some clear liquid there as well. Ava traces the IV line from the bags to the needle taped along her arm. She hadn’t noticed that before at all, but it explains why she still feels so heavy. “Did you steal that blood?” Ava asks incredulously as Sara taps the clear bag with a single finger.

Blue eyes turn back to Ava’s own, a hint of a smile on Sara’s lips. Ava missed that smile more than she wants to admit even to herself. “I didn’t not steal the blood,” Sara replies, her voice soft. It’s such a bittersweet reminder of the times Sara has used that turn of phrase before. Some of the anger Ava still feels fades a bit when Sara’s lips quirk up once more, the dimples appearing in the corners of her mouth.

Ava’s going to be upset with Sara for this for a while, Ava knows that. But she’s still hanging in that state of shock, not able to believe that this is real. It’s all so overwhelming that Ava doesn’t even know exactly what she’s feeling right now. Relief seems to be winning out. Relief that Sara is alive, relief that she’s here for some reason. Still Ava finds herself wanting answers, like how Sara got away and how she’s alive when Ava saw the reports from Gdansk. She wants to know where Sara was and how she knew that Ava had been looking for her.

“You need to get some sleep,” Sara murmurs, her hand reaching out towards Ava. But Sara’s hand pauses in midair, her expression conflicted as she retracts it once more. Ava wishes she hadn’t done that. Right now Ava could greatly benefit from Sara’s touch, it always did soothe her a bit. But she can’t ask for that—or she won’t. Instead Ava remains completely silent, watching as Sara walks around and climbs back into the bed, settling on the pillow about a foot from Ava’s body.

Something is still keeping Ava’s limbs in place, likely blankets or towels Sara bunched around her to keep Ava still. The grogginess has settled over Ava’s senses again, threatening to send her tumbling asleep once more. Turning her head to the side, Ava watches Sara as blue eyes stare back at her. Sara is different. Something has fundamentally changed in her and Ava knows it just from these few moments of interaction. Whatever really happened in Gdansk, it seems to have altered something in Sara.

But she’s alive, and that’s what matters most here. Ava’s breath catches in her chest as her eyes trail over Sara’s features, taking in her soft freckles and the curve of her lips. Her throat tightens as she finds the cluster of freckles just above Sara’s eyebrow that Ava had brushed her fingers over their night together in Cambodia, all under the guise of removing blood from Sara’s face. Maybe

they both knew that it was just Ava wanting to touch Sara, the same way she longs to reach out and feel Sara now. “I’m glad you’re not dead,” Ava exhales as Sara lets out a stuttered laugh, her eyes closing and her lips quirking up, “Can’t lose my favourite assassin.”

“I’m going to make you write that down so I have proof,” Sara replies, her voice quiet and soft, her eyes locking onto Ava’s own. Something takes over her expression, something heavier that makes Ava shift slightly so she can see her better. “I’m sorry Ava,” Sara says, letting out a tiny sigh that Ava can feel against her arm, “This wasn’t what I wanted. I’ll explain more later, but I wanted to come back to tell you. Please just know that I did.”

These past four months have been a series of betrayals or threats from people that Ava thought she could trust. Everything has changed since she learned of Sara’s capture in Gdansk. Ava’s not even sure where she stands with the Operative and Henry hasn’t called upon her since she was last in London. She wants to trust Sara’s words, Ava might even need to trust them. But right now she’s not sure that she can. “I wanted you to come back too,” Ava responds instead, watching as something akin to disappointment flashes over Sara’s features before disappearing.

Ava doesn’t want to hurt Sara, but Sara can’t possibly understand what it was like for Ava to learn of her supposed death the way she did. Sara can’t understand the toll that it took on Ava’s personal and work life. Every job for those first months, Ava went around hoping against the reality that she knew that Sara might just show up. Each time, Ava would hope for one of those job interruptions from Sara that she used to be so bothered by. Sara can’t understand the impact that she’s had on Ava, and Ava can’t explain it.

Swallowing thickly, Ava extends a small olive branch. When she takes Sara’s hand, it’s not as warm as it was before because Ava is no longer as cold. She can hear the hitch in Sara’s breathing as Ava tangles their fingers together on the sheets. They always were better at actions than they were talking. Everything has changed but some things will always be the same. Fingers grip Ava’s tight as Sara’s eyes close, her lips parted as she breathes in heavily through her nose.

Maybe Sara needed this contact as much as Ava did. Ava thinks there’s some truth to that assumption. Ava’s just glad that time hasn’t changed the fact that they can somehow seek comfort from the other. In the morning they’ll talk this out, but for now, Ava takes one more look at Sara before closing her eyes, feeling safe in a way she hasn’t in a while.

New Jersey, USA — 12:04

From the table, Ava watches on while Sara walks around tucking bags away into corners where Ava won’t trip over them. It’s been forty-eight hours since Ava stumbled into her hotel room to find a ghost waiting for her in her room, and in that time, Ava still hasn’t adjusted to Sara being back in her life again. This time has felt slightly unreal—partially due to the fact that Ava has been taking the painkillers Sara provided her with.

The bullet wound in Ava’s side had been almost professionally handled under Sara’s care. She had been quick to let Ava know that she had been lucky that it hit nothing and had largely stopped bleeding by the time she arrived to the hotel. While Ava had been under the influence of the toxin and then the pain drip that Sara had stolen, Sara had cleaned, stitched, and dressed the wound. All the borders of the injury are neatly stitched in precise lines, something that will leave a fairly small scar on Ava’s skin after it has healed.

It still hurts however, and even walking was a pain. This morning Ava had laid across the bed as Sara knelt near her and changed the dressing out. The moment had been painfully vulnerable, and

Ava had been frozen in place while Sara's fingers drifted over her skin. Ava had bit down on the inside of her cheek so hard she nearly drew blood, still waiting Sara, still convinced that Ava might blink and Sara would just disappear.

Moving states had been a necessity because Ava wasn't sure if she had left loose ends at the warehouse and hadn't felt confident that New York was safe. So this morning, they relocated here to New Jersey. The drive hadn't been very long, though Ava had mainly napped on and off in the passenger seat while Sara drove. "Do you have all of your papers to travel back to Europe?" Sara's voice cuts through Ava's thoughts. Over near the bed, Sara is already staring into Ava's open bag. With a nod, Ava gestures to the front pocket where her spare passports and other related information has been tucked away.

Since arriving here in this new hotel room Ava has been watching Sara, trying to determine what's different about her. Certainly Sara is quieter, less prone to that joking humor that Ava had become so accustomed to. But it's not just that. It's as if Sara is as tired as Ava is. They haven't talked about why Sara came back just yet, but Ava did learn how Sara was able to escape in Gdansk.

Apparently the guard that came in to her cell when Ava had been on the phone with Sara had made a crucial mistake. He had a weapon at his belt and Sara had turned it against him. She really was in bad shape, with a broken rib and what she learned was a puncture in her lung. But Ava knows that even injured, Sara is nothing but lethal. She was being held in a small compound far outside the city—partially underground which might explain why Ava had failed to get a quick trace on her line.

After taking out the men there, Sara had faked the files of her death and used their own computers to send the confirmation of her death back to the League. While she was there she had pulled every file she could find from the computer and took it with her. For the past four months, Sara has been healing and hiding away, moving cities and never once making contact with any old allies. The League and Operative both think that she's dead, and Sara had preferred to leave it that way. It's something Ava can understand, but she doesn't know what would make Sara suddenly come from her hiding to come here.

Ava's still hurt, though that word doesn't capture the extreme range of emotions she's tumbled through in the past hours. Still Ava feels stuck in this state of suspended reality, constantly convinced that this could all be a complex illusion her mind has conjured up. Though with each passing hour, those moments come fewer and far between. Every little smile tossed Ava's way, every brush of Sara's fingers along her arm on the car ride had helped establish reality once more.

As for why Sara is only back now and hadn't said anything before—Ava is still at a loss there. She's tried reasoning her way through this, but she can't come to a solid conclusion that might explain why Sara hadn't reached out at all. They've been in danger before, and they've always known the risks of communicating with each other. And yet Sara stayed away. This whole time she knew that Ava was searching for her, but Sara never stepped in and let Ava have a single clue that she was alive.

When something metallic clatters to the ground, Ava glances up once more. Over near the two beds, Sara is bent down where she's retrieving a knife that had fallen from the nightstand. The back of her shirt is risen up, exposing the familiar scars that stretch along her spine. This morning Ava had caught a glimpse of the healed wound along Sara's thigh from where she was shot in Pakistan. Sara had explained that it was hard working through the muscle damage, but she's nearly back to where she was before.

Sara shoves another knife under the pillow of the bed closest to the door, clearly the one that she

has claimed. Since coming here, Sara has been setting everything up and hasn't really said much to Ava. She's stalling and Ava knows it. "Can we talk now?" Ava asks, impatiently tapping at the table in front of her as Sara looks up in surprise.

It's not as if Ava is trying to be brash, but she wants answers. "Yeah," Sara nods her head, her lips pursing as she comes over to the table. Sara settles in the chair opposite Ava, her hands folded along the table, her eyes focused on the silly little bowl of fake fruit perched between them on the surface. She looks nervous, but Ava remains silent. This is Sara's time to explain, and there's really not anything Ava has to say to her so far.

"I didn't know that you were looking for me until two weeks ago," Sara begins, clearing her throat and glancing to the side, "I never once checked a single feed or report looking for you in the time I was away." A sharp ache breaks through Ava's chest, making her throat constrict as she stiffly nods her head. When Ava sucks in a deep breath, Sara looks up, her eyes on Ava's own. "Not because I didn't want to, Ava," Sara sighs quietly, "But because a lot changed in Gdansk. I learned a lot there. Including the fact that the League might have known about my communication with you."

That's a surprise to Ava. "How would they know?" Ava asks, as Sara lifts a single shoulder in a shrug, "We were always careful about that kind of thing. Even if they knew we were talking, how are you sure that they knew what we were talking about?"

"I'm not sure of any of those things, but I have reason to believe that the League might have tipped off those men in Gdansk. Nobody knew my location, and the day they started following me, I had just gotten to the city," Sara confesses, leaning back in her chair with a loud sigh, "All I know is that the League was involved in my capture, and I stayed away from you because I was worried that you might be next. The most I did was check to make sure nobody matching your description had been found dead."

Sara's last words are said quietly enough that Ava almost has to strain to hear them. It's not as if Ava doesn't understand Sara's reasoning here, she does. But Ava isn't a civilian with no idea of how these things work. "I could take care of myself," Ava says pointedly, doing her very best not to get upset with Sara's explanation, "I didn't need you to shield me, I needed you to tell me that you were alive. Do you have any idea how terrible it was to sit and listen to my handler tell me that you were dead?" As Ava's voice rises at the end, Sara flinches but Ava doesn't back down, "We don't get friends in this line of work, but I always thought you were my friend."

"Ava, I know you can keep yourself safe but not from the League. They're everywhere—even London," Sara protests, her eyes locked on Ava's, her lips in a frown, "And I am your friend."

"Friends don't do this," Ava shakes her head, that heaviness dropping down in her stomach once more, "I understand hiding away, but you knew for two weeks and didn't reach out. Then you show up here in my hotel room. Why?"

It would be naïve of Ava to think that Sara came here just to see her. If Sara had been interested in just letting Ava know she was alive, that could have been achieved in easier ways. Sara is here because she wants something from Ava, and Ava knows it. Yet she can't stop wishing that Sara was just here for her. "Because I want out," Sara's voice is a near whisper as she inhales deeply, "The League, they think I'm dead, but the moment I pop back up here in the states alive, they'll come for me."

That's a big ask. A surprised laugh leaves Ava's lips, the vibrations moving through her body making her stomach muscles ache where she was shot. Sara's eyes are wide and startled as Ava forces herself to stop laughing before she hurts herself. "You want out of the League, even though

you're already dead to them?" Ava clarifies, waiting for Sara's nod, "I think that's already been taken care of. After I learned of your death, I had a contact here in the States help me erase you from existence. For your family's safety."

In other words, Sara came here for nothing. If the League works in any similar fashion to the Operative, even the higher ups don't know the names and identities of the members and spies. Everything is meant to be kept secret. The only relations where spies know each other are handlers and their charges. But even with Henry and Ava, he knows so little about her. Ava knows quite a lot about Henry, but that's only because it's such a public figure.

On the other side of the table, Sara is already shaking her head. "It's not that simple," she explains as Ava tilts her head up, "People don't just leave the League, especially not when they know what I know. You might have gotten rid of the public records that relate me to my family, but the League, they know about them. I'm not here asking your help for my safety, I'm here for them."

Humming quietly, Ava looks to the side of the room. "I've kept an eye on them," Ava confesses in a soft tone, knowing just how much Sara's family means to her, "My contact here, he's been watching over them to make sure no harm comes their way. The Operative has been undergoing some changes, and there was a time where I was worried for their safety from my organization. But they're in the clear now."

Sara's eyes flicker over Ava's face as if she's searching for something. Ava looks away, not wanting to reveal anything. She didn't have to watch over Sara's family and they both know it. Ava could have walked away and just let them be, but she never did. "Where do I come into all of this?" Ava asks, still not following what has brought Sara back, "You need something from me, but what?"

"You have connections that I don't—people that work for you in the shadows the League wouldn't think to check," Sara explains as Ava nods her head slowly, "The League is aware of your work of course, but they can't pin even a quarter of your jobs to your name. I've been making a list of people and places that would cripple the League," Sara takes in a quiet breath as she pauses, "And I can't do this alone."

It's the first time Sara's ever said that. They've done jobs together before and worked alongside each other, but never once has Sara said why it is that she needs Ava's help. Ava knew of course—that her connections allow her to do things Sara's don't, but now Sara has voiced it. It's more than that though, it's admitting a vulnerability. While it's not quite another apology, Ava hears it as one. They're not meant to admit weaknesses to each other, and they've never done something like this before.

This is a request that Ava should say no to. She understands what Sara is asking. Not only does it put them in danger from the League, but it could place Ava in danger from the Operative as well. Yet this might just be the out that Ava needs. "Okay, on one condition," Ava nods her head as Sara straightens in her chair, "The Operative, I'm sure by now you know that's who took you?" When Sara nods her head, Ava hums quietly, "There's been some things that have happened recently that lead me to think my position there might be compromised. I have a list too, of intel I need to sort through the mess that is the rankings in the Operative."

It's a list of Operative allies, and going after them places Ava in further risk. Yet this is a task she's already committed to. The moment she took information from the data leak, she risked outing herself for treason to her organization. "You think that your higher ups have turned on you too then?" Sara asks as Ava tips her head down in a small nod, "Sounds like we both found ourselves in a mess these past few months."

That certainly is an understatement. In her years working for the Operative, never has it been more clear than it has these past few months that Ava knows very little about the people she is working for. Before, she was fine with not knowing everything, but now something has changed. “Nowhere is ever safe,” Ava echoes back Sara’s sentiment from a year ago, watching as understanding flickers over Sara’s face, “I have to go back to London to report on this job as well as to be checked out. We’ll make new accounts for correspondence but we should meet again to talk this out further.”

“You don’t want to plan now?” Sara asks, looking confused as Ava stands from the table with a small smile.

Pain ripples through her torso, radiating from the bullet along her right side and spreading through her hip and abdomen. “I’m too exhausted to think straight,” Ava shakes her head, making her way slowly to the bed, “And I’ll need my files before we can really plan this the right way.” That’s only the partial truth. The other half is that Ava needs a bit more time to adjust to this. She spent months thinking Sara was dead and it’s going to take more than forty-eight hours to get used to that. It’s certainly going to take longer for the pain of betrayal to slip away.

That is what this feels like in a way. Ava knows that their jobs mean not trusting someone and not getting close, but she thought that Sara felt something similar towards her. Apparently not. It’s selfish, childish, and maybe a little petty to sulk over that, but Ava needs time. She mourned a loss that never happened, and she’s not going to get over that overnight. “Are you hungry?” Sara asks, standing from the table as Ava slumps onto her bed with a quiet grunt, “I might run out and get something.”

Ava’s not hungry, but having some time alone to make her way through this might be a relief. “I’m good with whatever,” Ava replies as Sara snags her bag from the ground, “You should get a new burner while you’re out, so we can have contact with each other when I’m in London.” After Sara nods, she moves to the door before leaving. The sound of the lock clicking in place comes and Ava slides down her pillows.

Committing to this with Sara means finding a way out of both of their organizations. It means that Ava is finally taking that step to leave and have a normal life. This is what Dmitriy said she could do if she wanted. Ava doesn’t have to dig into the Operative. She could just say yes to helping Sara with the League and be done. It’s a decision that Ava is going to have to make and soon. Pulling the covers over her shoulders, Ava turns to her side and closes her eyes, already having a pretty good idea what she’s going to decide.

Sibenik, Croatia — 19:05

Perched in the corner of a café just inside the city, Ava scans the streets outside the window. She’s waiting for Sara to arrive here so they can talk about this further. It’s been nearly a month since New Jersey and since then Ava’s been in almost constant contact with Sara. Seeing as Sara had been worried about her family, she had remained behind in the States for the time being to check in on them. Though Ava doesn’t know how that went seeing as Sara hadn’t talked about them any further.

They haven’t wasted time formulating a plan seeing as it’s safer to do that kind of thing in person. Ava’s chosen this café because it rests in a camera blindspot and there are no cameras inside the room at all. While Henry had been fairly normal and amiable when Ava was in London, she is still carrying around a healthy dose of paranoia when it comes to him. He had given her time off to heal from her wound, and had then supplied Ava with a list of jobs that she could pick and choose from

when she was ready.

In a month's time, Ava has begun to recover from the bullet wound. It's slow going seeing as this particular bullet pierced through quite a few layers of muscle, but it hasn't been as bad as it could be. As of right now, Ava could defend herself if needed to, but it would likely still hurt. Henry had recommended that Ava see some kind of physical therapist but she had blown that suggestion off. Therapy isn't what Ava needs—she needs answers.

A month has also been enough time for Sara and Ava to slip into their own routine. There's been no more talk of Sara's disappearance and capture and believed death. That's a subject neither of them have approached since Jersey. Part of Ava is glad they haven't. It's easier to just let go of what happened instead of trying to rehash it all over again. Ava's feelings for Sara are different than Sara's are for Ava, and that's the end of it.

What they've settled into again is Sara's usual routine of gently teasing Ava and Ava replying back with a similar response. It's comfortable, though it is a bit of a painful reminder from time to time. Sara is different though, that much is clear. Though they've only really communicated through texts, emails, and calls, Ava can tell that the past four months have really changed something for Sara. She's not as light and unburdened as she had been, and Sara is serious more often than she is not—a shift from before where she was always joking.

Shuffling at the table, Ava catches sight of Sara in a black coat and beanie outside the windows. Already Ava ordered her tea and the coffee that Sara mentioned liking. The bell above the door chimes as Sara comes inside and swiftly rips her beanie from her head. Blonde hair sticks up all around her face as she does that, something that makes Ava's lips quirk upwards. "Corner seat," Sara observes as she comes over, already grinning with a file tucked under her arm, "So you can see all the danger coming."

"The danger already arrived," Ava teases as Sara just snorts before slumping into the booth in a rather ungraceful manner. Sara's muttering under her breath as she throws the file to the table and the tension that had been forming in Ava's body releases at the familiar routine. "So, I believe you were going to explain what's been happening in the League that made you hide," Ava clears her throat, not wanting to waste time seeing as they have a limited amount of daylight left.

The plan is for Ava to take Sara over to her bunker after this, not that Sara is aware that's Ava's intention. But Ava hadn't wanted to bring any kind of information here. It's safer to leave everything behind and travel there instead. "I already told you that they had something to do with my capture," Sara begins, her fingers closing around the hot mug of coffee, "But they've been up to other things too. Namely taking out some of our own. I don't know what's happened or why, but so far there are three League members that have been killed by our own assassins—four if you count my believed death."

Ava is going to have to say they should count that. "I looked into what you said about the League being behind this, and there was a tip that came in," Ava confesses, looking to Sara who doesn't seem surprised at all, "The Operative never said where it came from, so they're either hiding the fact that they did a favour to the League, or they never knew it was them in the first place."

At this point, Ava can't tell which of those is true. But Sara had been right about the League tipping off the Operative. The information of Sara's arrival to Gdansk came a whole two days prior to Sara even setting foot in the city. "I doubt they knew that it was from the League," Sara shakes her head before sipping her coffee, "When I got the job to protect you in Russia, the League never seemed to know that the request had come from the Operative."

Until now, Ava had almost forgotten about that. "Do you think you could find that request?" Ava

asks as Sara's brows draw, "I was told that my handler is the one who requested it, but only after it was approved through my higher ups. If he made the request, there should be some kind of record in the League of that, right?" When Sara nods her head slowly, Ava hums and leans back, "If you have a way of getting that, I'd like to see it."

Part of Ava piecing together who is who in the Operative has meant digging into the details of the files and records. Each of the three heads of the Operative seem to have unique ways of sending messages. If Ava can somehow link those to other messages that are in the system, she might have a key to finding them. "You're really worried that someone in your organization has turned, aren't you?" Sara tests as Ava just lifts a shoulder in a shrug, "I get it though, something seems to have changed in both of our worlds."

Again it's another understatement. Though Ava's not sure this was a sudden change. She's noticed the small steps the Operative has been taking in a more aggressive direction. Brussels was the first red flag. But then again, so was Henry asking the League for protection when Ava was in Russia. "The League is killing it's own members then," Ava muses, looking outside the window to the people walking by, "Surely that can't be a new thing? You're a group of assassins and everyone has heard the rumors of how lethal the League can be, even towards it's own members."

"They can be yes, and there are members who have died under mysterious circumstances," Sara confesses with a nod, "But this is different. They're not even hiding it from us anymore, and now they're sending our own members out to kill each other. Trust is a rare thing in this world you and I live in, and now we can't even trust the very people that we work for or with."

This is something Ava has known for a while. She can't remember a time that she ever placed her full trust in the Operative. But that is only because Ava had been taught that lesson early on. From what Sara has explained of the League, things work in a slightly different way among their members. Sara seems to know the names and real identities of some of the assassins she works with, whereas Ava doesn't know anything of her colleagues other than their numbers. Even back in training Ava did not go by her name and didn't know others. Henry is the only exception to this rule.

Across the table, Sara looks almost nervous, as if she thinks that Ava is going to turn her down. Technically neither of them have really agreed to help the other just yet. That's what they're meant to do today. "I came across some information while I was recovering from the bullet I took in Pakistan," Sara explains, nodding to the file on the table, "They're names of people and groups who make up the power that enables the League to operate as it does. I haven't pieced together how they all fit together, but if I can stir up enough trouble in those areas, I think I can cripple the League enough to get out."

"Your plan to leave this world is to piss off the very people who have been killing their own members?" Ava asks incredulously as Sara nods and sips from her cup, "Tell me how that is supposed to make anything better."

"The League isn't like the Operative," Sara explains as Ava drinks tea from her own cup, listening carefully, "Your organization is about political power and protection, something pretty common for spies." It's a fair assessment, so Ava nods her head in agreement. "The League is interested in political power too, but they're also interested in economic power and control. If I can prove that I am more trouble than I'm worth, they'll leave me alone. I've seen it before when I was in training."

It's not a terrible plan, but Ava's not convinced of it. Though that might be because if it was her trying this for the Operative, it would certainly get her killed. They would sooner murder Ava than

let her get away with blowing up their allies. That's what Sara seems to be suggesting. Ava came to understand a while ago that for Sara, chaos means implosion. "I might be able to help you put those names in context," Ava sighs, nodding out the window to where her car sits, "I have a place about an hour away where I kept some files and information on different companies. We should attempt to make a more comprehensive list so we can get started."

Already Ava has formulated a game plan. Seeing as Sara is dead and therefore has no obligations to the League, they're able to travel more freely than they were before. Ava has free control over which jobs she takes, so it's easy enough to choose those near whatever company or organization they're targeting. "As for my side of things," Ava sighs quietly, "The Operative is complicated. We don't have a central database where we keep information. Instead everything is scattered throughout data companies all over the world. Some of them aren't even aware that our communications are embedded in their servers."

"That sounds risky," Sara snorts as Ava just hums, "No wonder you're always running around trying to get back files after people steal them." Sara has a point, but also it would be just as dangerous to keep them in one central area.

"It's safer than risking criminals knowing exactly where to hit us if they needed something," Ava explains as Sara just rolls her eyes with a smile, clearly not convinced, "I've narrowed down some of the places I think we could find what I'm looking for, but we'll be digging through a lot of unnecessary data."

Leaning back in her seat, Sara digs her hand down into her pocket before removing her hand and placing something on the table. It's a data drive that Ava glances at curiously before looking up at Sara. "That's everything from the servers in Gdansk," Sara nods to the drive, "I pulled it all and I only took a look once, but there's a lot on there—maybe something we can use to get started."

If Sara took that from Gdansk, it means there is more than enough to get started. This past month, all Ava has been doing is going over files in her bunker looking for the most mentioned cities where data was stolen from. It's been a guessing game choosing which corporations and companies the Operative might choose to hide things in, but Ava thinks she knows what to look for by now. They're almost always data or computer companies that have plenty of technological security as well as physical security.

Gdansk was a city mentioned more than just a few times. If the spies that took Sara were stationed there long term, there is every chance that they had information with them that Ava could use to start searching for patterns in communications. "We should get going," Ava exhales as she takes one more sip of her tea before setting it on the table and standing up, "I don't want to have to drive anywhere once it's gotten dark."

There's no argument from Sara, instead she takes a final sip of her coffee before snagging the file and drive and walking out alongside Ava. Closing her door behind her, Ava tosses the bag from her passenger seat to the back so Sara can get in. "Do you always carry bags of guns with you in the car?" Sara teases as she peeks into the backseat where Ava has her rifle bag laid out.

"Sometimes," Ava shrugs, smiling as Sara laughs. When she starts the car, music fills the space but Ava reaches over and turns it down a bit. Sara is looking around the car while she fiddles with the lever under the chair that allows her to slide back and forth. For a moment Ava just watches her, that pressure back in her chest. She wonders just how long it's going to take her to get used to the fact that Sara is alive.

Today Sara's dressed in all black once more, though it's somehow fitting now. Her jeans are ripped even though it's relatively cold outside, and the long sleeves of the sweater she has on under her

coat are rolled at the wrists. Black is a good color on Sara because it always serves to amplify the sheer blue color of her eyes. Turning her attention back to the car, Ava adjusts the camera to look behind her.

A small sound comes from Sara, a teasing clearing of her throat. There's a very familiar and very mischievous smile on Sara's face when Ava looks over. "You know," Sara lolls, leaning into Ava's space as her eyes flick down to Ava's lips, "I don't think I've ever had sex in a car before."

Her eyes focused on Sara's own, Ava refuses to allow herself to glance down at Sara's mouth. It's not as if Ava isn't tempted—she is. Ava remembers how familiar Sara's body had become to her and she remembers how everything else faded away whenever they would lay together afterwards. Those moments in the after had become Ava's favourite. They were more meaningful to her than the sex ever was. But that was before and this is now. "If we're going to be working together, we shouldn't have sex," Ava replies diplomatically, leaning away from Sara, "Things could get messy, and we don't need that."

It would get messy from Ava's side. It already is messy from Ava's side. Being around Sara is a constant practice of self-restraint. Ava wants to kiss her and she wants to strip herself bare and tangle herself with Sara as she had before. But that can't happen now. They need to be focused and Ava never could force herself to think of the job whenever she was with Sara in that way. "I agree," Sara nods her head, surprising Ava, "You have a point in that. Things would be complicated."

Ava wants to know what Sara means by that. Does she mean it in the same way Ava does, or does Sara just mean that it would be a distraction when they should be focused? Whichever it is, Ava's not brave enough to ask. She already lost Sara, and she's not keen on losing her again just because Ava can't get control of her feelings. Secrets are what spies do best, that's all Ava has to remind herself as they go about this together. "I still might tease you a little bit," Sara confesses as Ava glances to her, "I can't help it, you're fun."

Her tone is light, and playful, something that eases the ache that had been forming in Ava's chest. With a tiny little smile, Ava shifts the car into drive and pulls away from the curb she had parked along. Seconds pass before a hand is in her space, laid over her thigh. Ava chooses to ignore it, but then Sara is moving again. This time fingers are walking up towards her hips. Slapping Sara's hand lightly, Ava throws her a fake glare.

Sara is already smiling, her eyes lit up and the corners of her mouth holding those dimples Ava used to brush her thumbs over from time to time as she kissed Sara. "Don't," Ava points a finger at her as Sara laughs. It's hard to fight down the urge to smile as Sara continues to laugh on. Ava missed this more than she'll ever allow herself to admit. It's not the same as before, but it's something. And for now, when everything has erupted into chaos and mistrust, Ava is just going to lean in, even if everything has changed.

Zadar, Croatia — 20:33

"Okay," Sara lets out a little laugh as she looks around while Ava leans in the doorway, "When you said bunker, somehow this is not what I was expecting." With a little smile, Ava shoves away from the door before closing it behind her and locking everything up. Sara had been nothing but confused as Ava brought her down here, joking the entire time that Ava was dragging her to a cave in the ground.

This is definitely not a cave, something that Sara quickly came to understand. "I've had this since

leaving training,” Ava confesses as she makes her way to the chair and takes a seat, “It’s been my version of a safeguard. All files pertaining briefs of my jobs and all reports I get from the Operative are stored here.” Ava gestures to the server off to the side that contains all the offloaded information. It’s the very one that she went to great lengths to make sure it couldn’t be broken into remotely. “I keep every line of communication,” Ava continues on as she powers on her computer, “And every copy of the data I take from my jobs.”

Behind her, Sara comes a bit closer and leans in to look at the server. “You really don’t trust people do you?” Sara muses as Ava just hums quietly, “I get it, I never did something this thorough, but I certainly kept tabs on other members and my higher ups from time to time.”

“You can’t ever be too careful,” Ava replies while opening the windows of her computer and looking for the relevant files. They’re buried somewhere in a series of files that Ava encrypted as an extra layer of security. Everything has been labeled with a series of codewords, something to make it easier for her to find documents but impossible for an outsider to make sense of it all. Ava’s key was a list of songs that her father used to listen to when she was younger, the meaning of the organization contained in the songs.

The computer is taking it’s time loading, so Ava leans back in her chair only to collide with the arm Sara has laid over the back. Looking over her shoulder, Ava finds that Sara was already looking at her, a small smile there on her lips. “You’re in my space,” Ava tells her pointedly, playfully.

“Am I?” Sara throws back, still grinning as she tilts her head to the side. This time Ava’s eyes do drop down to Sara’s lips before she abruptly turns around again. Ava takes a brief moment to remind herself that self-control is vital here. It would be too easy to lose herself in Sara, but that’s not going to happen here tonight. Nor is it going to happen when they go back to Ava’s safe house a short drive away. Or anytime after that.

On the screen, everything has finally loaded, providing the distraction Ava needed. Pulling up the file Ava’s compiled on the League, she spreads the documents over the monitor. “Anytime I helped you with something, I kept copies,” Ava gestures to the list of documents in front of them, “I kept company names, files, dates, and assignment details. If we pull everything I have and compare it to the list you brought, I think we can piece together some idea of where to hit the League first.”

It’ll take time, but Ava has another two weeks of mandatory healing before she’s allowed back in the field. That should be enough for her and Sara to get started and to choose the first city on their list. First they’ll have to attempt to decipher everything of course. “You kept records on the League?” Sara asks, her voice sounding tight. Once more, Ava turns to her, not understanding the stricken expression on Sara’s face. “Ava do you have any idea how dangerous this is?” Sara demands, gesturing to the screen, “People have been killed for keeping less than this. I told you to delete everything.”

“I’m not scared of the League,” Ava retorts as Sara scoffs, still looking angry, “Why does it matter that I’ve kept this? You’re here asking me to help you rain chaos down on the League, isn’t that far more dangerous than just poking around in a few files?” Instantly the anger flickers away from Sara’s features, replaced by something looking very similar to guilt. Ava hadn’t meant it like that, she hadn’t been trying to remind Sara what they’re both about to undertake. “I want to help you,” Ava clarifies as Sara’s eyes cut to her, “So you’re lucky I risked my life to keep these files.”

Her joke fails to make Sara laugh, something that makes a bit of tension spark in Ava’s chest. “This is dangerous Ava, taking on the League like this,” Sara begins as Ava just nods her head, “No, I need you to really understand. They know you, and they know your work. If they sense

even a hint of a pattern in your jobs, we're in real danger of running into either a local team or a hired assassin."

Ava's already considered this. She's considered this and more over the past month. This time alone gave her time to really think. For a while Ava had even considered the possibility of going to Minsk just to get Dmitriy's opinion on the matter. But right now, bringing any one else into this is not worth the risk. From now on, it's just Sara and Ava doing this, nobody else. Ava's made up her mind—she wants to do this to help Sara, and to help herself.

"I want out too," Ava confesses as Sara's expression morphs to one of surprise, "If I can't trust the Operative with my very safety from their persecution, I can't continue working for them. And right now, I'm doubting everything I once thought I knew. Sometimes there are deadly consequences to working for an organization that deals in secrets and shadows."

Bright blue eyes scan Ava's face, searching everywhere. But Ava is telling nothing but the truth. She takes in Sara's curious expression, the draw of her brows and the delicate frown settled along Sara's lips. If anyone is going to understand what Ava just said, it's Sara. Times have changed but Sara always did understand Ava best. They live in this world together; they know the dangers and risks as well as the exhaustion that comes from never slowing down. Sara is tired, and Ava is too. "Nowhere is safe," Sara murmurs as Ava just nods and turns back to the screen.

Shifting everything to a download, Ava presses the button to transfer the relevant files to a drive. When she leans back in her chair, Sara doesn't move her arm and Ava doesn't ask her to. Instead Ava hums quietly and parrots Sara's statement back, their new motto, "Nowhere is safe."

Chapter End Notes

So she's back, not dead, as promised. I'm really thrilled to have gotten to this part of the story because this is where all the pieces from the first part come back into play. As just, a general disclaimer, I know virtually nothing of servers or hacking or anything of that kind so, the accuracy is not going to be perfect here (in fact it's going to be incredibly flawed). And as always, thank you to those reading along and I've really enjoyed getting to read the comments left behind!

Part Eleven

Chapter Summary

Sara and Ava begin tracking their organizations through jobs scattered over the countries. It soon becomes apparent that this was a bigger task than either of them expected. They're both learning how to work together again, and Ava's trying to learn how to attempt to let someone in after so long spent alone. Neither of those things go particularly well in the beginning, but Ava thinks that she and Sara might be finding their way.

Chapter Notes

Alright so here we are with part eleven, and I still have no idea just how many chapters are left. I haven't actually settled on an ending for this, and if I can't decide between the two I might just post them both. There likely won't be an update until the middle of the week but I should be back after that.

As always the same trigger warnings do apply though we're past most of the violence for a while. But as always thank you to everyone reading along and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Paris, France — 13:44

As Ava walks through the streets towards her hotel, she listens in to the conversations being had by those around her. Ava always has loved people watching, but what she loves even more is to hear the things that people are talking about in their lives. With the job Ava holds, sometimes she forgets that other people talk about more normal and mundane things such as grocery shopping or where they're going to walk their dog in the morning. Before it used to amuse Ava to listen to such things, but now it makes her ache in a way.

For so long this job has been all Ava's known and now she's about to cast it to the side. Doing so means learning how to do these mundane tasks such as dog walking and chores. It means learning to not just do them but to enjoy doing them. Ava's not even sure she would know how to go to a mall for the sake of shopping. She knows everything there is to know about handguns and rifles and how to make a shot several meters away with heavy wind, but somehow the mechanics of a shopping trip are elusive to her.

It's troubling to say the least, something that makes Ava frown slightly as she listens into the conversation the lady in front of her is having on the phone. From the sound of things, the woman is a grandmother who is planning to visit her family this upcoming weekend. They're talking of normal things such as the length of the train ride or what kind of clothing to pack. There's no mentions of murder and espionage, nor secrecy and betrayals. Sometimes Ava envies people like this woman and all the things they don't know.

Knowledge can be a burden and experience can be a hinderance. Even now Ava looks around and

all she can see is danger. The alley up ahead could hold someone from the League or Operative that might be here to kill her. The man across the street in the pinstriped suit is undoubtedly a businessman, but Ava wonders what kinds of evils he's committed to be on top. Every person that passes by is an obstacle for Ava to dodge, never making contact with their bodies on the off chance that they're here to do her harm. Each camera Ava walks by is something to shy her face away from lest someone be tracking her through the footage.

Living this way is exhausting when it used to be exciting and thrilling. For a while now Ava has noticed that each of her jobs is repetitive in some way or another. It's always some powerful group that has garnered the attention of the Operative through whatever information they have. Ava is always sent in with the job to recover things at all costs. The task is the same, the outcome is the same, and nothing ever changes. Ava's far too tired to carry on this way for much longer.

With a small sigh, Ava removes her hands from her pockets and steps inside the revolving door to get into her hotel. Inside things are far quieter and also considerably warming. "Good afternoon Pierre," Ava greets the desk clerk cordially in French as she unwinds the white scarf from her neck, "I don't suppose there are any messages waiting for me that might have come from London?"

Ava's due to receive some kind of brief from Henry in the next day or so. Already she's handled her business here but when she spoke to him last he had mentioned needing her to cover something in the country before she leaves. "There's no mail for you Miss Scott," Pierre replies with her alias as Ava just hums, "However there is someone who has come to see you." His voice pauses and Ava glances away from the mailboxes and to his face. He's peering over her shoulder and Ava turns that way as well while he continues on, "I attempted to ask her to leave, but she said she would wait. I didn't want to make a scene and kick her out."

"Yes, she is stubborn that one," Ava's lips quirk up as she catches sight of Sara lounging in a chair off to the side, "Thank you Pierre but I can handle this. She would have only come back again if you'd kicked her out." Sara's not so far away that she can't hear what Ava is saying, evident in the way her mouth curves into an impish smile. Crossing over to Sara, Ava comes to stand in front of her. "You couldn't have been more inconspicuous?" Ava questions as she gestures to Sara's outfit, "I thought we both agreed that blending in was your new goal."

Sara is dressed in a nice suit that's complete with a vest. It's a dark green color with creased slacks and a tailored blazer. Underneath the vest is a silky white shirt, some of the buttons popped open near the top and revealing smooth freckled skin. "I am blending in," Sara replies, standing up with her arms raised to her sides as Ava rolls her eyes fondly, "I know I'm not meant to be here, but something has come up that I could use backup on, if you're game?"

There shouldn't be something Sara needs help with seeing as they're not set to begin going after any League allies until later next week. The plan was that they were going to meet in Munich, though Sara appears to have scrapped that plan. "Depends on what you're asking for backup in," Ava tells her, tilting her head to the side, "What kind of project could a dead assassin possibly be involved in?"

"One that has no business being discussed in a public lobby," Sara murmurs, looking over Ava's shoulder. When Ava turns, she catches sight of Pierre sneaking glances their direction. Humming quietly, Ava gestures to the elevators with her arm as Sara smiles and brushes past her. There's a bag clutched under Sara's arm, likely one that contains some kind of weapon or a file that she has brought along with her. "What were you doing out in the city?" Sara asks when they get into the elevator, her eyes drifting down Ava's body.

Elevators are a risky place for Ava to be in with Sara. In the beginning, they would fight in this

small contained space, but most of Ava's memories in an elevator with Sara consist of a different kind of fighting for control. Too many times Sara had pressed Ava too roughly into the walls only for Ava's spine to bump harshly against the hand rails. Too many times Ava had thrown her hand out to the side panel and pressed whatever buttons she could find in the hopes they'd make it to their floor. Too many times one of them had been far too impatient to wait for their arrival in the room and hands had wandered past the boundaries that clothing provided.

The way Sara is looking at Ava right now reminds Ava of all that and more. "I was just getting some air," Ava replies, adjusting her gaze so she's now facing forwards. Yet she can feel Sara's eyes on her, something that threatens to bring a blush to her cheeks. Sara's attention always made Ava feel electric, magnetic. She's not used to people looking at her and Ava's not sure she'll ever get used to the way that Sara not only looks at her, but she sees Ava too. "And I was returning weapons," Ava confesses as Sara laughs.

"I figured," Sara hums as Ava glances to her with a small smile. Maybe mundane normal things are overrated. Maybe all Ava needs is just someone who understands that Ava's version of grocery shopping is locating the necessary weapons for a hard job. "Any word from your boss yet?" Sara inquires curiously as Ava shakes her head in response.

Recently Henry has been rather quiet, though Ava largely suspects that's because things do tend to die down considerably after large data leaks happen in the Operative. Even Ava's jobs have been fairly simple and straightforward. "You know," Sara lilts, turning and leaning sideways so her body presses along the length of Ava's arm, "I think this might be the first time we've been on an elevator together and engaged in small talk rather than finding another way to fill the silence."

Turning her head to the side, Ava comes face to face with Sara and her wide smile and twinkling eyes. "Well, then I guess they were wrong," Ava proposes as Sara raises a brow, "Old habits can die." When Sara laughs, it's a bright sound, filling the air as her eyes crease at the corners. With a shake of her head, Sara steps out of Ava's space, leaving Ava's arm cold without the intrusion. Somewhere along the line, Sara became one of the few people Ava was okay with touching her. Personal space is usually a must for Ava, but she can't remember the last time she truly minded that Sara was close to her. At this point Ava expects it from the touch-starved assassin as she had once joked.

When the elevator bell dings, Ava steps out first and leads the way to her room. Sara's heels click along the marble floors, the sound reverberating through the empty hallway. Glancing over her shoulder, Ava finds Sara looking around, her hands tucked in her blazer pockets and her eyes focused on a painting to the side. "I hate generic hotel art," Sara mutters, nodding to the art piece, "What is that even supposed to be? Who gives a damn what kinds of paintings have swirling colors on beige walls in boring hotels?"

"Well it sounds like you might," Ava teases as she comes to stand in front of her door, scanning the key there. Sara just snorts before ducking inside as Ava steps in as well and engages all the locks. Already Sara is poking around the room, something she has made a habit of doing any time they share a space together. The bag she carried up sits on the bed now, and Ava comes over to peek inside.

"Don't be nosy," Sara calls from the bathroom, her eyes meeting Ava's in the mirror just as Ava is about to reach for the bag. Clicking her tongue, Ava sits down on the mattress as Sara comes back into the room. "I brought you something for this evening, an unofficial and unrelated job I need your help with," Sara proposes, her attention on the dresser drawers she's now going through. The top drawer contains Ava's weapons, and Sara finds a knife there before holding it up the light and humming appreciatively.

Normally Ava wouldn't allow such an invasion of her privacy, but there really isn't anything Sara hasn't seen at this point. Privacy is an irrelevant word when Sara's seen all of Ava bare and naked over and over. "So then, what is it that we're doing?" Ava asks, definitely curious to know what might have pulled Sara all the way here.

A soft sigh falls from Sara's lips before she turns around, leaning against the dresser. Sara looks good in suits, particularly in this one. Green isn't a color Ava had considered on Sara before this, but the rich deep tone serves as a contrast against Sara's pale skin and her blonde hair. "Breaking and entering," Sara replies as Ava fights back a smile, "There's someone I know from before. He got mixed up in something on that island with me and someone has evidence of it; I want it gone before the information falls into the wrong hands."

Ava's read Sara's file and she had of course dug into her background extensively. There was only one name in there that could have possibly been connected to Sara and the island of Lian Yu. "Oliver Queen," Ava tests, gauging Sara's reaction. Instantly Sara's expression clouds over, her smile falling and her eyes jumping to the side of the room. Ava can see the tension in Sara's jaw and the way Sara's throat bobs as she swallows.

When Ava had been prying into Sara's life before, she had seen the name mentioned as the other passenger on the Gambit. But a further dive into Laurel's life had revealed that she and Oliver had been dating at the time the ship sunk. Ava's a spy, not a detective, but even she was able to piece together what Sara and Oliver might have been doing on such an intimate trip like that. It's one of the things Ava might have judged Sara on in the beginning, but she's let that go now. Everything is always more complicated than it seems on the surface.

To Ava's knowledge, Oliver is dead, though Sara wanting them to go after this information suggests otherwise. "Okay," Ava replies, nodding her head. Blue eyes snap back to Ava's, looking nothing short of surprised. "Getting information from evil people is the hallmark of my job," Ava shrugs as Sara's gaze sweeps over her face, her lips still forming a small frown, "Of course I'll help you."

The answer was always going to be yes. Sara asked her explicitly for help, something she has only recently started doing. Before it was just Sara telling Ava what she needed as per their deal to stop thwarting the other's plans in the field. This is different, this is Sara being vulnerable and Ava knows it. "Good," Sara nods her head, though her voice is quiet, almost relieved in tone, "I've brought you something in that bag, it's a gala, and you're my date."

A date. That word strikes Ava's ears in a discordant way. Flinching slightly, Ava glances to Sara who has already headed back to the bathroom. "Your date?" Ava repeats, hoping Sara doesn't catch the slight waver in her voice. This is just for a job, Ava reminds herself of that, yet she can't help that anticipatory flutter that forms in her stomach when Sara peeks over her shoulder with a little smile.

"Did I stutter Sharpe?" Sara challenges as Ava mirrors her smile back. Fighting off the ridiculous grin on her face, Ava stands to her feet and tugs the bag on the bed towards her. Inside something has been wrapped neatly in a small bundle. There's string holding the parcel together and Ava tugs on it lightly, watching as it unravels. Pulling back the paper, Ava takes hold of the fabric and spreads it out.

It's a black silk dress and Ava knows without even trying it on that it's her exact size. She really doesn't know what to make of that fact, but then again, she could likely choose a dress for Sara as well and manage to get the measurements right. The front cuts down relatively low, meaning Ava is going to have to put some effort into concealing her scars for the evening. But the fabric is

slippery and so soft, almost pouring through Ava's fingers as she picks up the bottom hem. The sleeves are a complex pattern of thin straps that seem to form a small web along the back of the dress, and there's a slit up the left side.

Dresses aren't usually Ava's thing, certainly not ones as light and revealing as this one is. Over in her bag Ava has a suit, one that she might feel more comfortable in, yet part of her feels compelled to wear this. She can't remember if Sara has seen her in a dress or not before. The simple fact that Sara brought her this is enough for Ava to make up her mind about the dress. Humming quietly, Ava smooths her hand over the silky fabric one more time before gathering it in her hands and heading for the bathroom to prepare for her work date.

Paris, France — 20:38

The gala somehow ends up being far more crowded and packed than Ava was expecting. Sara had explained on the cab ride here that the man who has the information they need is a rather affluent business man here in the country, so Ava should have been expecting this. And yet she was still overwhelmed by the sheer amount of people that were flowing into the building when they arrived. Crowds have always been a source of anxiety for Ava, so she had hesitated outside for a moment until Sara had just taken her hand with a smile and led her inside.

There's relatively no danger here this evening, and the goal is fairly simple. All they have to do is find the time to slip away from the gala and make their way to the secure room in the back of this mansion. It's there that the information on Oliver and Lian Yu is being kept. Rather than taking it from the server and leaving nothing in its place, Ava has brought a hard drive with a rather nasty virus. This should be enough to keep anyone from noticing that the information had been stolen. If anything they'll think that somehow the file had corrupted.

Tapping her fingers nervously along her own wrist, Ava stands off to the side of the dance floor just taking everything in. In the past, Ava's always avoided jobs like this where she might be required to go to dinner parties or anywhere that involved a heinous amount of small talk. So far this evening three French politicians have come up to her and asked her of the political climate in America. That's Ava and Sara's covers, two reporters from the states who are doing an exposé on French business affairs.

Seeing as Ava hasn't really been in the states for any prolonged period of time, she's primarily stuck to vague concepts and topics. So far it's worked, though she thinks she might be one more conversation of the economy away from hiding out at the bar for the rest of the evening. "You look like you're about to bolt," Sara chuckles, appearing at Ava's side, "I checked the halls and they're still busy, but maybe it's best we wait a bit if you're this high-strung."

"I hate small talk," Ava mutters in an irritated tone as she nods to the last man who approached her here, "Just because I deal in secrets and information doesn't mean I know everything there is to know about politics. Thankfully none of these men seem to know what they're talking about either." Ava lets out a long sigh as Sara just smiles, "That man over there thinks that Washington, DC is in the middle of the states."

When Sara laughs, it's just a bit too loud, something that Ava gives her a look for. Thankfully the noise didn't draw any attention to them. Ava's had enough time in the spotlight for the rest of the week already. "Come on," Sara offers Ava her hand, still smiling, "Let's go dance, disappear in the masses for a while to avoid another talk on geography and politics."

The last time they had been at a gala together, they had been on opposite sides. The last thing Ava

wanted to do that evening was dance with Sara. She had agreed back then on necessity alone. This time is different. This time Ava wants to dance with Sara, a form of escape until it's time to make their move. Placing her hand in Sara's own, Ava allows herself to be led to the floor without a single complaint. It's more than busy on the dance floor, but Sara leads Ava through with easy.

Music filling the room, lilting and waltzing through the high ceilings and arched door frames that surround them. Throughout the evening, a variety of different music has been playing, but it appears that someone has turned on some list of songs that come from decades ago. Right now a song is coming to an end, giving them time to find a space among all the other bodies crowding the floor. There's a hand at Ava's waist keeping her close as they find a place, gently guiding Ava along. Sara comes to a stop between several other couples, somewhere safe from the stares of the crowd. "Madame spy," Sara holds her hand out once more as Ava slaps her arm with a scandalized look.

All that does is lead to Sara's smile widening as she pulls Ava in close. It's closer than Ava realized Sara was going to be to her, certainly close enough that Ava can trace out every shade of blue in Sara's eyes. Ava can feel the press of Sara's body against her chest as a hand settles along her waist. It's a lot of contact, something that makes Ava's traitorous heart pick up in her chest. "You led last time," Ava argues, trying to flip their positions, giving her something to do to settle herself.

"You don't know how to dance," Sara retorts as Ava purses her lips and rolls her eyes, "Let me lead, I know you like when I'm in charge." Sara's voice is lower for the final sentence as Ava clicks her tongue and lightly presses her foot into Sara's own. Not wanting to show Sara even the slightest hint that her suggestive tone had an impact on her, Ava maintains a neutral expression. But she surrenders, settling her arm around Sara's neck as the song changes.

Rather than something slow and soft as had been playing before, the music changes to something more upbeat. Ava knows this particular song, her father always had a fondness for it. It's 'Les Champs-Elysées', a little song of two lovers that meet. Sara must know it too, seeing as she's humming quietly before the lyrics have even started. When Sara looks to Ava with that playful sparkle in her eyes, Ava knows what's coming before she has the time to stop it. A hand lightly pushes her waist as Sara uses their joined hands to spin Ava around.

Ava doesn't mean to laugh, but she does as Sara draws her back in and swings them both around. There's a glimmer in Sara's eyes when they come face to face again, the room settling now that Sara has stopped twirling them in circles. "This is not a swing song," Ava tells her pointedly as Sara just smiles and lifts a single shoulder in a shrug.

"But you're more relaxed now aren't you?" Sara challenges as Ava fights off her smile but fails miserably. When Sara raises their hands over Ava's head, Ava willingly lets herself be spun this time. Some little ache forms in Ava's chest as Sara draws her back in, smiling all the while she twirls them in a circle again. Ava's father used to spin her like this when she was younger, dancing with her in the kitchen as her mother watched on fondly. Dancing like this again makes Ava miss them in a way she hasn't in a while now.

The music plays on and Ava can't help but hear the overlapping memory of her father singing the song in an exaggerated tone as he swung her round in circles. While her parents weren't often around much, they always made the most of their time with Ava when they were home. There's not a single day that has gone by that Ava's forgotten just how warm and bright their home always felt before her parents died. But that's gone now, and that house hasn't been home for Ava in nearly two decades.

Her smile fading, Ava lets out a quiet exhale as the music slows and comes to an end. Feeling a little too raw, Ava carefully withdraws from Sara and clears her throat. "We should probably start for the back," Ava speaks as she glances down the now less crowded hallway, "Staying here too long opens us up to a discussion we can't lie our way out of."

Sara's own smile has fallen as well, but Ava doesn't know what to do here to explain that Sara did nothing wrong. She did everything right actually, drawing Ava from her thoughts and helping her relax. But Ava doesn't know how to talk to Sara about her family. Ava hasn't really talked about them and the impact losing them had on her. In fact she does her best to not think about that at all seeing as it only drags up terrible memories.

Stepping back again, Ava looks to Sara once more before walking from the dance floor and making her way along the side of the room. Behind her Sara follows closely, though just before they get to the hall, a warm palm slips into Ava's own. Startled, Ava turns around as she comes to a stop, leading to Sara nearly colliding with her. "For our cover," Sara says pointedly, glancing down at their joined hands.

Her throat tight, Ava just nods her head, "Right, the cover." A look passes over Sara's face but Ava ignores it, instead focusing on the hall once more. Hardly anyone is around, but Ava still walks near Sara's side, their fingers tangled together. The scattered people that fill the halls are far too deep in conversation or far too tipsy to be paying much mind to Ava and Sara as they push through to the back hallway that bridges off the one they're in.

This one is even less crowded, and Ava keeps an eye out as they continue walking. A sound comes from the end of the hall and Ava startles, her hand clasp tight around Sara's own. "Ava," Sara whispers urgently, her hand at Ava's waist, "Quick, come here." Those are the last words Sara speaks before she's pressing Ava into the wall. Lips descend on Ava's own, warm and soft and painfully familiar.

Closing her eyes, Ava reaches up and threads her free hand in Sara's hair. Soft curls slip through her fingers, the same curls that Sara had formed as Ava sat on the bed a few hours ago watching Sara as they talked out the plan. Sara tastes of mint and brandy, her palm warm along Ava's back, finger tips pressing into the bare skin the cutout in Ava's dress reveals. That fluttering sensation is back in Ava's body when Sara hums quietly into the kiss, a sound that Ava is well acquainted with by now.

Suddenly, far too suddenly for Ava's liking, Sara is pulling away. The warmth of her body leaves Ava's own, and Ava leans there a moment, watching the guard walk down the hallway. It was another part of their cover and Ava knows it, but that's what makes it hurt this time around. She wonders if Sara missed that as much as she has. "Sorry," Sara murmurs, her eyes flickering over Ava's face, "Didn't know how else to explain why we would be this far back here."

"It was a good idea," Ava clears her throat as she brings her fingers to her lips to carefully wipe away any smudges Sara might have created in her lipstick. Her fingers come away red, the same color that Sara has along her mouth now. "Which way to the server room?" Ava asks as Sara looks down the hall. When Sara holds her hand out again, Ava takes it hesitantly, her throat still tight, her stomach still heavy.

There's a door at the end of the hall, the second to the last one that Sara leads them into. Inside a server stands there with an access terminal position in the middle. Releasing Sara's hand, Ava steps up to the keyboard as Sara comes to stand near her. "You have the disk?" Ava asks, glancing to Sara who pulls the hard drive from one pocket and the data drive from the other. Humming to herself, Ava carefully searches the mainframe in front of her, looking for anything that might be

labeled with Oliver's name.

Clearly nobody here had been worried about a break in or a data leak, because the very first thing that comes up is what they had been looking for. "Idiots," Ava mutters with a small snort, "You're sure this is all you need on him?" If Ava had time, she'd like to go over what is here, to see what is so important that Sara might risk coming out from her hiding just to get rid of a few files.

"Positive," Sara replies with a terse nod, "You don't even have to copy it over, I'm fine with deleting it. It's best that no more evidence of this exists out there, not even if I'm the one with the copy."

Ava is tempted once again to ask just what the hell happened on that island. But from the look on Sara's face she gets the impression that would be a bad call right now. Taking the disk from Sara's hands, Ava shoves it into the appropriate slot on the server. All it takes are a few keystrokes to delete the file and replaced it instead with the virus. "Now when they try to open it, that should take over some of the other files in the system as well," Ava explains as she erases any sign that she was here, "Clearly they're not technologically savvy, so I doubt they think that something was stolen."

Closing out the program, Ava removes the disk from the server before handing it over to Sara once more. There's an unreadable look on Sara's face, her eyes stuck on the terminal screen and her lips pulled in a steep frown. Ava really never has liked seeing that look on Sara's face. The first time she can remember seeing it was after Sara tumbled into the water in Ireland, the panic that had racked Sara's body and left her quiet and empty the whole drive home. It makes Ava ache just seeing her like this again. "Ready to go?" Ava prompts gently, extending her own hand to Sara this time.

Blue eyes cut over to Ava's own, no longer shining as they had out on the dance floor. Ava wishes she knew the right thing to say right now to make that glimmer appear again. Sometimes with Sara, Ava's at a complete loss with what to do or say. There are moments where Sara is an enigma that Ava doesn't have the proper key to crack. "Yeah," Sara replies, taking Ava's hand and giving her a small nod, "I'm ready."

Munich, Germany — 10:45

Humming a song to herself, Ava stands in front of the mirror. The bullet wound from New York has healed in full now, though the mark still looks angry and jagged. Ava's back contains a similar wound, though it's slightly smoother seeing as the bullet entered through her back first. It's just another scar, but there are some that Ava is slightly self-conscious about, and this one has been one that's bothered her recently.

Already Ava has markings along her body that prevent her from wearing certain clothing if she wishes to hide her scars. With each new injury, she gains another one on her body, another mark of what this job has taken from her over time. It's far from the worst scar Ava has, that title belongs to the one along her spine where the shrapnel from the bombing in Bucharest broke through her skin. Yet there's something about this particular scar that makes Ava ache. It may very well be the memories associate with that night, the way her reality shifted once more when Sara came back into her life.

It's been two weeks since Ava saw Sara in Paris. They've been doing their best to divide and conquer, so while Ava has been here in Munich doing her job, Sara has been taking on another task in Budapest. Here in the city, Ava has not only handled her job, but she also took care of the task

that Sara needed from her. There was a banker in the city where the League funnels funds through, and Ava gathered up the accounts needed to halt some of that movement. What she needs now is for Sara to point out the relevant numbers so Ava knows what to freeze.

According to Sara's texts, she should be here any moment, though Ava's not sure she quite trusts Sara to be entirely punctual. So far Sara has yet to truly be on time to their meetings, not that Ava minds much. Due to increased levels of paranoia towards their organizations, Ava has been insistent that they try to remain apart while they work together. Part of her had not wanted to do that. The last thing Ava wants is to be separated from Sara only to lose her again. Which is why Ava had given Sara a chip to place in the bracelet Sara is constantly wearing.

It's a GPS tag and Ava has a similar one in her necklace that hangs around her neck that she hasn't taken off since they've started this. These tags are ones Ava had taken from a secure military technology center in Denmark, and they're virtually untraceable. Only Sara and Ava have access to each other's coordinates should something go wrong in the field. Despite that though, Ava still worries.

A knock sounds at the door, but before Ava can get to it, the door swings open. "Honey, I'm home," Sara jokes as she steps inside, still bundled up against the cold. Rolling her eyes with a small smile, Ava steps from the bathroom and leans in the doorway. Sara has a bag slung over her shoulder that she throws to the second bed in the room. Seeing as they're here in the city together to complete another task, Ava hadn't seen the harm in being together for a single night.

When Ava looks from the bag to Sara, she finds that Sara's amused blue eyes are already focused on her. It's now that Ava realizes that she still doesn't have a shirt on and is standing in just her bra and black slacks from her job earlier today. "This is quite the welcome," Sara lilts, coming to sit on the edge of the bed as Ava shakes her head and pushes away from the doorway, "Though I see you've added some new scars to your collection."

"You've seen my scars," Ava retorts with a small snort as she turns her back to Sara. The file she has for Sara rests in the drawer of her dresser, filled with account numbers and names for Sara to go over. They both know that Sara has seen Ava's scars, in fact Sara has mapped her lips and teeth and fingers over more than just a few of them.

When Ava turns around again, Sara's attention is still focused on her. It's that full and unabashed kind of staring that Sara does from time to time, the kind that never fails to make Ava want to shy away from her initially. "Some of them are new," Sara comments, and Ava chooses to ignore that. The only reason some are new to Sara is because she had been faking her own death when Ava received them. "That one looks new," Sara nods her head and points to the small inch long scar just under Ava's ribcage.

That particular scar came from just about three months after Ava learned of Sara's death, back when she was still running around putting out fires. "Business executive with a pen knife," Ava explains as she comes over to the bed and stands before Sara, the file in her hand, "He got the best of me for a split second before I killed him. Turns out he was responsible for the data leak inside the Operative. My handler had me bring his company down when I was finished."

It had actually been really easy to do. Ava only had to relay information to a few of her contacts around the globe in order to cause problems within the company that eventually led to its collapse. "Your handler," Sara muses, taking the file that Ava offers her and leaning back on her palms, "Henry Saunders, a security consult to the MI6, Interpol, and various external companies and corporations."

Beyond startled that Sara has learned this information, Ava stares back at Sara, not allowing her

surprise to show on her face. "How do you know this?" Ava asks, keeping her voice even as she drags the nearest chair over and takes a seat, "There's no official mentions of that anywhere."

"No there's not, but he's really not careful with his mobile security," Sara chuckles, as Ava tilts her head to the side in confusion, "Before I found you in New York, I was looking for you in London. You weren't there, but after tapping various lines out of the building and intercepting communication, I found a letter from him to you." It had to have been the letter Ava received just a few days prior to going to New York. "I looked into him, in Budapest," Sara continues as Ava looks up in alarm, "You're his only charge, did you know that? He doesn't mentor anyone else."

Ava doesn't even know how to react to this right now. There are a lot of things Sara just said that Ava has several issues with. "You went to his office?" Ava clarifies, watching on as Sara nods her head. Sara has the decency to look sheepish and maybe just a bit guilty as frustration courses through Ava's body. "He knows who you are Sara, he knows your face," Ava hears her voice rising as she stares at Sara, so incredibly angry that Sara would do something so dangerous, "Henry has been out for your blood since before Brussels. We are meant to stay out of League business yet for some reason, over the past two years he has had some kind of a vendetta."

"The League blinded him nearly fifteen years ago after he got too close for comfort," Sara supplies as Ava sucks in a slow breath, working hard to maintain her patience, "I think the real question here is why he ever stopped holding a grudge in the first place. Was he always angry at the League?"

Ava knows what Sara is getting at here, and it's not possible. "Henry isn't the one responsible for this," Ava shakes her head as Sara raises a brow, "Don't get me wrong, I don't trust him at times, but he is a public figure. There are three heads of the Operative, and none of them could afford having such a public role in connection with MI6 and MI5." Sara doesn't look convinced, but Ava doesn't need to convince her, she knows that Henry isn't the mole in the Operative.

That is what her and Sara believe has happened based off of the data they have gone over. Someone in the Operative has to have been feeding information to the League, and that someone has to be one of the head three. It's the only thing that would explain everything that has been happening. "You said that he threatened you when you were in London that one time," Sara counters as Ava shakes her head, "I get it Ava, I didn't want to think that my people could turn on me either. But we can't let your bias get in the way of a thorough investigation into this."

"My bias?" Ava asks incredulously, scoffing as Sara just shrugs, "No it is not my bias here. It is the fact that Henry personally pulled me into this world and has been the only constant in my life since then. You don't get to talk about my bias." Sara has touched on something very sensitive here, and Ava should take a moment to calm down but she can't. It's one thing to admit that Ava doesn't trust Henry, but it is another thing entirely for her to believe that he could be actively contributing in aiding the enemy with information. Ava has never once operated under the assumption that Henry has told her the full truth of things, but that doesn't mean she's convinced that he has turned on her completely.

The very foundation of everything Ava has done in this job is ripped out from under her if Henry is behind everything. He has taught her everything that she knows, and even if their relationship has been rocky, it's been consistent through the years. "He's cocky, and sometimes manipulative," Ava confesses as Sara purses her lips, "But that does not mean that he is the one who has been orchestrating the hits here. Henry seemed surprised when he talked about your capture and Brussels didn't appear to be fully his idea. He would have claimed it if it was."

"What happened to not trusting anyone, isn't that your life slogan?" Sara accuses as Ava bristles in

her chair, "It's an ugly truth Ava, I get it, but it might be one that you need to be prepared to face."

Silence falls between them as Ava looks to the side, anger welling in her body. Everything in Ava wants to say that Henry can't be behind this. Ava's looked over the limited pieces of correspondence she has from the three heads and not a single one of them seem to match Henry's keywords that he uses most commonly in codes. Henry likes old-school spy tricks, relying on book ciphers or puzzles. Whenever he is really trying to hide something in code, he uses some random book by James Patterson of all people. Not a single one of the head's correspondences have contained a key like that.

"It's not a truth that I'll have to face," Ava insists, already done having this conversation, "I'm not saying Henry hasn't done bad things, but I am saying that he would not work with the League." Ava wishes that she could be more convincing. She wishes that she could tell Sara that she hasn't regarded Henry with high levels of suspicion. Even in Brussels, Ava had been worried that there might have been a plot to kill her too that somehow Henry knew about. But that never came to fruition. There are times where Ava is overly paranoid, and she now regrets sharing those moments with Sara seeing as it's led to this.

She can't explain to Sara that Henry was there for her all through recruitment and training. Ava can't begin telling Sara all the ways that Henry was present and just how responsible he is for the reason Ava stuck with things when everything seemed impossible. Henry might not be a father figure to Ava, but he is someone in her life of significance. And Ava refuses to accept any possibility of truth in Sara's claims.

"Okay," Sara holds her hands up in surrender, "I just was pointing out there are some things that lead to a healthy amount of suspicion, but if you're sure, then we move on." Nodding her head tersely, Ava relaxes in her chair once more. She hadn't meant to get mad at Sara, but Ava doesn't know how to talk about these kinds of things. Talking about the job right now is far safer for the time being.

Sara had gone to Budapest to break into another Operative facility there where Ava knows information had been stored. It's that very information that they'll spend this evening going over, after they do whatever task is next on Sara's list. "You have a cover already?" Sara asks as Ava hums quietly, "Good, our target is the owner of a nightclub here. He's responsible for managing several of the League's local contracts. I want to kill him, and I want to make it look like an accident."

Now that they're on a more familiar topic, Ava nods her head slowly and snags her shirt from the back of her chair and pulls it over her body. From what Ava has gathered of Sara's plans regarding the League so far, the general idea appears to be to cause as much chaos as possible. "I have the files with the accounts there," Ava points to the folder Sara had laid by her side, "Are you sure that you want to wait to hit them with everything all at once? Wouldn't spreading things out be easier?"

They've identified a list of compounds and facilities Sara wants to hit to steal information from. Once they have that information, Ava's role in all of this is to send the files out to her contacts who will then begin to make the League crumble. Though Sara has some kind of a big finish planned, but she's not made Ava privy to what that plan actually involves. They're still gathering information as they go. So far Ava knows that Romania is their next destination where they'll be going after a significant financial contributor for the League.

Ava's gone over Sara's plans, but seeing as she knows very little of the League's internal mechanisms, she's been more than a bit lost. It's a well crafted plan, that much is clear, but Ava's not entirely sure what kind of impact this is going to have in the end. "The League's resources are

vast,” Sara explains with a quiet sigh, “If we take companies out one at a time, but the time we get to the next, the League will have already filled the slot we left empty. It has to be done all at once, leaving them little to no chance of recovery.”

Humming quietly, Ava nods her head, though she still doesn’t understand why this is going to lead to the League letting Sara go. But their organizations are different, so maybe this is Sara’s ticket out just as Ava’s ticket out is making sure she finds the mole. If Ava were to try and leave now before figuring out what’s happening, someone might come after her—maybe even another spy as the League sends assassins after their own. And maybe none of this works, but at least they’re both trying to stop some of the worst pieces of corruption within their organizations.

“I don’t know about you, but I’m starving,” Sara sighs dramatically, throwing herself backwards onto the bed. It’s actually Ava’s bed, or the one that she has claimed as her own. But Ava hasn’t said anything about that yet. She’s noticed that Sara prefers to sleep closest to the door whenever they share a space, so Ava is fine with moving. “Why don’t you put on something that isn’t work slacks and we can go out,” Sara proposes, propping up on her elbows.

Ava can confess to being hungry as well, so she nods her head before standing from her chair and moving to the dresser. Aware of the eyes on her, Ava turns her head over her shoulder to find Sara watching her with a small smile. “You want me to get dressed with you watching?” Ava teases, not even remotely surprised when Sara just lifts her shoulder in a small shrug.

As intimidating as it is when Sara watches her, Ava also finds it thrilling. Nobody ever stares at Ava as if they can see all of her the way Sara does. Ava’s used to being in the shadows but sometimes it is nothing but exhilarating to be in the spotlight of Sara’s attention. That and Sara has had this coming for all the times she used to tease Ava. With her fingers, Ava reaches down and pops the button of her pants before slowly lowering her zipper.

Dark blue eyes don’t leave her body, but Ava doesn’t miss the way Sara’s jaw works. Pride courses through Ava at the very thought that she can draw this kind of reaction from assassin laid out on her bed. Her stomach fluttering wildly, Ava shifts her pants down her legs, moving slowly and gauging Sara’s expression. Sara’s gaze trails down the length of Ava’s body before her eyes flick back up to Ava’s own. Even from a distance Ava can see the black of her pupils overtaking the blue. “Lace,” Sara muses, her attention falling to Ava’s hips once more, “Didn’t take you as a lace kind of girl.”

Ava had almost forgotten that she had put those on this morning. They’re nearly sheer dark maroon lace underwear, and she’s rather happy that she had chosen those this morning instead of something plain. “Well,” Ava lilts in a low voice as she steps from the pants before slipping her joggers on, “There’s a lot you don’t know about me.”

A hum comes from Sara, her lips curving up into a smile as Ava brings the pants around her waist and ties the strings at the waistband. “Apparently,” Sara concedes as a matching forms along Ava’s own lips. When Ava walks to the bathroom to find something to tie her hair up in, she’s aware of the way Sara’s focus doesn’t leave her. But Ava doesn’t mind when Sara looks at her like this. Sara’s attention is the only one Ava welcomes instead of shuns.

The only time Ava rebukes Sara’s piercing stare is when they’re delving into something sensitive. But this is something they’ve done countless times before. This is the easy part that Ava lets Sara see. It’s everything else that she still wants to keep hidden away. Sara is the one person who might be able to navigate her way through every little detail Ava keeps tucked away inside of her. Sometimes Ava is convinced Sara already sees through her as if Ava was made of glass and her thoughts are nothing but transparent. Ava is fine with Sara seeing her like this if it keeps her away

from everything that feels raw and vulnerable.

Finding the hair tie on the counter, Ava grabs it before flicking off the bathroom lights. “Alright,” Ava sighs as she heads for her shoes, “Let’s get a move on, tell me more about this nightclub owner as we go.”

Sibiu, Romania — 21:01

Walking away from the bar, Ava casts a single glance back over her shoulder to the woman she just left sitting in the seat beside the one Ava had occupied. “*Alright what the hell was that,*” Sara’s voice crackles through the device in Ava’s ear, sounding more than just a little irritated, “*I thought you were going to take the card from her. Why are you walking away?*”

With a small exaggerated sigh and an eye roll, Ava slips into a booth across the room and perches there in the corner. “It’s in her purse, I already told you that,” Ava explains as Sara huffs through the device, “I don’t want to make a scene out here when we’re in public like this.”

Right now they’re at a bar about thirty minutes from where they’re staying for the evening. Ava’s been stationed here to just watch a client which gave her plenty of time to work with Sara on a joint task here. Their target for their side endeavor is a company here downtown that deals in international banking. They contain information on both the League and the Operative that Sara and Ava need, which means they’re going to stage a break in tomorrow afternoon.

The success of their heist greatly depends on getting an access card. If Sara had things her way, they would have attacked the employee who had been leaving the building this afternoon as they were canvassing. But Ava shut that down the moment Sara proposed it, telling her that self-control is vital for living life in the shadows. Sara hadn’t liked that and had slunk down in the passenger seat with a slew of muttered insults Ava knew she didn’t mean.

They’ve been here together for about twelve hours and most of that time had been spent in the car watching the building. Sharing such a small space with Sara for so long had not been a very good thing for Ava’s patience. If she thought that Sara had struggles sitting still in a hotel room, Ava learned that once the environment was constricted further, Sara really had trouble remaining in her seat. While they had both done this before in Ireland, they weren’t stuck in the car for as long as they were today, nor were they together that entire time.

The goal of that stakeout was looking for an employee traveling to the bar they’re currently in now which is across the street from the building. Once this woman had come here, Sara had remained behind while Ava took the car back to the flat and had dressed in something nicer. Seeing as Sara is not used to being subtle, they both agreed it better that Ava get the swipe card. Or more accurately, Ava had forbidden Sara from interacting with the woman seeing as Sara’s plan involved ‘bumping into her’ and knocking her purse to the floor. For a dead person, Sara has yet to learn the art of being subtle.

Once they have the key card, they’ll finish making the plans to break into the building tonight. The hope is that this data terminal is going to have the missing pieces Ava needs to find the relative locations of some of her higher ups and that Sara is going to find the weakest links for the League. This particular company is an ally for both of their organizations, so both Sara and Ava have to be very careful about how they do that. That means not making a scene, as much as Sara would love to have one.

An impatient sigh comes through Ava’s earpiece, something that makes her wince as she looks

across the bar. Sara is tucked in a booth in the corner opposite Ava, wearing ripped jeans and a white shirt with a leather jacket. Ava had just snorted when Sara came to the car this morning wearing that very jacket. "I'm getting in the spy mood," Sara had insisted as Ava had slapped her hand away from the volume dial, "James Bond would have been far cooler if he had worn leather jackets." Ava had disagreed, but the jacket did look good on Sara, not that she was going to tell her that.

"I don't see why we can't just take the card from her instead of going through all this smoke and mirrors," Sara mutters petulantly as Ava clicks her tongue in reprimand, *"She's going to notice it's missing tomorrow when she tries to come into work and suddenly can't get in."*

That is true, but that's why Ava is going to wake Sara at the crack of dawn to break into the building. Though Ava hasn't told Sara that, she's just planning on doing it. Looking across the room, Ava levels Sara with a look only to watch Sara roll her eyes. "She'll come back over here in a minute," Ava argues, nodding to the woman sat at the bar, "The trick is to leave them wanting more, so they come back to you. They're less likely to think that you staged something if you do it this way."

Another scoff comes from Sara as Ava brings her drink to her lips. It's water in a glass meant to look as if Ava's having a drink. Sara had insisted when Ava got here that she could have something to take the edge off, but Ava wanted her mind clear. "*Spies,*" Sara mumbles, though Ava can hear the playful nature of her tone, *"Leave them wanting more. That's bullshit. Is that what you were doing with me in Moscow?"*

"Why?" Ava teases with a small grin she hides behind her drink, "Did it work?" Silence comes from Sara's end of the line, but when Ava glances over to her Sara is smiling and shaking her head. That hadn't been exactly what Ava was doing in the beginning, but she'll confess to having swapped tactics once she realized there was no harm in Sara that evening. Of course Ava had been wrong, that evening had changed the course of the past two years, but she doesn't regret it—any of it.

At the bar, the woman looks over her shoulder and Ava immediately averts her gaze, not wanting to be caught staring. Flirting is something she's had to do for her job before, not that Ava enjoys it. But she's learned what kind of people respond to what kinds of things. This particular woman, and American named Rachel, is an employee working for a very secretive, very enigmatic banking company. Strong approaches were never going to work with her, she needed to make her own decision to approach Ava.

"Have I mentioned this evening I think you look good?" Sara's voice comes through the earpiece, low and suggestive. It's not the first time Sara has said something like this during the evening. The entire time Ava was talking with Rachel, Sara was right there in her ear, narrating every motion Rachel made, ever smile cast Ava's way. It was both amusing and also slightly annoying to have Sara recounting what she believed Rachel's thought were in that moment.

"Be professional," Ava scolds lightly, trying to hide her smile. When Ava went back, she had put on one of her tanks and changed into a nicer pair of jeans. Normally Ava doesn't bother with heels, but when Sara told her that Rachel was a bit taller, Ava had thrown them on as well. As for her hair, Ava had left it down. Though that had nothing to do with Rachel and everything to do with the fact that Sara once told Ava how she liked her long hair as she had tugged gently on it and bit her teeth into the side of Ava's neck.

By the time Ava came here and entered the bar, Sara was already set up in her booth, her brows raising as she had made the very first comment on Ava's appearance for the evening. *"Speaking in*

a strictly professional manner, you look good,” Sara amends as Ava snorts, nearly inhaling her drink as she raises it to her nose, “You should wear those heels with those jeans more often—they make your as—”

“Oh my god,” Ava exhales in a rush, glaring over at Sara, “Do not finish that sentence.” Laughter comes through the earpiece as Ava watches Sara smile over at her. Somehow even though Sara isn’t the one actually engaging with the target, she’s still managing to make a scene by embarrassing Ava. “With all of these comments, someone might think you’re jealous,” Ava comments, raising her glass to her lips and glancing over at Sara who snorts, “Rachel is just a target Sara, if that makes you feel any better.”

Another scoff comes, but this time it feels just a bit forced, something that sends just the smallest flash of pride through Ava. “*Please, Rachel is a stuck up foreign investor,*” Sara retorts as Ava raises her brows slightly, “*And what is there to be jealous of exactly?*” For a brief moment, Ava chest tightens, but then Sara continues on, “*Rachel doesn’t get to take you home this evening and Rachel doesn’t get to know that high-pitched sound you make every time I—*”

“Yes, thank you,” Ava interrupts Sara as she inhales deeply through her nose, bringing her fingers to the bridge of her nose and pinching lightly, “Rachel doesn’t get to do a lot of things, that’s summary enough for the evening.” Movement across the bar catches Ava’s attention and she glances up just in time to see Rachel coming her way. “See,” Ava can’t help but tease as she turns her head to the side to mask the fact she’s talking, “Sometimes brute force is not the answer.”

An indignant sound comes through to Ava’s hear. “*I’d say this evening the answer was a pair of very high heels and a tight pair of je—*” Sara’s voice cuts out as Ava raises her finger to the earpiece and turns it off, effectively ending Sara’s commentary. This is where the job begins and Ava needs to focus. Later she can hear all of Sara’s lovely and very colorful comments of what she thinks the answer is, but for now Ava has a task to complete. When Rachel slides into the seat across from Ava with a small smile on her face, Ava can’t help but send a triumphant look Sara’s way. Sara might be better when it comes to forcing her way through things, but subtlety is Ava’s speciality and she’s more than willing to show Sara how things should be done tonight.

Sibiu, Romania — 23:09

Files are spread all over the small living room area inside the flat. They cover the table and the couch that Sara and Ava are both sat on. Papers are tacked and taped to the wall and there are even crumbled balls of paper tumbling all over the carpet where Sara had discarded idea after idea. A bottle of wine rests on the table, half empty. It’s their second bottle of the night, most of it’s contents having been drank already or currently in the glass that Ava holds in her hand.

A groan falls from Sara’s lips as she throws another piece of paper to the ground, but Ava doesn’t even bother to correct her on it this time. They’re both burnt out from their early start to the day with the building heist, not to mention the problem solving they’ve been doing since twelve this afternoon. It was a successful heist, almost too successful. Instead of finding only pockets of information, they had found far more than what they expected to. The trouble is now sorting through everything.

Both Sara and Ava are working on creating a comprehensive list of targets and buildings to hit, trying to see if there are any overlapping cities so they’re not wasting time. So far they’ve agreed that the last stop for the League will be undetermined. Sara needs more concrete proof of a central location where most of the League’s political power is being held. Ava doesn’t know exactly what kinds of markers Sara is looking for, and Sara had not exactly done a very good job of explaining.

The most Ava can gather is that in order to really make the League collapse in on itself for a while, they need to hit a really powerful ally, but Sara doesn't seem to know where that might be.

Ava herself doesn't even know where this ends for her. So far she's been following the breadcrumbs to wherever they lead her next. From the information Ava has gathered this evening, she's learned the primary location of two of the heads of the Operative, though she couldn't piece together their identities from that. Number Two appears to be working somewhere inside the British Parliament, something that hadn't exactly come as a surprise. What had been shocking is that Number Three is working somewhere inside the Senate of the United States.

Until today, Ava had been operating under the assumption that most Operative spies were based in and from Europe, though that has not turned out to be the case. But now that she has their locations, Ava was able to narrow down specific IP addresses and rule out their lines of communication. It's been helpful, but already Ava had been operating under the assumption that number One is the mole. Today had only confirmed that. Whoever number One is, they're good. They leave virtually no trails and their communication is so varied that even Ava has struggled to find and identify a specific pattern to some of their messages.

"There's too many cities to count," Sara bites out, her tone sounding more than just a little frustrated, her lips set in a firm frown when Ava glances up, "The League has people everywhere, look at this sheet." A legal pad is promptly shoved in Ava's direction, knocking against the knee she has drawn up with her on the couch. Reaching out, Ava takes the pad and skims the city names there. Sara isn't wrong, there are countless here, far too many for them to visit before someone catches wind of what they're doing.

After handing the pad back, Ava turns to the table and grabs the nearest two files. "Use what we got today as well as what I already had and cross reference," Ava reminds her gently, knowing just how frustrating something like this can be, "Find the companies that have the most mentions in everything we have and bump those to the top of the list." This is something Ava's had to do before when wrapping up loose threads. Sometimes she'll come across a company that had already disposed of the data Ava was sent to collect and it makes for a wild goose chase to nail down where the information was dispersed.

But this is not something Sara is used to, so Ava's done her best to be patient and help Sara where she can. Ava's side of this doesn't have a long list of targets but rather a careful dig through documents as they gather them. Seeing as the Operative has a data base in most countries, Ava's been letting Sara put their agenda together from this point on. In the beginning Ava thought she would be able to hit certain stations for specific details, but each new piece of information shows that there is no rhyme or reason to what is stored where.

"I guess it's a good thing you were being so reckless in keeping all this data," Sara mumbles as she takes the file and sets it on the couch between them, "I still don't think you should have done it, it certainly seems like you have a death wish." Humming quietly, Ava just leans back with a small amused smile. Sara has been a bit cranky today seeing as Ava woke her at four in the morning to leave for the heist.

As it turns out, Sara is really not a morning person, something Ava learned the hard way this morning. A single tap to Sara's shoulder had been all it took for Sara to lurch upwards, knife already in hand. Thankfully Ava had been expecting some kind of a reaction and she had been quick to knock the blade from Sara's hand before either of them were hurt. Sara had complained every step of the way after that, only quieting and becoming serious when it was time to sneak into the building.

However right now, Ava thinks that Sara is less cranky and more just overwhelmed. It's a lot of information to pilfer through, and Sara hasn't really let Ava help much. "I'd been keeping mental notes for a few years before I knew you," Ava confesses as Sara glances up curiously, "Henry always told me horror stories of the League, how you're all brutal and are indiscriminate in your killing. He said the League offers services to the highest bidder, regardless of who it is they want killed."

A bitter laugh falls from Sara's lips, something that takes Ava aback momentarily. "I used to think that too for a while in the beginning, but as it turns out there is a reason for most of the kills," Sara raises her brows as she speaks, her eyes falling back down to the file, "It all comes down to power, specifically political power. The head of the League, Ra's al Ghul, he wants to be in control."

That's a name that Ava has never heard before, and it's a little bit startling that Sara is giving up that information so freely. It's surprising as well that Sara even knows who the head of the League is. Learning the differences between the Operative and the League never fails to shock Ava. "Okay," Ava nods her head slowly, trying to follow where Sara is going with this, "And what does he want to be in control of?"

When Sara sighs quietly, it sounds nothing but upset, maybe even disappointed. "Everything," she shrugs, glancing over to Ava with downturned eyes, "Even us, his own killers." There's pain evident in Sara's features, a deep kind that Ava hasn't seen in her before. "Training in the League is a kill or be killed situation," Sara continues on, glancing away as Ava listens on quietly, "Those who made it barely survived, and so many died in the process. He could change the rules but he won't. He thinks that trial by fire is the only way to prove yourself in this world."

Ava's training was nothing like that. It was harsh at times yes, maybe cruel in others, but recruits were not pushed to such extreme limits in the way Sara is describing. Now she thinks she might just understand why Sara attacking the League in such a way might grant her freedom. It's not about crushing the League, it's about proving herself. This is Sara's trial by fire continued. "What made you want out?" Ava asks quietly, watching as Sara's jaw works, her throat bobbing as she swallows thickly.

For a moment Ava thinks that Sara might not answer her. They're getting into something they haven't talked about before. In all their times working together, never have they really delved into personal matters. "A bad hit," Sara replies, her voice hush and strained as she lifts her shoulder in a shrug, "Do you ever regret any of it, the people that you killed or the companies that you ruined? Did you ever look into their lives?"

The answer is partially yes but partially no at the same time. "I would look into their professional histories," Ava exhales quietly, tapping her fingers along the back of the couch where her arm is laid out, "But I hardly looked any further than their criminal records. Exploring their personal lives is where there's the potential for things to get messy," Ava pauses and purses her lips, "People are rarely just one thing, bad or good, but my briefing is to only look at what they did in their professional lives."

There were of course some jobs that were more complicated than others, jobs where Ava knew her targets had young families. But even then, she always followed through. Her targets made their choices, and Ava was only there to do a job. Personal feelings don't get to come into it. "My last kill in Gdansk, his personal life was there in the house with him," Sara murmurs, her voice a soft whisper, "His daughter, she saw me kill him."

A small ache forms in Ava's chest. That's never happened to her, but she can't imagine what it was like for Sara in that moment. Shifting on the couch, Ava turns her body and lays her hand over

Sara's that rests between them. Blue eyes lift to Ava's own, and Ava pretends she doesn't see the tears glimmering there, or the way Sara swiftly wipes them away with her free hand. "I learned the day after—the day I was caught—he was ex-League," Sara continues on as Ava hums quietly, "He settled down and had a family. The League told me he was the enemy, but he was one of our own. And I killed him."

An apology doesn't seem fitting here, so Ava just gives Sara's hand a light squeeze. Sometimes it's easy to only see the light and playful side of Sara. Sometimes it's easier for Ava to look past the parts of her that are broken. In this line of work, it's hard to remain fully intact. Either the mind breaks, or the body breaks, those are the two ways things go. It was Henry who told her that once a while ago, but the words stuck with Ava all this time. Ava thinks in Sara's case, her mind hasn't been in this for a while now. If Ava's being honest, hers hasn't either.

Seeing as a simple apology won't work, Ava offers something else up instead. Something more rare. The truth. "When I was four months into this job after training I was sent on a job with six other spies," Ava begins as Sara turns to her, looking curious, "It was a high stakes job, so we worked as a team, something that rarely happens in the Operative." Clearing her throat, Ava shifts on the couch, remembering how much she had hated being on that job and having to share duties. If she could go back, she would have been kinder, more patient. She didn't know what was coming only hours later.

"We were going after a really dangerous target, someone who had been messing with the Operative after finding information on the organization," Ava explains as Sara turns more on the couch, her hand tight around Ava's own, "Long story short, we got some really bad intel on just how skilled he was. He brought an entire building down on himself to avoid capture. Everyone but me died, and the most the Operative had to say was that it was a mistake. Five spies were dead because of fault information they supplied us, and they barely even admitted to that."

Ava won't ever forget the look on Henry's face when he stood there in her hospital room and told her that the entire team had died. While Ava wasn't the only one pulled from the rubble in Bucharest, she was the only one who survived the trip to the hospital and the surgery she underwent. Two others died in transit, and the other died on the table. But the Operative all but swept it under the rug, pretending that it never happened. Even now Ava has tried searching for any official files pertaining to that mission and she can't find a damn thing.

"So we both work for assholes," Sara comments, her voice breaking through Ava's thoughts. Lifting her eyes up, Ava catches sight of that bittersweet smile on Sara's face. Somehow it's just enough to break through the heaviness that was settling on Ava's chest, sending it scattering back into the corners.

With a tiny laugh, Ava just nods her head and smiles. "Yeah, I guess we do," Ava agrees, letting out a quiet exhale. Sara's hand is still in her own, and Ava does need it back so she can return to her files and search for any missing clues. Already Sara has turned her attention back to her legal pad, going over the cities and countries listed in front of her. But she hasn't let go of Ava's hand yet, and her fingers are still gripping Ava's just as tight as they were before. Ava thinks they might both need this, and besides, a few more minutes won't hurt.

Leaning back, Ava tucks her file against her knee and skims the message in front of her, the pressure of Sara's fingers around her own serving as a constant reminder that even if they do work for assholes, at least they're together in trying to find a way out.

Chapter End Notes

As always thank you to everyone who has been reading along and I absolutely love getting to read the comments that have been left behind on past chapters. This has been such a fun story and I appreciate everyone hanging in here with me for this. It is a slowburn, a pretty slow one but they're going to get there in bits and pieces in the end!

Part Twelve

Chapter Summary

When Sara pushes Ava away after a hard night in Spain, Ava doesn't know how to bridge the gap between them again. Neither of them are used to this, that much is clear. But Ava's tired of fighting, and eventually, one of them is going to have to give.

Chapter Notes

I had an exam that was postponed, which means I found myself with some spare time today. We're finally getting to the chapters that I've been excited for. There's a smidge of angst coming but I swear it's pretty short lived. If you've been reading along you've probably noticed they're a little push-pull in this which is the point. I hate rushing things and in the context of this AU rushing to get them together doesn't make sense in my mind. But they're going to get a happy ending and there are soft moments even in the angst.

Trigger warnings apply as always for this, same as before. But I hope you all enjoy this!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ibiza, Spain — 22:55

Exhausted from her travels, Ava trudges up the stairs to the flat that Sara should already be waiting for her in. After a long two weeks of jobs for Ava and some side project Sara has been working on, they've finally aligned their schedules and made a real plan from here on out. Ibiza is the first step in a list of six locations they're going to visit and break into companies within. It was Sara who had formulated the outline and Ava had confirmed that each of those places either had a data bank in the city or one nearby that she could get her information from.

They're hitting a business company in Sweden that's funneling the League's funds, an arms dealer in the Netherlands that is supplying the League with political allyship as well as contracts, next is another bank in Australia followed by a security firm in Nepal. There may be a few added steps if they can't find what they need, but their last blow will come to a firm in the Philippines that the League works with primarily. And of course here in Ibiza, they're headed out tomorrow to find damning evidence against a criminal working on the outskirts of the city.

It's a long list but it shouldn't take long. Sara had actually created a really thorough plan of attack that even Ava had been proud of. Once Ava had the plan, it was easy to fit her jobs to that schedule so the Operative won't know what she's up to. Seeing as they're delaying actually doing anything with the information they gather, Ava's not at risk of Henry recognizing that she's only hitting cities that have suffered a blow to some company or another. There might be trips Ava has to take back to London to check in with Henry in person, as well as jobs that might come up that need her urgent attention. But Ava doesn't anticipate that getting in the way of this much.

Keys in hand, Ava lets out a quiet sigh before turning them in the lock. She'd picked these up at the drop point Sara left near the airport so Ava could get in the apartment if Sara wasn't there. But Ava arrived here four hours later than intended due to a mixup at her last job that meant handling things last minute. Her target had apparently given away the intel to another man that Ava then had to track down and kill as well, something that pissed her off to no end.

Shoving open the door, Ava looks around the little hallway that leads into the open floor plan. "Sara," Ava calls out as she steps inside and drops everything there at the door, too tired to carry things further, "Sorry I'm late, there was a massive clusterfuck in Rome I had to handle before coming here." Shrugging off her jacket, Ava hangs it on a hook near the door right next to Sara's own beige coat that rests there.

Ava only needs her clothing bag for now, so that's the one that she lifts from the ground as she makes her way into the room. The lights are all dimmed except for the ones in the kitchen, but Sara isn't in that room. It takes Ava a moment to scan the studio style space and locate her. The beds are both against the far wall, bags already on the one Sara has claimed and knives spread along the comforter. But Sara is sitting on the couch, her legs curled to her chest, a bottle of some kind of liquor sat between her legs and her torso. "Sara?" Ava murmurs as she drops her bag down.

When Ava comes over near the armchairs and table near the chairs, something crunches under her shoes. Looking down, Ava finds countless fragments of glass sitting there, shattered and broken. Each piece casts reflections of the kitchen lights around the room, illuminating the fabric of the chair closest. On the couch, Sara hasn't so much as moved, but she does lift the bottle to her lips when Ava glances to her. It's a clumsy movement, alcohol spilling down Sara's chin and dripping onto her shirt.

The bottle has a bloody print on one side and Ava can see more blood along the light grey fabric of the couch. Startled, Ava remains where she is for a moment, unsure what to do. Glossy and shining blue eyes stare back at Ava, almost defiantly. "What happened here?" Ava asks, using her foot to sweep most of the glass to the side before someone gets hurt later. No reply comes, so Ava comes a bit closer, moving slowly. Sara's curled in on herself right now, making herself look small and Ava really doesn't know what kind of mindset she might be in.

"Nothing happened," Sara laughs bitterly, the sound harsh and short. Taken aback, Ava pauses where she is before settling on the couch about a foot from Sara. There's a file on the table that's closed, papers sticking from it and colors marked along the tops of the sheets. It's not a file that Ava has seen before. Before leaving Romania, she and Sara had meticulously labeled each of the files they have been carrying around. But this one contains no label.

Clearly something happened here, Ava just doesn't know how far to pry and what to let go of right now. "Sara," Ava tries, reaching for the bottle only for Sara to jerk it away. Liquid sloshes over the side of the bottle, once more getting on Sara as well as splashing down onto the couch. "Okay," Ava holds her hands up in surrender, her heart clenching when Sara levels a harsh glare her way, "You can keep the bottle if you tell me what's going on here. I can't help if I don't understand what's wrong."

"Maybe I don't want your fucking help," Sara snaps as Ava leans back, doing her very best to not feel hurt right now. But it's hard, Ava's not heard that tone of voice from Sara ever. She's never heard that kind of anger leeching from Sara's voice and filling the air around them. A heavy silence settles over the room, one that has Ava shifting uncomfortably on the couch. "You should leave Ava," Sara mutters, looking away and taking another sip from the bottle, "I'm not good company right now."

The other thing that is clear in Sara's voice is the pain. Ava's gotten quite good at detecting that over the years. "No, you're not good company right now," Ava responds in a level tone as Sara's eyes cut over to her, "But usually that means people shouldn't be left alone when they're like this." Again Sara looks away, too quickly this time. Humming quietly, Ava leans back into the cushions. "If you really want me to go I will," Ava tells Sara gently, watching the muscle along her jaw jump, watching Sara's chest lurch, "But if you just want someone to sit here and maybe listen, I could do that too."

Ava's not very good at being tender with other people. Her profession relies on lying and backstabbing, secrets and disappearances. But Ava's well versed in listening to others talk. Some of her easiest jobs have come after nights spent tailing her targets to bars where they drank too much and spilled everything Ava needed. "Just stay," Sara grunts out, not looking at Ava still, her eyes focused on something across the room, or maybe just nothing at all.

Nodding her head, Ava shifts further into the cushions and settles facing Sara. Her arm along the back of the couch, Ava takes a mental catalogue of the state Sara's in. Sara must have been here for a while before because that looks like a new bottle and Sara's nearly had half. It's not a very big bottle, but that's still a concerning amount of alcohol for her to have had on her own. Dressed in sweatpants and a loose white shirt, Sara almost looks as if she might have been dressed for bed. There's wet patches on the front where the liquor has spilled and blood stains the right side of her shoulder.

Looking for the injury, Ava locates it along Sara's left palm. It's hard to see through the glass bottle, but it looks as if Sara might have cut her hand whenever she smashed whatever glass thing is now broken on the ground. There's not a lot of blood present, but Ava would ideally like to clean and dress that before much more time passes. Loose blonde hair falls limp around Sara's shoulders and there's a streak of blood along the right side of her face as if Sara had rubbed her hand there.

The silence remains, but Ava can hear the unsteady pace of Sara's breathing. She's hurting right now, and Ava doesn't know how to make things better. "Can I see your hand?" Ava asks quietly, waiting for Sara to reply. All Ava gets is a firm shake of Sara's head. A bit of frustration rises in Ava's chest, but it's directed at herself. She's not good at this. Ava doesn't know how to take care of another person in this state. Physical injuries are something that she can fix, but Ava can't mend whatever is plaguing Sara's mind tonight and she hates that. Ava's useless until Sara explains, and even then she might not be able to do a damn thing.

"I had a side project I was working on," Sara speaks suddenly, surprising Ava who just nods her head and hums under her breath, "I was trying to shut down everything that involved the drug." For a moment, Ava has to think back in order to understand what Sara is talking about. They haven't had a job come up with a drug unless Sara is talking about the shared job they both had prior to her believed death where they had been in Ireland. "I told you I wanted them all dead," Sara continues, and now Ava understands.

Sara is talking about the drug that had been linked to Anthony Ivo. She's talking about Mirakuru. Ava remembers the images from the reports she came across in her bunker, the blisters and burnt bodies, the damage and destruction. "I thought you said that things hit a dead end after Malaysia," Ava pushes, not sure if asking Sara questions on this is a good idea right now but going for it anyways, "I thought that was the end of the line."

"No," Sara replies, shaking her head. When she turns to face Ava once more, there are tears gathered in her lashes and an angry frown on her face. Sara's jaw works as she sucks in a breath through her nose, almost shaking with rage. "I had been searching for the man who started it all, all the way back in the 1940s," Sara reveals as Ava looks to her in confusion, "He was a Japanese

scientist looking for a super hero serum. Instead he created monsters and I wanted him dead.”

Looking to the file, Ava catches sight of the drug name there at the top of one of the papers. This was what Sara meant in Ireland. She said that she had a list of people she was trying to kill, trying to take down. But if Sara was going after the original creator, that means she surely must have succeeded in her goal of taking the others down. “So what happened?” Ava prompts gently, moving just a bit closer on the couch.

Now her thigh presses against Sara’s own, her arm tucked behind Sara’s shoulders along the back of the couch. “Nothing happened,” Sara spits out bitterly as she shakes her head, her left hand gripping her pant legs in a closed fist, “I got there and he was already dead. Lung cancer. But he died peacefully in his sleep after his serum killed so many people.”

It’s not as if Ava doesn’t understand this, she does. After Bucharest all she had wanted was revenge on the person who had nearly killed her and killed so many others. But he had died in the blast as well. There was nobody left to be angry with. Other than at herself of course. Ava had blamed herself for not seeing the flaw in the information, for not seeing the risks of following such a dangerous subject into an enclosed public space. She wonders what it is Sara’s blaming herself for this evening. “Did it make you feel better?” Ava asks, already knowing the answer.

“No,” Sara’s voice is quiet when she speaks this time, her hand trembling as she brings the bottle to her lips. Reaching out, Ava stops Sara with a single hand to the top of the bottle, urging it down and away from her mouth. When Sara doesn’t fight her, Ava pries the vodka from Sara’s fingers and leans forwards to rest it there on the table in front of them. Settling back once more, Ava glances to Sara who is flexing and curling her fingers along her pant-legs.

Again silence settles, but then Sara is moving, turning towards Ava. Before Ava can even think, Sara has thrown a leg over Ava’s lap, wobbling unsteadily as Ava quickly reaches out to hold onto her. “Sara,” Ava tries to stop her, but then lips crash down on her own. Sara’s kisses are hungry and she tastes of the sharp vodka she had been drinking. Fingers grip Ava’s shirt in a vice-like grasp, tugging her closer and closer. But Ava knows they can’t do this.

Gently pushing Sara away from her, Ava shakes her head. “No,” Ava tells Sara softly, reaching up and cradling Sara’s cheek in her palm. Bright blue eyes flutter shut and Sara’s chest spasms with a quiet sob but no tears fall. Their faces are still so close together and Ava can smell the alcohol lingering on Sara’s breath. Sara’s hands are still fisted in Ava’s shirt, her arms trembling in the space between them.

That ache is forming in Ava’s chest and suddenly she doesn’t care about holding back anymore. Sara needs someone with her right now, and tonight it would only hurt if Ava holds up that barrier she’s placed between them since Sara came back into her life in New York. Lowering it down, Ava strokes her fingers over Sara’s cheek and listens to the catch of Sara’s breath. “Not tonight,” Ava murmurs, brushing her thumb down Sara’s bottom lip, watching as it gets caught along her fingertip before springing back, “Not like this.”

“Sorry,” Sara whispers quietly, her eyes still closed, her hands tugging lightly on Ava’s shirt as she sways slightly in Ava’s lap. Instead of saying anything, Ava just keeps Sara steady with a hand along her hip, resting just under the edge of Sara’s shirt. Warm bare skin meets her fingertips there and Ava delicately brushes her thumb over Sara’s hip bone in what she hopes is a comforting touch.

“It’s alright,” Ava soothes in a hushed tone, her eyes still caught on Sara’s face. She wants to ask how long Sara has been sitting here alone in the near dark drinking on her own but Ava thinks she knows the answer is Sara’s been here a while. Guilt seizes Ava’s chest because she likely could

have stopped this sooner if she had been on time. If Ava had gotten to her target faster he wouldn't have been able to spread information around and she could have been here to prevent Sara from losing herself tonight. Though maybe Sara wouldn't have let Ava stop her. Maybe she's only compliant now because she's too drunk to be anything else.

Tapping Sara's hip lightly, Ava brushes her fingers over Sara's cheek just one more time. "Come on, you need a shower," Ava prompts her as Sara's eyes snap open, still far too unfocused and glossy for Ava's liking, "You smell like a distillery." At another time, Sara would have laughed, but tonight she is nothing but silent as Ava carefully helps Sara up from her lap. Standing as well, Ava loops her arm around Sara's waist to guide her around the glass on the ground and towards the bathroom.

Inside, Ava settles Sara along the closed toilet seat and she's relieved to find that the shower stall does in fact have a small seat there in the corner Sara can sit on. Turning on the water, Ava sets the temperature before shaking the water from her hand and facing Sara once more. Sara hasn't moved, her shoulders caved inwards, her eyes fixated on the ground. Ava hates seeing her like this. She would do anything to take away whatever pain Sara is experiencing and bring back that cheeky smile she adores so much.

But this is the kind of pain that Sara is just going to have to fight her way through before she can come out the other side. Even if Ava doesn't know everything that's plaguing Sara tonight, she is sure of the fact that there is very little she can really do to help tonight. And she's well aware of the fact that Sara is likely to be gone in the morning and they're going to face a very stilted day and a half here on the job. "Go on," Ava nods towards the shower, watching as Sara's shoulders stiffen slightly, "I'll be outside when you're out."

Leaving Sara to her own devices Ava pulls the door to and walks to where Sara's bag of clothing is settled on the bag. She needs new clothes, not ones that are stained in blood and covered in vodka. There's another plain black shirt on top, but Ava can't find another pair of comfortable long pants so she moves to her own bag. Ava brought three pairs of comfortable pants with her seeing as she's been moving around more than Sara has been recently and has little time to stop at her safe house for new clothing.

With the clothes in hand, Ava nudges the bathroom door open just a crack and lays them along the vanity. The mirrors are already fogged up, but Sara is no longer sitting on the seat. Her clothing is on the ground and the sound of water splashing and hitting tiles at an uneven rate fills the room. Ava backs up from the bathroom once more, but she does leave the door cracked on the off chance Sara falls or tumbles while getting clean.

Now Ava turns to the room once more and sets about cleaning everything up. She tackles the glass first, not wanting either herself or Sara to wind up cutting their feet on it. Sweeping that up takes little time, though Ava does find the other half of what she now knows was a broken glass in the sink. There's blood on this piece, a reminder that sends Ava to her bag to lay out the first aid kit along the nightstand so she can patch Sara's hand after.

The shower is still running by the time Ava is finished cleaning, so she changes into her own pajamas for the evening before walking back to the couch. Ava doesn't want to pry into Sara's things, but she wants to see what all Sara had been up to in this side project of hers. Sitting on the edge of the couch, Ava carefully opens the file and settles it along her knees. Inside are countless names scrawled in Sara's neat looping handwriting. There's bullet points under each name, and all of them have been crossed out with a red pen.

This appears to be a several year long endeavor, likely something the League never knew about.

Sara had gone after any variant linked to the drug, any supplier, any manufacturer. From the looks of things, they're all dead now. But Ava pauses as she skims through the file, realizing that Sara's plan here as a crucial flaw. Drugs like this, they're always popping up all over the place. Even if Sara killed everyone known to the cause, that doesn't mean she killed the intent to create it. Killing intentions is a hard thing to do. There's every chance that this drug is going to pop up again, but Sara can't spend her whole life killing people as they appear.

When the shower flips off, Ava closes the file and settles it on the table once more before going over to the beds. As she rifles through the medical supplies, she can hear the quiet rustling sounds coming from the bathroom while Sara dresses. Soon the door squeaks on its hinges and Ava turns to see Sara emerging. It's strange seeing Sara in her sweatpants. Ava's not much taller than Sara, but there is a difference in the length of their legs, so Sara has rolled the waistband twice more than Ava usually might.

She can't tell if Sara looks better now that she's showered or not. Her eyes still aren't looking to Ava, her movements stiff and mechanical even as she sways on her feet. Once Sara is close enough, Ava steadies Sara with a hand along her elbow, helping her to sit on her bed across from Ava. "I'm going to clean that now," Ava motions to Sara's hand, not even giving her a choice in the matter.

But Sara doesn't protest, she just offers her hand up when Ava comes to sit next to her. Ava gently wipes the cut down with a small wipe to make sure all germs and bacteria are absent. It's not very deep at all, and it's only about two inches long. Stitches won't be needed here, something Ava is glad for—she doesn't want to inflict anymore pain on Sara tonight. Placing the wipe to the side, Ava gets out the bandage and begins to wind it around Sara's hand. "I'm sorry," Sara whispers, her eyes focused on her lap when Ava glances up.

"It's okay Sara," Ava soothes, smoothing her thumb over the joint of Sara's wrist, "I understand this—I really do." Or at least Ava understands something similar. When the bandage is secured around Sara's hand, Ava tucks her fingers underneath it to make sure that it's not too tight. Sara is staring off blankly, her features tight and pinched. Unable to stop herself, Ava reaches out and slides her fingers along the side of Sara's jaw, cradling her cheek in her palm.

Sara jolts initially before relaxing once more, her breathing faltering as her eyes slam shut. Ava's never seen Sara so lost and so broken before, and she hates that this has happened to her. "I'm so sorry Sara," Ava murmurs quietly, brushing her thumb back and forth over Sara's cheekbone in a repetitive motion.

When Sara sucks in a shuddering sigh, she turns her head to the side, dislodging Ava's hand from her face. "Me too," Sara exhales quietly as Ava's hand falls into her lap, "But it's done now, one way or another." It's not though, and they both know it. All that's done is Sara's crushed what currently exists. Not even someone as stubborn and strong as Sara can stop the future though. "I know it won't stop," Sara admits as Ava nods her head slowly, sadly, "People are always going to want to be stronger, powerful, something to account for a loss they think they have. Sometimes the bullied turn into the biggest bullies of them all when they grow up."

Ava's not perfectly following Sara's line of reasoning, but she doesn't have to. Sara needs to get this out, that much is clear. "The man who made this serum, he was small when he was little, mocked for his size," Sara pushes on as Ava hums quietly, "He wanted to be better. So he went out and inspired people who would make monsters of those who just wanted to survive."

There's a deep bitterness and melancholic undertone in Sara's voice. But there's guilt too. Ava's read her file, it doesn't take much to assume what Sara is talking about here. A single tear has

escaped the corner of Sara's eye and Ava catches it with her knuckles, gently brushing it away. "You're not a monster Sara," Ava whispers quietly, her chest clenching as she catches yet another tear before it can reach Sara's cheek, "No matter what you did."

Instantly, Sara's body goes rigid and she flinches away from Ava. Not understanding what she has said or done wrong, Ava backs up slightly. "You don't know what I did," Sara replies in a trembling voice, but she sounds so angry as opposed to sad this time around. When Sara shifts on the bed, clumsily trying to get under the covers, Ava stands up and lifts them so Sara can climb under. Once Sara has settled, she flips to her side, facing the wall away from Ava, a clear sign that this conversation is over.

Nodding her head in understanding, Ava rests her hand on Sara's shoulder and gives it a light squeeze before going to her own bed. "I might not know what you did," Ava confesses as she gets under her own sheets, "But I know you're trying to make it better." Silence comes from Sara, but Ava can see the stiff way she's curled in on herself still. "Monsters don't care about the damage they've caused," Ava speaks quietly, gently, "Monsters don't ever stop to do the right thing."

Again Sara says nothing, but Ava expected this from her. Ava wasn't speaking for a response, she was speaking so Sara could hear her and understand that Ava has never once viewed Sara as a monster. It makes Ava ache to think that Sara considers herself one. "Goodnight Sara," Ava tells her quietly, "Get some sleep, we have work to do in the morning." This time there is a mumbled response, barely there, but still a response. With a quiet hum, Ava flips off the lights and plunges the room into darkness.

Amsterdam, Netherlands — 17:45

The bar Ava is sitting in is far too loud for her liking. Music is pumping through the speakers and filling the small space with an exorbitant amount of noise. This is the location Sara had sent her the address for with a plan to meet up and swap files of information. They've gone back to their divide and conquer system seeing as this seems safer. So far the plan has been to handle business for the other then meet somewhere secure and swap everything off. Staying in one location together could be seen as too dangerous.

That hadn't been Ava's plan though, it had been Sara's. In Ava's mind, they're in far more danger apart than they are together. There is safety in numbers when it comes to this job, and Ava hadn't been keen on splitting up. But Sara had insisted this was for the best, and Ava hadn't been much in the mood to fight with her. The plan was announced to Ava the morning after she found Sara curled around a bottle on the couch in Ibiza.

Ava figured that Sara was going to close off again, after all it's likely what Ava would have done in the same position, but she never had expected the level of indifference Sara showed towards her. They didn't even finish out their time there in Ibiza in the same flat because Sara had announced her intention to find a different space as they worked within the city. It had been a blow that Ava pretended she didn't suffer from. Sara hadn't talked about what happened the night before and she had kept her injured hand from Ava's sight at all times, almost as if she thought Ava not being able to see it would erase everything.

It's not been erased from Ava's mind. She remembers the haunted and empty look in Sara's eyes. She remembers the two tears Sara shed and the way she was physically trembling from the impact of whatever memories were playing in her mind. Ava remembers Sara waking up in the middle of the night with a startled gasp while Ava pretended she was still asleep while really she was listening to Sara struggle to breath after a nightmare. And Ava can't forget the way that Sara had

straddled her and kissed her on the couch, tasting like vodka and a mournful kind of regret.

However Sara is hellbent on acting as if none of that happened, and Ava's too tired to fight her. This is just a job and Ava needs to accept that. With a small sigh, Ava glances to the files down in front of her that she has brought for Sara. There's a minor kink in the plan that they do have to work out at some point this evening. Sara's whole scheme here revolves around everything hitting the League all at once, but some of these companies are going to take time to ruin. What Ava needs to be able to do is get some of this information out to her contacts in advance so they can get started. Though she gets the feeling Sara might say no.

Then of course there is the matter of Ava being called back to London between this job and the next. Apparently Henry needs Ava to handle something within in the MI6 building that involves a server that went down. Files on that server contained some of her own job briefings and Ava needs to go and help sort through the mess to identify which belonged to her. It's not ideal, but it also will give Ava access to the main server where she might be able to take some intel from.

Shifting on the bench of the booth, Ava winces slightly when the stitches in her side pull. Ava's been here in Amsterdam for three days so far and her first day here is when she had gone to the warehouse owned by the arms dealer Sara needed her to look into. Ava wasn't there to kill him, but of course he left her no option once he realized that she was there to break into his company. He had cut her along her stomach with a knife, nothing too deep, but enough to need a few stitches in order to close it. But Ava's stitching skills never were the best, certainly not when she's attempting to do them on her own stomach. There's a possibility she laid them too tightly and that's why they're still causing her a bit of pain.

The door to the bar swings open and a familiar face comes into view. Nodding her head, Ava beckons Sara over to her at the table. Sara's dressed in fairly normal clothing, her usual black jeans and a light blue shirt with a coat overtop. "You're early," Sara comments as she slips into the booth and lays her bag on the table.

Ava's really not early, she's on time. "I'm punctual," Ava replies diplomatically as Sara just chuckles and pulls a file from her bag, "This isn't the best place to exchange files Sara, not out in public like this." This isn't where Ava wanted to do things at all. If she had things her way, they would be heading to her place or Sara's as opposed to sitting here at the bar and swapping files where anyone can see them. There might not be any cameras, but that doesn't mean there aren't eyes on them.

"I think meeting in public is better than doing so in flats and hotel rooms," Sara replies as Ava sucks in a quiet breath, "This way we can see the danger coming." They could see the danger coming in a hotel too, and there are considerable risks from being here in a bar right now. Both of them know this. Both of them know that Sara is avoiding Ava, and Ava kind of hates it. "So, I found what you needed in the business office downtown," Sara taps the folder that she's laid on the table, "From what I scanned, there's nothing new there, but it seems that there might be some connection to your number One and the British Navy."

That doesn't really make much sense to Ava, so she's sure it's another dead end. Later tonight she'll pour over everything inside the file and try to make sense of it all. "We need to talk about your plan to release all of this information at once," Ava leans back into her seat and folds her arms over her chest, "I know you want it to happen as one large blow, but the reality is that some of these things are going to take time. I need to be able to release at least half of what we have in advance, or nothing will happen."

"It has to happen at once or this comes back on us before we're ready," Sara shakes her head as

Ava sighs impatiently, "It's okay if it takes them time, I'm not worried about that. The League is bad at outsourcing jobs and responsibilities. If we take out the bottom, the key players, the rest folds in on itself like a house of cards." Ava tilts her head to the side, silently considering this. It would be easier for Ava to understand if she knew all of Sara's plan. So far Ava knows where they're attacking and what they're taking, but she doesn't know the reasoning behind it.

A quiet hum comes from Sara, and when Ava glances up, bright blue eyes are on her, almost concerned in nature. "I still don't know if this won't come back on you in some way by the time we're through," Sara confesses as Ava nods her head because she figured as much, "I know you've talked about your parents being dead, but if you have anyone else out there that you care about, you should warn them just in case. The League won't hesitate to go after them to get to you."

That's something Ava already considered. Since starting this, she has cut all ties to Dmitriy and Gary that could be traced back to her. Both of them were warned seeing as they're the only people Ava consistently visits and talks to. "There's no other family for me," Ava shrugs as she glances to the side, "The others have already been told to lay low while you and I ride this plan out."

Ava would have felt better if she had the chance to go and tell them personally. Ideally she would have been able to go to see them and make sure that they both have the proper security measures in place, but that hasn't been an option. When Sara tilts her head to the side, clearly prompting for an explanation, Ava shakes her head firmly. "I'm not talking about this out here," Ava glances around the room pointedly, "Not with this many people, not when my place is three blocks from here."

That guarded expression is back on Sara's face, the same one she wore the morning they talked about this new plan of splitting up. Ava hates that look, it always means Sara is going to say something she doesn't like. "It's not safe for us to be seen going to a place like that together," Sara murmurs as Ava snorts in disbelief, "Don't do this Ava, we both agreed that this was better. Passive aggressive snorts and comments aren't the way to go."

"Neither is avoidance," Ava retorts before she can stop herself, "I get you've made a habit of running from things that are difficult, but you can't just keep skipping off on me when things get hard." Ava's not just talking about the new plan of separation and they know it. Her words break through the neutrality of Sara's expression, revealing something like surprise and maybe guilt laid underneath.

For just a split second Ava is convinced that Sara is going to say something meaningful, that she is going to actually apologize. For a second Ava hopes that Sara just might take it back and stop keeping herself away from Ava. Instead Sara pushes out of her seat and slides from the booth. "I'm going to get a drink," Sara mumbles, her eyes looking anywhere but Ava as disappointment sinks low in Ava's chest, "I'll be back."

"Yeah," Ava sighs, her throat tight as she looks out the window. In the reflection she watches Sara linger there a moment before she walks away. It stings more than it should. Ava isn't used to being shunned like this. A while ago she swore that Sara cared for her too, that maybe they were in the same boat with their feelings. Ava used to think that. There were moments before Sara disappeared where Ava was convinced she saw real fondness sparkling in Sara's eyes in the moments they were together. But ever since Sara came back, she's been different, distant. Ava hates it.

Pushing down the sinking feeling in her stomach, Ava reaches out for the file Sara brought for her. If Sara's not going to let them go back to the same place to do this, Ava may as well get a head start so she can leave soon. Public venues never were Ava's thing and she's not keen to linger here even if Sara is present.

Several lines of communication are printed out on each page, every one of them containing a sign

off from number One. There are references here to Naval ships as Sara said, but she hadn't understood what she was looking at. Ava does though, they're names of countries that are coded inside the ship names. This is an old-school form of communication, hiding words within words. Sara wouldn't have thought to look into something like this and it might take Ava a while to find the right key. But at least she knows where to start with this.

Somewhere off to the side, a glass breaks along the ground. Instantly on high alert, Ava turns to the source of the noise only to find that Sara has a man double her size pressed face down against the bar counter. "Oh you have got to be kidding me," Ava mutters as she slams the file shut and shoves everything into Sara's bag. Trust Sara to start a bar fight when they are meant to be in hiding right now.

Everything is already escalating and Ava can hear angry voices overlapping behind her as she gathers everything up and slings the bag over her shoulder. There's a knife tucked inside Ava's pocket that she truly hopes she does not need, but she keeps her hand over it as she approaches the ensuing conflict across the room. Thankfully there aren't many people in the bar, but Ava does see one rather large man approaching Sara from behind. Sara doesn't see him coming, too busy threatening the man struggling under her.

Fisting her hand in the back of the approaching man's shirt, Ava jerks him backwards and away from his course. It takes two seconds for him to whirl around with a clumsy punch that Ava carefully dodges before striking him right in the nose and bringing her knee up with force against his groin. Predictably, he goes down and Ava steps neatly over his body before coming to stand near Sara. "If you lay your hands on her again, or any other person for that matter, I will kill you," Sara is gritting out right near the man's ear.

There's a woman off to the side being talked to in hushed tones by the bartender, and Ava doesn't miss the light bruising along her side of her face as well as the bruises around her wrists. Humming in quiet understanding, Ava reaches out and lays her hand along Sara's back. When an elbow comes at her face, Ava was expecting it and catches Sara's arm in her hand. "Not here," Ava tells her pointedly, tugging on Sara's arm sharply, "We have to go—now."

This kind of a scene is not what they needed. Two women instigating a bar fight isn't going to look good no matter where they are, but it's certainly not a good thing when both Sara and Ava are meant to be hiding. With a jerky movement, Sara pulls away from Ava's grasp before slamming the man down into the bar once more. Clicking her tongue, Ava lets out a quiet sigh as Sara briskly walks to the back door, not even so much as looking back at Ava.

After giving the bartender an apologetic smile, Ava tightens her hold on the bag around her shoulder and makes her way to the door as well. Outside Ava finds herself in an alley, stepping just out the door and watching on as Sara roughly warps her coat around her body. "What the hell was that?" Ava asks angrily, walking over to her and coming to stand in front of Sara, "First you say it's too dangerous for us to be seen together but then you go and make a scene where everybody is watching? Tell me how that makes sense Sara?"

"He was abusing her," Sara retorts, her eyes lit up with fury when she lifts her head, her features tight and compressed, "I was standing right there next to him and he was squeezing her arm so tight her skin turned white. Would you really stand by and watch something like that?" Ava wouldn't. She purses her lips silently before sighing and looking to the side. "No man gets to touch a woman like that," Sara continues on, her voice hard, her jaw working as she stares off down the alley, "Ever."

Ava's not mad at Sara, not really. This is something personal for Sara, Ava can tell as much.

Letting out a long exhale, Ava just nods her head while Sara turns to face the alley wall. “Okay,” Ava hums gently, resting her palm along the small of Sara’s back, “Well we have to go somewhere else now, so it looks like you’re done avoiding coming to my place. Let’s go.” This is no longer an option Sara has anymore. Ava’s not going to chance going somewhere in public when their faces might be recognized by anyone this evening.

Thankfully Sara doesn’t fight her, she just turns and walks to the end of the alleyway on her own. Shaking her head and fighting off that heavy feeling that has been sitting on her chest since Ibiza, Ava follows after her. Tonight they talk about the plans and where they’re at so far, and tonight they talk about this separation. Sara isn’t the only one with a say in this. Ava has a voice too and she plans on using it. Whatever Sara’s issue is with being alone with Ava, it ends tonight.

Amsterdam, Netherlands — 19:01

When Ava unlocks the door, she lets Sara go into the room first. Sara brushes past Ava, still quiet, still not saying a single word. They spent the entire walk here in silence with Sara trailing a good three feet behind Ava at all times. It was almost a little frustrating because the whole point of leaving was to not make a scene. But with Sara walking in the back that way, it looked to Ava—and likely others—as if she was following Ava in a strange manner through the city.

Ava’s tired of the silence and she’s tired of the tension between them. This isn’t the kind of tension they had back when they were fighting over targets or having sex in random rooms. This is something entirely different and Ava does not understand what is wrong. The entire point of Ava’s job is to gather secrets and answers, so she doesn’t appreciate them being held from her like this. “Did you manage to get what you needed from the arms dealer?” Sara asks, looking around the room as Ava carefully does up the locks.

The last one clicks into place, securing them here for the remainder of the evening. While they were walking back, the only thing Sara had mentioned about her stay here is that she hadn’t yet found a place to stay overnight. They hadn’t talked about it, but Ava knows Sara is going to stay here for the evening. There’s no telling what might come from that bar brawl and they’re safer together at this point. “I did,” Ava mumbles, taking a seat on the bed, “He wasn’t very happy to see me.”

Already Ava’s stomach already aches again, a dull throb forming where the stitches rest. It likely wasn’t a good idea to engage in that bar fight knowing that she had a still healing wound, but it wasn’t as if Sara gave her much of a choice. “You’re bleeding,” Sara frowns, suddenly right in Ava’s space. She moved so quickly Ava hadn’t seen her coming and she startles slightly, backing up just as Sara’s hand reaches out for her. “I shouldn’t have asked you to go there alone,” Sara shakes her head, stepping back with a deep frown, “Next time I’ll go, it’s too dangerous for you.”

At this point in the evening, Ava has had enough of Sara just deciding things here. “No you shouldn’t have let me go alone,” Ava retorts as Sara looks up with a startled expression on her face, “We should have gone together, because that was the plan in all of this—to do things together.” Sara has the decency to look guilty, her eyes cast towards the ground, her body language shifting to something more defensive. “You don’t get the only opinion here when it comes to planning hits,” Ava continues on as Sara’s jaw works, “From the moment we started this, we both accepted there were going to be dangers.”

“That doesn’t mean I’m okay with you getting hurt because of me,” Sara fires back, gesturing to the red stain along the front of Ava’s grey shirt, “I was in Sweden breaking into servers there and you were being stabbed here.”

“Because you decided it was best that we separate,” Ava defends herself, trying her best not to let the frustration win out right now. It’s not as if she doesn’t understand where Sara is coming from, Ava doesn’t want Sara in danger either. Already this is risky enough. The Operative thinks that Sara is dead, but with each city they travel too and each job they work together, they’re putting the secret of Sara’s real status at risk. “If we had been together maybe I would have had an easier time the other day,” Ava shakes her head with a quiet dejected sigh, “This is too complicated for either of us to do on our own.”

In front of her, Sara shifts from one foot to another. Worried blue eyes scan Ava’s face, Sara’s lips set in a firm frown. Ava can almost see the fight happening in Sara’s body, the tension in her frame, the hesitation in the way she’s only half facing Ava right now. A small exhale falls from Sara’s lips before she sucks in a deep breath. “Okay,” Sara nods her head in agreement as Ava looks to her in surprise, “You’re right. But next time something like this happens, don’t keep it from me. I wouldn’t have asked to meet in the bar if I knew.”

It would be easy for Ava to be petty right now. The only reason Ava hadn’t bothered to tell Sara she had been injured was because Sara was barely responding to the messages Ava sent her over text. But Ava bites that down. Confrontation really isn’t her thing. “But if we hadn’t met there I wouldn’t have had the chance to see you scare the shit out of a grown man,” Ava teases quietly, a peace offering.

When the smile takes over Sara’s face, it doesn’t quite reach her eyes. But it’s still something, so Ava will take it. That one smile helps melt away some of the pressure that had been slowly building all week in Ava’s ribs and stomach. “One bed,” Sara nods to the mattress Ava is sitting on as Ava nods her head, “Is this your way of telling me that you want to break the no sex rule.”

Teasing is easy. Teasing is something Ava can do. “I’m not having sex with you,” Ava points her finger at Sara in warning as she pushes off the bed and heads to the dresser, “There is a pull out couch right there that should be fine for the evening. It’s not as if we’re here much longer.” Twenty-four hours to be exact. Or at least that’s how long Ava is here in the city. “I have to go back to London after this,” Ava confesses as she finds a new shirt tucked away in her drawer, “Henry needs me on a job there, so I’ll be a few days late to Sydney.”

Silence meets Ava’s statement and when she glances over her shoulder, Sara is digging through Ava’s bag near the door. It’s the bag that Ava has her first aid kit in, the very kit that Sara throws to the bed as Ava watches her stand up. “Does it make you uncomfortable?” Sara asks, her eyes stuck on Ava’s own, that frown back on her face. Ava doesn’t understand what Sara means, so she turns around and tilts her head to the side. “I know I make a lot of jokes and comments about sex,” Sara lifts a single shoulder in a shrug, “I just wanted to make sure it never makes you feel uncomfortable.”

Warmth crashes through Ava, pushing away any remaining ache that had been left from the past few days. Her lips quirking in a small smile, Ava takes her clean shirt in her hand and walks to the bed. “It doesn’t bother me,” Ava shakes her head as she sits on the mattress once more, “I would tell you if I cared, though I don’t know how I could when you’ve had your head between my legs on multiple occasions.”

That draws a small snort from Sara, her eyes lighting up as she smiles. It’s taken time, but Ava thinks she’s learned the meaning behind some of Sara’s expressions. This one in particular seems to be reserved for when Ava’s said something fairly stupid or made a joke that Sara happens to find amusing. It’s not much, but slowly Ava’s assembling pieces of the puzzle that make Sara up. “Let me help,” Sara speaks quietly, crossing the distance between them and reaching for the kit laying across Ava’s lap.

Having Sara's hands on her right now doesn't seem like a particularly good idea. But the kit is removed from Ava's reach before she can say a single word. Nodding her head, Ava slowly brings her shirt up and over her head before tossing it to the side. Along her stomach, Ava can already see the issue. There's two ripped stitches near the margins of the wound she patched up herself a few days ago. They likely came from her jerking the man back towards her, a sign that Ava had in fact laid them too tightly.

"Lay down," Sara pushes Ava's shoulder lightly, already standing to the side of Ava's legs with the kit in hand. Shuffling backwards, Ava rests along her back and bunches the comforter under her head so she has something to rest on. It takes another five seconds for Sara to follow after Ava, straddling Ava's thighs and resting her weight down.

"What are you doing?" Ava asks instantly, shifting slightly as Sara's hips settle over her thighs. The warmth of Sara's body presses into Ava's own, jolts of electricity through Ava's stomach. A very familiar look has taken over Sara's face, her lips curved upwards in that same smirk that Ava's become quite accustomed to over their time together. "You could sit off to the side," Ava looks to the empty space on the mattress beside her, the space that she thought Sara was going to occupy for this.

Laughter bubbles up from Sara's chest, the vibration able to be felt even in her legs that rest on either side of Ava's own. "I could do that," Sara muses in amusement as Ava looks up to her, "But then I wouldn't get to see you under me." A thrill of anticipation carves through Ava, sending fluttering waves of heat between her legs. When Sara leans down, her face inches from Ava's own, Ava's breathing stutters in her chest and her lips part slightly. "And I do love seeing you under me," Sara whispers in that low tone.

Inch by inch, Sara backs up, her eyes dropping to Ava's chest. But Ava's focus is on Sara only. Even when a finger lands right at the hollow of Ava's throat, she can't move and she can't look away. Sara's finger glides down Ava's skin, trailing down her breastbone, mapping over the fabric of her bra, slipping down her abdomen. By the time Sara hooks her finger in Ava's waist band, Ava regains her ability to move again. "No sex," Ava reminds Sara as she grabs that single finger and guides it away from her body, all the while aware of just how thick her own voice sounds.

This time Sara's smile is gentle when she looks down at Ava before settling the kit to the side and begins taking everything out. While Sara busies herself with that, Ava tries to figure out what to do with her hands. The most natural position would be to lay them down by her sides, but that would mean resting them over Sara's knees. Doing that would be a gateway drug to slipping her hands up further on Sara's body, which would lead to something they have no business doing this evening.

As much as Ava likes Sara, she is unavailable and that much is clear. Neither of them are good at being with other people, and it would be nothing but a mistake to try and get closer to Sara. Yet Ava wants to throw that warning to the side and burn it. Everything in this job is dangerous, at least this risk has a reward that Ava thinks could be more than worth it if things worked out. Oblivious to Ava's dilemma, Sara threads the needle and holds it to the light before wiping a cold antiseptic cloth over Ava's skin.

The alcohol from the wipe bites into the wound, making Ava flinch slightly. Her knees attempt to come upwards to protect against any oncoming pain, and as a result Sara is jolted further up Ava's stomach. Ava sucks in a deep breath as Sara's brushes against her bare skin, warm and far too clothed for Ava's liking. "This is another reason I'm straddling you," Sara shakes her head with a small smile that seems forced, her throat jumping, "I would prefer not to be kneed in the head."

There's no pretense when the needle pierces into Ava's skin and she sucks in a breath through her

teeth. The flesh around the wound is so tender, pain lacing over Ava's abdomen in streaks of heat as she forces herself to remain still. A comforting palm rests along Ava's side and she tries to focus her attention on Sara rather than the series of punctures that await her. "Where did you learn this?" Ava asks, her breathing hitching as the needle enters her once more.

"Where did you?" Sara glances up with a single arched brow before smiling and returning to her task, "Probably the same place you did, in training. Trained to be alone, trained to take care of myself, trained to execute orders at any cost." It's pretty accurate to Ava's own experience, so she simply nods her head as Sara's thumb smooths over her ribcage. "Though I think having some medical knowledge from college helped," Sara discloses with a shrug, "It never hurts to know basic anatomy given how many times I've either been shot or nearly shot."

Ava's mind jumps back to that vulnerable looking scar that rests too close to Sara's heart. She remembers the way the ridges of the healed wound feel under her fingers and under her lips—smoothed with time but still jagged against the rest of Sara's soft skin. "They didn't really teach us much medical care in the Operative," Ava opens up as Sara hums, still focused on her task, "But I had a job at a hospital once where the doctor took the time to mansplain quite a few things to me. In a way I think I'm thankful—for the knowledge though, not his attitude."

Sara's laugh is short and light, her eyes sparkling when her attention leaves Ava's stomach for a moment. It's that look Ava's been missing recently, that easy and free expression on Sara's face. Ever since Sara came back, things have felt heavy and clouded over, but it feels like maybe they might be finding their way together again. All Ava knows is that she can see the beginning of Sara's dimples forming in her cheeks again, something she hasn't seen in this way for some time.

Resting her head back, Ava lays her hands over Sara's knees. But she keeps them balled in fists, allowing herself only the slightest bit of contact. It would be easy for her to surrender and rests her palms over Sara's skin, but right now Ava's still testing things out, trying to determine how likely she is to be burnt in this. "You're lucky," Sara murmurs, her fingers tapping right near Ava's ribcage, "Any deeper and an inch to the right and he would have hit something vital." That is something Ava knew, which is why she had been rather quick to step to the side of the blade once she saw it coming her direction.

"At least I'm alive," Ava shrugs. The words leave her mouth and Sara's fingers halt along her skin. It's a hesitation of lingering seconds, but Ava catches it and tucks that somewhere among the pieces of Sara she's committed to memory. There's no smile on Sara's face, but there's not a frown either. All that comes from her is a quiet hum as she reaches for the scissors that rest to the side. Cold metal presses into Ava's skin for a short interval of time before they're gone, replaced by a stiff bandage that Sara had prepared in the beginning.

Ava should thank her, but her ability to speak has been halted, her words tangled up in her throat. The palm along her side is still warm, the intensity of Sara's gaze still burning her through. Blue eyes stare right back into Ava's own, and for a moment Ava considers letting her self control slip. She considers sitting up and dragging Sara into her so they can settle everything left unsaid with their actions rather than their words. It's what they're best at after all.

But Sara makes the decision for her, a leg lifting up over Ava's body before she's shifting away off the mattress. "We should go over everything and make a plan for Sydney," Sara speaks, her back already to Ava as Ava struggles to sit up on the bed, "Breaking into a bank isn't going to be easy."

Nothing ever is easy, that's all Ava's come to learn over time. "I already started on a plan," Ava divulges quietly, reaching for her shirt and shoving down the disappointment threatening to rise in her body. It's a disappointment Ava really has no right to have, she's the one who instituted the no

sex rule and Sara's only following it. But Ava almost wishes that Sara would break this rule as she has countless others.

However it's not going to happen tonight and Ava knows it. Pushing off the bed, Ava comes over to the desk in the corner of the room where Sara has already laid things out. They have a job to do first—everything else can come after.

Sydney, Australia — 20:09

All it took was a sentence and Ava's self-control had snapped. It was a nothing sentence, something simply, something Sara probably didn't even realize had an impact on Ava. It's not even something Ava hadn't known partially, after all Sara had told her the truth years ago when they came across each other in the States. They had drinks in the lobby and it had reminded Ava so much of their time in Moscow that she had to ask again, she had to know the real reason Sara intervened when she was meant to stay away.

The story Ava had been told was that Sara found Ava surprising, that she thought Ava was nothing like she expected. But that hadn't been the full truth. Tonight, only seconds ago, Sara had told Ava the truth as the elevator doors closed. "You were in the middle of a Russian bar reading a file in French," Sara had smiled, her eyes pouring into Ava's own, "There you were, hiding in plain sight, but nobody noticed you. I like mysteries, I wanted to notice you—to solve you."

Those words had split something open in Ava. Her job is to be hidden and not seen, to collect secrets not to be one to be collected by others. In her mind, Sara turns Ava into everything Ava doesn't feel she is. Yet that's what Sara sees her as, just as much of a puzzle as Sara is to Ava. Her words had broken what was left of Ava's resolve and she had done something that maybe they both saw coming. There's no excuses, no covers, no lies—just them in an elevator where Ava had pressed Sara into the wall and kissed her.

She's still kissing Sara even though she needs air, but this feels more important. This was bound to happen from the moment Sara came back into Ava's life when Ava needed someone there the most. Hands sneak along Ava's sides and she tosses the rest of her resolve to the side. Cradling Sara's jaw, Ava shifts her head to the side to capture Sara's bottom lip, trapping it gently between her own. The gasp that falls from Sara's lips when Ava's thigh lodges between her legs sounds like a gunshot in the silent air between them.

Fingers dig into Ava's shoulder blades and teeth sink lightly into her lip, but neither of those things hurt. Sara hasn't tried to hurt Ava in a long time, at least not on purpose. An ache forms in Ava's abdomen as she presses herself impossibly close to Sara, a need welling in her body to just be near her again. Ava missed this, she missed the tenderness in Sara's hands as they roam her body, the way Sara sucks in air each time they part, the soft smell of Sara's coconut shampoo filling her senses. Ava missed the way that things are different between them when they're speaking with their actions. This is how she reads Sara best.

A quiet ding comes from the elevator door, but Ava nearly misses it, too busy shifting her lips down Sara's neck. "Ava," Sara murmurs, tapping the back of her neck as Ava hums against her pulse point and Sara's voice turns to a laugh, "Ava." Letting out a reluctant sigh that results in Sara shivering, Ava backs away and slips her palm in Sara's own. Another laugh tumbles from Sara's lips as Ava pulls her swiftly to their shared room, the room they've been in for three days now and somehow avoided something like this.

Their job here is complete, both of their tasks taken care of as well as Ava's job. Each step was

done together as per Sara's promise in the Netherlands and Ava likes to think they work better this way. Shoving the door open with her shoulder, Ava steps into the room and doesn't bother turning the lights on. She couldn't even if she wanted to because Sara has her against the wall in seconds, lips attaching to Ava's neck. "No marks," Ava reminds her teasingly as Sara just hums, her smile able to be felt against Ava's skin.

Desire courses and burns through Ava's body, made only more intense by the fact that they haven't done this in so long. This hasn't been just sex in a while, Ava knows that. It was easy to pretend before that there was nothing emotional behind this but there is. Pressure thrums in Ava's chest and any words die in her throat as she makes a quiet strangled sound when Sara's palm rests over her breast.

Wanting Sara back up near her, Ava tugs on Sara's arm until she gets the message, far too overwhelmed and too prideful to ask. Hands cradle Ava's jaw and lips descend on her own again. Sara tastes of the cherries she was eating by the dozen at the bar, the sharp tang of the vodka resting just under that. Their kisses are no longer harsh and hungry but rather slow and languid. Against Ava, Sara's body is all hard angles—taught muscles and sharp hipbones that Ava presses her fingers into because she always loved the juxtaposition there along Sara's skin.

Ava loses herself in this, surrenders to this in a way she's wanted to for so long. This time there's no use in holding back, not when Ava knows what it's like to lose Sara. By the time they make it to the bed, most of their clothing has been shed. Sara's dress is a pool of silk by the door, Ava's pants resting right in front of them. Ava's not wearing her underwear but somehow her shirt is still on and her bra is unclasped.

A hand pushes Ava down to the bed, eliciting a laugh from Ava seconds before Sara settles in her lap. They meet again, Ava holding Sara close to her even as Sara is shoving Ava's shirt down her arms, the fabric getting tangled up around Ava's wrists. She does have to stop kissing Sara just to fix this, tossing everything to the side before drawing Sara in again. Every touch along Ava's skin burns through her, forming flames that lick through her abdomen and pool between her thighs.

When Ava's nudged to her back she doesn't fight it, laying there along the mattress as Sara removes her underwear first and Ava's as well. Reaching out, Ava helps Sara settle over her again, slick skin brushing over Ava's stomach when Sara grinds down with that wicked smile on her lips. She does it again and this time Ava tips her head backwards, a sound leaving her throat that sounds strangled. "Fuck Sara," Ava murmurs, glancing down and watching as Sara continues to move against her, spreading her arousal over Ava's muscles.

Watching is fine, but Ava needs Sara's lips on her own again. With a single hand, Ava leans up and cups her hand around the back of Sara's neck before dragging her down. Sara smiles into the kiss, her hands skating up Ava's body, settling over her breasts as Ava arches up into her. "You're impatient," Sara murmurs against Ava's lips. Not even bothering to hide it, Ava just nods her head and backs up.

Sara sits back, her palms settled over Ava's abdomen. Moonlight spills through the cracked blinds, bathing Sara in cool tones. Her skin has turned to alabaster, her eyes glinting a brilliant shade of blue in the low light. With clearly no intention of moving, Sara rests there, her eyes skimming over Ava. One hand sits just over the healed bullet wound along Ava's stomach, the very one from the night they found each other again. Something about the touch feels protective, almost apologetic.

Fingers splay along Ava's belly, thumbs smoothing over her skin. Sara hasn't stopped staring at her and Ava feels as if Sara can somehow see every single thing Ava is thinking right now. Ava's not even sure what she's thinking right now, but it feels too vulnerable to allow Sara to continue.

Shifting her hips up impatiently, Ava jostles Sara slightly. Ava's waited too long to remain still much longer, she needs to feel Sara through the one kind of connection they seem willing to offer up to each other.

Getting the message, Sara's lips crook in a smile before she slides down Ava's body. Her lips map the way, lingering just a few seconds over the bullet wound that mars Ava's skin. Everything is gentle and soft in a way it never was before, something that cracks Ava open. Her chest feels tight even though that fire is burning through her body. It's nothing but overwhelming but Ava doesn't care, she wants this.

When breath ghosts over Ava, she shifts her hips upwards, seeking out Sara's mouth only to watch as Sara backs away. That motion doesn't work again because an arm lays over Ava's belly, fingers anchoring around her hip and forcing her to be still. Her chest heaving, Ava watches on as Sara tips her head against Ava's thigh and traces her fingers over the inside of Ava's hip. "Do you trust me?" Sara whispers, a question that has Ava's breathing catching slightly.

This isn't part of this. Sara is going off script here and Ava freezes, not knowing what to say. A single finger drifts up her stomach, finding it's way to her breastbone before coming back down again. Swallowing thickly, Ava shifts her thighs to gain some kind of friction. "I don't trust anybody," Ava replies as Sara's eyes flicker upwards to her once more.

It's not the answer Sara was looking for and Ava knows it. But she has no idea why this question is being asked right now in the first place. Teeth nip into the soft skin of Ava's thigh, right over a scar that came from a bullet graze four years ago. "Do—" Sara licks, her lips soothing the same place she just bit, "You," another kiss lands on her hip, "Trust me?" The final kiss lands just on Ava's pubic bone, Sara's chin nearly brushing where Ava needs her most.

Black burns through the blue in Sara's eyes, turning them dark as she stares up at Ava. Ava wants to fight this, she almost wants to run. Trusting someone doesn't just mean accepting that they could one day hurt Ava. It's so much more than that. It means accepting an eventual loss. That thought has Ava's chest threatening to spasm as she blinks rapidly to avoid any tears forming. She already lost Sara, or so she thought.

Sara doesn't understand what she's asking Ava to admit right now. This isn't just a question for the now, it's a question for the future—for the always. This would mean Ava saying she could live with a kind of loss she's spent years running away from. This would mean Ava caving to the conflict that has been at war inside her body from the moment Sara came into her life once more. Does Ava surrender, or does she continue to fight.

Fingertips press into her hipbone, gentle not harsh, drawing Ava back to the present. Wrenched back from the depths of her mind, Ava decides to settle somewhere in the middle ground. That feels safe for now. Taking in a quiet breath, Ava lets it out and looks to Sara's soft eyes. "I could—one day," Ava murmurs, her tone so hushed she's not sure that Sara's even heard it at all.

Sara's eyes peer up at her, waves of blue colliding in one place, fragments and clusters of color that Ava never could look away from. Another kiss is dropped along Ava's skin, something tender that has that ache rising up in her once more. "Can't that be enough?" Ava whispers, her hand sliding over Sara's arm along her stomach, her fingertips pressing into Sara's skin as she asks the question. There's no reply from Sara, just a quiet hum before she lowers her head down. When her tongue finally meets Ava, Ava tips her head back and closes her eyes, trying to meet Sara somewhere in the middle. For now.

Chapter End Notes

So I've had a few comments now asking to see Sara's POV in all of this and I thought I might take a moment to briefly address that. I have a hard time writing split POV fics that are this long and the plot has been formulated solely around Ava's perspective. That being said, I did have a small collection of moments I wanted to show through Sara's POV in a "follow up" of sorts. A split POV here would be too tricky to try and throw in this far into the fic, but if there's something specific you wanted to see, let me know in the comments. I've got a few things planned but I love getting input from others!

Part Thirteen

Chapter Summary

Sara and Ava finally have a needed discussion, but it doesn't go the way Ava plans. In the wake of the final leg of Sara's exit from the League, they both realize maybe they're not as safe as they once thought.

Chapter Notes

So this week was a bit insane, and it was virtually impossible to find time to write or the will to write lol. And I imagine next week is going to be the exact same. But I found time here and there and so here we are with part thirteen. I'm thinking there might be somewhere between 3-5 chapters left? I said I wasn't going to cut things but I think I changed my mind seeing as I'm likely to do a small series of moments from Sara's POV. There are some things I have outlined that might make more sense displayed from her POV but they won't be included here.

As always, same trigger warnings apply. There's just a decent bit of general violence or talks of violence in general. All of that being said, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Kathmandu, Nepal — 21:44

Shifting on the couch, Ava lets out a quiet sigh and stares down at the file in her lap. Three months into this endeavor to take down the mole within the Operative and Ava's no closer to piecing together who the traitor is and why. Every new piece of information comes with at least three more questions. It's this exhausting trail of messages that make limited sense and Ava is beginning to wonder if she's not set out on a pointless chase.

Sara's on the other side of the sofa, her legs curled up near her chest as she goes over the building plans for two places in the Philippines. She's attempting to narrow down which of the League's allies they should go after in the country based on which one would have the biggest impact. It's a puzzle they need to solve before leaving here in three days' time. Already they've found the last pieces of information Sara needed and after the Philippines, Sara should be completely in the clear.

It's not that simple for Ava however. Sara clearly knows so much about the internal workings of the League but Ava knows next to nothing of how the Operative has been running. She thought that she did, but this dig showed that she knows very little of their real partnerships around the globe. This has been a time of reckoning for Ava, a hard path of learning that she might have been working for something very different than she initially thought.

Silence had fallen between Sara and Ava about a half hour ago after Sara suggested that maybe the League and the Operative weren't so different. Ava hadn't liked that. The League kills people based on contracts and requests from outside sources. That's not what the Operative does. They run on secrets, not assassinations. Yet Sara had pushed and pointed out just how often Ava's job has

involved killing. She had a point, and Ava had momentarily felt sick to her stomach when she realized that maybe Sara wasn't so far off.

Certainly the file in Ava's lap suggests that Sara was nothing but right. It's detailing a conversation between One and some foreign power in America. There appears to be quite a bit of collusion between the Operative and the CIA, something that hasn't settled right with Ava. A further dig into some of the intel Ava has collected over time has shown that there were more than just a few jobs where she was protecting secrets belonging to American organizations as well.

It's not that Ava didn't know the League and the Operative were essentially two sides to one coin. They both perform tasks that sometimes relate to preserving reputation, they both take out targets in order to do this. The main difference is that the League takes outside contracts but the Operative does not. The Operative was meant to be an agency that worked towards preserving national security. Now Ava's learned that might not have always been the case. Now she knows that there are times where maybe the Operative was behaving the same as the League. She shouldn't have snapped at Sara for suggesting something they've both suspected was true, but having the proof sitting in front of her is hard for Ava to reconcile with.

Somewhere in the hallway, a sound goes off and Ava instantly straightens on the couch as her heart rate picks up. Her hand over her gun, Ava trains her eyes on the door and doesn't move. Only when laughter comes from just outside does she relax slightly, sinking back into the cushions and glancing to the file. "You really don't ever slow down do you?" Sara muses, a small smile on her lips when Ava turns to her. Her legs are tucked up under her, creating distance between them on the couch.

It's said as a gentle jest, a tease, but it's hardly funny. Her words are a reminder that Ava really hasn't taken much time in life to slow down and even once she leaves this job, adjusting to a calmer life is going to be nearly impossible. "No," Ava admits, removing her hand from her gun and settling her elbow along the back of the couch, "Our jobs are different, the League is a community organization, protecting their own," Sara makes a face at this and Ava hums before continuing on, "For the most part at least. But spies, we're on our own. The most the Operative does is warn us when something has compromised our positions, but even then they don't provide a way out."

That much was clear during the data leak. Ava had been sent to about eight different spies in various placements, but not once had she been given an exit plan for them if something had gone south. Henry had only sent her there as a warning, not as a source of help. It's something Ava has done before, but this time around when she was already questioning everything, it only made her rethink the principles of this organization she's devoted her life to. The League might be harsh, but the Operative is cold—Ava just can't tell which might be worse.

"I get it," Sara closes the file in her lap and turns to face Ava, her cheek coming to rest against the high backing of the couch, "I think I've been on my own for a while now. The League never liked everything I was doing on my jobs." That brings a small smile to Ava's face as she remembers the sheer destruction Sara would leave in her path no matter where she went. Sara is impressive, and she's not a force that Ava would ever be keen to go against again. Sometimes Sara's sheer lack of concern for the fallout of her actions makes her dangerous to anyone who crosses her, and there's something in that Ava can admire.

As Ava's reaching for her papers again, they're pulled from her reach and thrown onto the table. "We need drinks," Sara announces as she stands from the couch and walks to the kitchen. They don't need drinks. They need to get everything ready for the breach they're planning tomorrow where they'll be gathering information for Ava's quest. The plan is to break into a security firm where Ava hopes they'll find something concrete. Breadcrumbs left behind in messages from One

to Two had led Ava to this particular firm. It's been mentioned hundreds of times in codes that Ava painstakingly deciphered last night and this morning, and she's nervous about what they might find.

In the small kitchenette, Ava can hear glasses clinking together and she turns over her shoulder to see what Sara is doing. They're both in for the night after a long day of completing jobs in the city, so Sara has already showered. Her hair hangs in damp waves around her face, a few already dried strands caught along her cheek. When Ava showed up here after Sara had already arrived, she found that Sara had cut her hair. It no longer spills down her shoulder blades as it had before but instead stops just under her clavicles. Ava thinks this length might suit Sara better.

The light catches the top of Sara's hair where it's just drying, illuminating strands of lighter blonde and turning them gold. Recently Ava's wanted to ask Sara something stupid. Or blurt out something stupid. After a life spent hiding and keeping everything in, Sara makes Ava want to try something new and different. She wants to try telling Sara the truth but that feels impossible. What she should do is wait until this is over, but Ava knows her patience won't last long.

Ava doesn't know everything there is to know about Sara, and normally that's something that might keep her away. Research matters in this line of work and Ava prides herself on never stepping into circumstances until she knows her subject well. This time around things have been different. Ava's in this with Sara despite having a lack of complete understanding. Yet she finds that she doesn't care if Sara is still this half-completed puzzle in her mind, Ava just wants to try and solve things as she goes. Maybe Sara has the right idea with never making fully-formulated plans. As they've seen, plans often go to hell in seconds in this line of work.

"You're different," Ava murmurs, watching as Sara's eyes lift upwards and lock onto her own, "Before the Operative took you, you weren't the same as you are now." They don't really talk about Sara's disappearance. Mostly because it still makes Ava feel a little angry and bitter that Sara never reached out.

Surprise flickers across Sara's face for a few seconds, but then it's gone, replaced with a small smile instead. "Well, nothing like some good old-fashioned torture to refresh one's perspective," Sara hums with a shrug, her gaze falling back to the drinks she's mixing, "Maybe I did some soul searching in that cell seeing as there was nothing else to do but await my demise in the dark."

Something ugly and hard forms in a knot behind Ava's ribs, putting pressure on her heart in a way that makes it beat irregularly for a moment. "Maybe," Ava manages out, clearing her throat and looking away. She doesn't like reminders that Sara was alone there for at least a few days thinking there was no way out. Ava doesn't like reminders of that phone call she received and the way she could hear the life slipping from Sara's body.

"You've changed too," Sara remarks as Ava turns her head once more, feeling a bit confused, "When we met you never would have done something like this—helping me or turning on your own organization." Sara's right, but that was years ago. People reinvent themselves in far less time. Ava's still working on that if she's being honest.

"Maybe I did some soul searching too," Ava sighs, settling into her corner of the couch once more as Sara comes over and hands her a drink. It's some kind of martini, though Ava doesn't care much what it is—it has enough vodka to take away the edge that's settled in her body. The drink burns as it moves down her throat, leaving a lingering heat in its wake. "Nothing like a good old-fashioned faked death to reset perspectives," Ava mumbles, her lips still around the rim of her drink.

Sara jerks on the opposite end of the couch, making a quiet choking sound before removing her drink from her mouth. Blue eyes find Ava's own, but Ava looks away. She shouldn't have said

that. They've found something resembling peace between them and a comment like that compromises things. "Ava," Sara sighs quietly but Ava just shakes her head and holds out her hand. There's no need to bring this up again.

Staring at the two beds opposite the couch, Ava swallows around the thickness in her throat. "I shouldn't have gone there again," Ava says by way of apology, her fingers tapping nervously along the back of the couch, "We've already talked about this, you've already said that you had to stay away."

A strangled sounding exhale comes from Sara, something that almost makes Ava turn her direction. But she already knows what she'll see. Sara will be staring somewhere else with that conflicted and guilty expression on her face. Yet nothing actually comes from it. Surprisingly, Ava is the spy and yet Sara is the one who is clinging to all of her secrets. "I was afraid of putting you in danger," Sara says quietly as Ava's resolve breaks and she turns to her once more, "I stayed away because I knew if I reached out, if I found you in a city, I wasn't going to leave again." Her breath catching, Ava scans Sara's face, taking in the pinched line of her mouth and the glimmer in her eyes. "I'm not safe for you Ava," Sara shakes her head in a minute gesture, "You don't understand how close the League came to finding you before I was taken."

"Then why come back at all?" Ava pushes, the pressure rising in her stomach and forcing it's way to her chest, "If you're so bad and if I'm in so much danger, why find me in New York. I've seen your plans so far so I know you could have done most of this on your own if you wanted too." Sara's jaw works as she turns her head to the side, her fingers tightening around her glass. "You're resourceful, so the reason you gave for needing my contacts was bullshit," Ava can't seem to stop herself though she knows that she should, "So why come back for me? Why pull me into this if it meant I wouldn't be safe."

When Sara settles her glass on the table firmly, the sound echoes in the room, striking Ava's ears in a harsh manner. Her body tenses as Sara shifts along the couch, her eyes locked on Ava's own. A single leg swings over Ava's body and a weight settles in her lap. The drink in Ava's hand is taken away and placed on the table as well, gentler this time. "Because I'm selfish," Sara shakes her head, a hand coming up to cup Ava's cheek. The heartbeat in Ava's chest has picked up, thundering traitorously loud. Conflicted blue eyes sweep over Ava's face as Sara leans in, her nose brushing Ava's own delicately, "Because I couldn't stay away from you."

Sucking in a quiet breath, Ava stares back into Sara's eyes that have gone blurry, far too close for her to focus on. Her hands settle along Sara's waist, holding her in place, holding her gently. Something raw and tender and exposed flutters in Ava's chest. In an attempt to be brave, to be courageous, Ava leans forwards and her forehead bumps against Sara's own. "Is that such a bad thing?" Ava asks in a small whisper as a thumb brushes over her lower lip before it's released with a quiet popping sound, "Is it really that terrible to just be selfish every once in a while?"

A few beats of silence come and Ava wishes that she had the ability to look into Sara's thoughts. She wishes that she could untangle synapses and neurons just to have a single glimpse into what Sara is thinking for once. "Yes," Sara hums, her breath washing over Ava's face as she lets out a sigh, "It really is." But all the same, lips meet Ava's own, soft and warm and familiar in a way that aches. Liquor lingers on Sara's lips but Ava kisses it away. Her hands come to frame Sara's face, holding her close just in case Sara gets any ideas on disappearing again. The files abandoned for the evening, Ava holds Sara against her. Selfish or not, they're both in this and for Ava, she doesn't see a way out. Not that she ever wanted one.

"I'm fine," Ava snaps after Sara casts her another wayward glance from the kitchen, "You don't have to keep looking over at me every five seconds, nothing has changed since the last time you checked." Irritation ripples and bubbles under Ava's skin, anger sparking in her chest and rage burning through her stomach. None of this is Sara's fault and Ava really shouldn't snap at her. But this has been an impossibly hard night and Ava is struggling to maintain her composure of her emotions.

"You just learned that everything you thought and more was right," Sara murmurs from the kitchen, the knife moving in rhythmic dull clacks along the cutting board, "I think that warrants having someone looking over at you here and again. You haven't moved since we found the file."

No, Ava hasn't. If she moves right now she'll probably do something like tip this table or throw on her clothing and go for a run until she can't breathe. In the past twenty-four hours, all of Ava's worst suspicions and more have come true. Their inquiry into the Operative's files here in Nepal had everything Ava needed and then some. Piecing through everything has taken time, but as of a half hour ago, Ava had cracked the cipher and she and Sara were able to read the messages.

It had been Sara who discovered the original key that led to Ava realizing the cipher code. What she found was the secure transmission from number One to the League regarding Ava's Moscow job. Because Ava already knew the details of that job and Sara remembered fragments of the message she received, they were able to work backwards solving the cipher. Once they were able to do that, all of the following messages were able to be decoded.

Ava had been wrong about the mole being a recent betrayal in the Operative. They've been transferring information with the League for about fifteen years, for longer than Ava's even worked here. It doesn't seem as if numbers Two and Three know about this betrayal, or if they do they've remained silent about it. But number One has not only given information to the League but received it as well. There are some Operative jobs, some of Ava's jobs that have been performed under both Operative and League interests.

There's countless messages spread over the table in front of Ava but she can't bring herself to read through all of them. Already she had counted about fifteen jobs she's worked in the past three years alone that served the interests of both organizations. "I guess we should have seen something like this coming," Sara murmurs as Ava jerks in her seat, her head turning to look at Sara, "We always wondered how you and I kept running into each other in the same cities. I guess this explains the reason."

It more than explains the reason, and Ava feels like an idiot for not seeing it sooner. Time after time she and Sara kept running into one another. They had assumed the whole time that they were there against each other when in reality they had separate parts of one job. "How are you so calm about this?" Ava asks, not understanding the lack of reaction from Sara, "We just learned that this entire time, someone in my organization was plotting with yours. How many jobs did we spend fighting when the goal was always for us to be working together when we didn't know it."

This undermines everything Ava thought she knew. It's reality shaking and yet Sara seems completely unbothered. "Ava," Sara hums as she sets the knife down, her eyes finding Ava's own, "You work for a shadow organization that survives off secrecy. Are you really so surprised that something like this had been happening in the background the entire time? Hadn't you always wondered what was the 'why' behind everything?"

"It wasn't my place to ask why," Ava defends herself, shrinking into the cushions and staring off to the side of the room, "There is supposed to be some kind of mutual trust between those of us on the

ground and the people calling the shots. To ask why is to violate that.” This is what Ava had been taught, find answers and don’t ask the wrong questions. There are other people in the Operative that ask those questions, but Ava is simply meant to execute orders. It’s only over the past three years that Ava has found the desire to ask questions here and there.

That’s why this endeavor she has set on to uncover the truth has been so challenging. Ava’s not used to this kind of digging, she’s not used to questioning the orders that she’s given—not in this capacity. “Well, I’m not surprised,” Sara replies, lifting her shoulder in a shrug, “Secret agencies will always have their secrets. I had questioned all of this myself back in the beginning when I was tasked with your protection. Though this does make me wonder if the League was aware of who you are all this time.”

That’s a thought that hadn’t crossed Ava’s mind at all. Sitting up straight, Ava turns her body along the couch so she’s now facing Sara. “You think they knew they were sending you out to protect a member of the Operative?” Ava poses as Sara just shrugs again and nods, “So then why would they care about finding me now? Why would I still be in danger if they haven’t come for me yet?”

“The League isn’t loyal to anyone but themselves, plain and simple,” Sara states, grinding the pepper shaker before scooping both plates in her hands and coming to the couch, “If you accidentally got in the way of something, their connection to your higher ups wouldn’t matter. They’d still kill you, regardless of any consequences the Operative might attempt to impose on them.”

Taking the plate that Sara offers her, Ava settles with her back along the arm of the couch, her legs spread in front of her. On the other end, Sara mirrors Ava’s position, their calves and knees brushing. Sara’s far too calm in all of this, too resigned to the fact that the truth appears to be subjective when it comes to their jobs. Ava can’t possibly be okay with that. She left her life behind to do this job and now it’s turning out to be nothing like she once expected. Everything is entrenched in layer after layer of secrecy that Ava knew existed, but she never thought that it would apply to her own work.

As Sara begins eating the food they picked up not even three hours ago, Ava twirls her fork along her plate, her appetite no longer present. “I think what’s more problematic is that the League was using the Operative to take out assassins, like me,” Sara mumbles, her mouth half full of food as she points to a sheet of paper with names that sits on the table, “I always wondered how they got rid of us before they sent us on those jobs, now I know.” Humming quietly, Ava just nods her head. “We always knew about that one,” Sara taps the handle of her fork against a name, “Michael Donnelly.”

Instantly Ava’s blood runs cold. Every muscle in her body stiffens and an ache forms along the scar tissue near her spine. “What did you just say?” Ava asks in a strained voice, her breathing faltering in her chest.

“Michael Donnelly?” Sara repeats, looking confused as Ava stares at her, “He was one of ours, died as some collateral damage in one of your organization’s schemes.” That is not what happened at all. Not even close. Shuffling forwards, Ava abandons her plate and her food along the table and takes the paper that Sara had been tapping.

The list of names is there along with all of the communication that came with them. Sara had been the one compiling any names she came across, but she hadn’t organized the correspondences so Ava had to search for what she’s looking for. However she knows the date in question, so that should make this easier. Rapidly flipping through papers, Ava comes to a stop along a sheet that

contains a single message to the League, and a response that came after. “*Subject is highly dangerous,*” the message from the League reports, “*Proceed with caution.*”

There’s a detailed passage that comes underneath that listing out Donnelly’s strengths. Ava finds it there, third from the top, “*Demolitions expert*”. Anger rips through her body, that familiar and sickening ache rising in her stomach. He had been the target they were tracking back in Bucharest, the one that the Operative never warned them about. The intel Ava was given listed Donnelly as a service repair man. They were warned that he was dangerous and knew how to defend himself, but nobody had said anything about the bombs.

“They knew,” Ava murmurs, staring at the paper in shock, her throat tight, “They sent us in there to bring him in but they knew what he was.” The hand holding the paper trembles so Ava throws the stack of messages to the table once more. So many people died that day, not just Operative members. The media swept it all under the rug, courtesy of Operative interference, so nobody ever knew the real damage that happened there that day.

“Ava,” Sara speaks quietly, the couch shifting beside Ava. A palm lands against Ava’s spine but she jolts away. Right now her skin burns too badly to be touched. “Okay,” Sara hums, nodding her head in Ava’s periphery, “Just take in a deep breath for me.” Ava tries, but the air doesn’t reach the depths of her lungs. Closing her eyes, Ava takes a moment to try and calm herself down.

The Operative knew about the faulty information and they still sent Ava and the others in there. Curling in on herself, Ava draws her knees up by her chest and rests her chin on them as she makes an effort to take in slow breaths. Panicking about this isn’t going to change the outcome of that day. Everyone already died and there’s nothing that Ava getting worked up is going to do other than make her feel worse. But that’s easier said than done.

A hand hovers just at Ava’s shoulder and she can’t help but lean into it now, the contact no longer burning. Sara is warm, somehow she always is and Ava likes that about her. Now that warmth is comforting, something Ava actively seeks out as she allows Sara to move closer on the couch. Their shoulders and hips press together as an arm winds around Ava’s body and draws her close. Ava’s head comes to land right on Sara’s shoulder, her fingers curling into the soft fabric of Sara’s black shirt. “What happened that day?” Sara whispers, her voice sounding so loud in the nearly silent room.

When Ava sucks in a deep breath, she can feel the stutter of her own heart in her chest. “It was a bomb,” Ava replies, not really sure how else to describe the events of that day, not sure that she could start from the beginning if she wanted to, “We didn’t know that he was setting a trap, and we didn’t know that he never planned on getting out of that building alive.” The day they arrived there to take the building, Ava had this twisting feeling in her stomach. That single job is the primary reason that she doesn’t rush into things. Lacking a plan in the field never leads to anything good.

“We were given the all clear on taking in into custody if we could, but killing him if we couldn’t,” Ava shrugs, her cheek brushing against Sara’s shoulder as the hand along her waist draws her closer, “The Operative sent six of us in but like I told you before, only I made it out. Nobody ever said anything about it afterwards, and nobody ever explained where the man really came from. We were told he was a civilian, but they knew who he was.”

Or at least One knew who he was. But Ava has to believe that there were others who knew as well. There’s every possibility that Henry knew too. That’s something Ava doesn’t even want to consider. She remembers the look on his face, the clear display of grief and regret. Henry is a good liar, but surely not even he could be that good at lying. Surely he wouldn’t stand in a room when Ava had been administered so many drugs and lie to her face about never knowing the dangers.

Pushing that thought to the back of her mind, Ava curls further into Sara, resting her bent knees over Sara's own thigh. "I'm sorry," Sara murmurs, her nose brushing against Ava's forehead seconds before a gentle kiss is placed in the same spot. It's heartbreakingly tender, something that has Ava's chest seizing up and her muscles going stiff. Comfort isn't something Ava's offered in this line of work. This is new and Ava can't tell if she likes it or not but she doesn't want to move, so maybe that's an indication of the feelings even she can't access just yet.

"We don't have to keep pushing this," Sara's voice is soft, her hand now resting over Ava's topmost knee, a thumb running over the fabric of her pants over and over, "You've learned enough to present this to the others and get out, haven't you?" Technically yes, but followup would be needed and this is something Ava wants to do herself. Her eyes caught on Sara's fingers, Ava lifts her shoulder in a single shrug. "If we keep going, you might learn more," Sara reminds Ava, "You might find something really heinous in this trail we're following."

There's every chance that they're going to find something horrific and Ava knows it. A betrayal that runs this deep doesn't come without casualties. It's only a matter of time before they find the trail of bodies that accompanies each lie One ever told and tried to keep hidden. Not even a spy could keep a secret like this for as long as One has without taking out anyone who dared challenge them. Yet Ava's in this now and she's determined to finish it herself. This was her job, and now she's learning that the organization she's poured her life into isn't as she once thought it was. There's no way she can walk away without getting final answers.

"No," Ava shakes her head, sitting up and pulling away from Sara, "I need to finish this search just as much as you need to finish toppling the League." There's a look of understanding, and maybe also sorrow on Sara's features when Ava turns her head in Sara's direction. With a heavy sigh, Ava looks around at all the files spread along tables in front of them, her eyes catching on the one open to the list of names. "We need a change of scenery," Ava announces, standing from the couch and walking to her shoes, "I know you just made dinner, but how do you feel about a round of drinks?"

Letting out a little laugh, Sara stands up as well. "I'm always up for drinks," Sara replies evenly, tossing a smile Ava's direction as she steps into her own shoes near the table, "We can always finish this on the plane tomorrow if we need." They probably should do more work tonight, but Ava would rather take up Sara's suggestion so they can drink whatever they want at the bar across the street. Nodding her head, Ava shrugs her coat on and heads for the door.

As Sara steps outside to the hallway, Ava spares just one more glance towards the files laid spread over the table. Exhaling quietly, she closes the door and swiftly locks it before turning to catch up with Sara. A hand slips inside the crook of Ava's arm, tucked there between her elbow and her body. Ava needed the contact, that reminder that she's okay. She doesn't thank Sara though, she just hums, knowing somehow that Sara will understand exactly what she means by the sound.

Manila, Philippines — 08:04

Rolling over with a tired grunt, Ava shuffles her legs under the covers before throwing her arm to the side. Rather than hitting the mattress, her arm strikes something warm and soft. Ava's eyes jolt open as she startles slightly and takes in the scene in front of her. Light is pouring through the open window by the bed, assaulting her senses and making Ava close her eyes for a few seconds more as she adjusts. "Good morning," Sara replies in a tone of voice that is far too chipper considering how early it must be.

"Too loud," Ava complains, pushing her hand against Sara's bare side. A laugh comes in response as Sara shifts on the bed, moving even closer. Taking a chance with the light again, Ava cracks just

a single eye open. This wasn't what she expected from this morning. Ava expected to wake and find Sara gone, or at least in the other bed, or maybe even somewhere clattering around in the kitchen as she had been yesterday morning.

Last night Ava remembers Sara falling apart underneath her before she promptly fell asleep minutes after. They had been going over the plans for today and Sara's eyes had closed somewhere around the time Ava had been explaining the mechanics of the bombs they're using. It had taken Ava about half of a lecture on the difference between timed ignition and manual ignition to realize that Sara had in fact fallen asleep right on her shoulder, and at that point she would have felt bad waking Sara.

They've never slept in the same bed after having sex. They've certainly never slept as close as they did last night when neither of them had been wearing clothing. Ava had fallen quiet, stuck staring at Sara as she slept on. Her lips were parted in her sleep, her hand resting almost protectively over the healing bullet wound along Ava's stomach. For some reason Sara rests her palm there from time to time, and she's taken to pressing her lips to the scar each and every time she moves down Ava's body. Ava would like to assign meaning to that, she would like to assume that it's because Sara was shaken by that night just as Ava was shaken by Sara's death. But she wonders if that wouldn't just be wishful thinking on her part.

It had taken Ava some time to go to sleep, too focused on the soft puffs of air hitting her neck and the way Sara has a habit of mumbling in her sleep. She assumed that in the morning, Sara would be gone and they would just pretend nothing happened as they have the other times they've shared a bed. Yet here Sara is, still naked, and holding a chocolate muffin in her hand as she reads a file propped against her legs. Not only is Sara here not that Ava is awake, but she had clearly left and come back.

"Want some?" Sara asks, offering the muffin to Ava as a series of small crumbs fall to the white sheets. Wrinkling her nose, Ava carefully picks each of them up and places them inside the wrapper laid between them on the bed. "I eat the bottom last," Sara explains, though Ava hadn't asked, "My sister always did that when I was little, she said that the top is the best part and should be saved."

Humming quietly, Ava props herself up on her elbow and draws her legs up near her chest. Sara doesn't mention her family, and Ava thinks this might be the first time that Sara has willingly brought them up. The covers slip down near Ava's waist, exposing the bare skin of her chest and stomach. Blue eyes roam her body slowly, finally reaching Ava's own eyes as Ava shakes her head with a smile. "I'll pass on the muffin," Ava tells her as Sara just raises her brows and shrugs, "But I will take that file."

Sara doesn't even argue when Ava reaches out and takes the file from her. Rolling to her stomach, Ava lays the file out on the pillow and holds herself up with her elbows. This is their last target in Sara's quest to tackle the League. Supposedly this is the location where nearly all central information relevant to the League passes through. Sara has since explained her plan in depth and she has revealed that contracts are passed through this corporation and the League derives quite a bit of their political power from this ally as well.

The plan is to go in and bring the place to the ground. Sara will be inside where she'll insert a disk drive to the mainframe that will unleash a nasty computer virus that Ava's been holding onto. Ava will also be inside, though she's going to be down in the basement strapping their explosives to the pillars that support the building itself. Already there's a plan in place to force evacuation of the area so no civilians are caught in the blast. Thankfully the building itself is in a remote plaza and is removed from any other buildings that might suffer the effects of the blast.

As for Ava's agenda, Sara will be taking the contents of a particular file on the server prior to destroying everything. Seeing as the terminal contains information of the contracts and communications that go through to the League, Ava is hoping there might be some kind of a clue left behind. She's hoping they might get the final cipher required to break through the remaining messages and files she has for whoever One is. This could all be a shot in the dark though and Ava knows it.

Flipping the pages in front of her, Ava turns to the section regarding the building plans themselves. Just as she locates the server room Sara will be heading to, a single finger lands along Ava's spine. Casting a look over her shoulder, Ava takes in the look of mock innocence on Sara's face as that same finger continues moving down the length of her back. "I'm supposed to be reading," Ava reminds her, tapping her thumb along the edge of the papers.

"What's stopping you?" Sara replies, a small smile on her face as she tilts her head to the side. Her body is now curved towards Ava's own, her knees bumping Ava's thighs under the covers. Ava's eyes travel the expanse of soft pale skin along Sara's chest, dappled and decorated with thousands of clusters of freckles. "Keep reading," Sara prompts, her hand skimming just below Ava's waist before smoothing back up to her shoulders.

With a slight click of her tongue, Ava turns her attention back to the file in her hands and does her best to repress the shiver rising up in her body. Focusing is made much harder when Sara is touching her like this. This doesn't feel sexual at all, it's just Sara running her hand up and down the length of Ava's back. Fingers catch along the skin Ava knows her own scars rest along, pausing each time.

The moment a single finger tip brushes that long and jagged mark near her spine, Ava stiffens. Sara's ministrations have paused, but this time Ava doesn't dare look to her. Swallowing thickly, Ava grips the edges of the file. "Who did this to you?" Sara's voice is low and hard, angry in a way that Ava hasn't heard her in a while.

"Not a who," Ava replies quietly, her eyes flickering to Sara's tense features then back to the file, "A what. The bomb in Bucharest." A quiet hum falls from Sara's lips as the touch along her spine resumes. "I spent a lot of time recovering from that injury," Ava murmurs, resting her cheek along her own shoulder as she turns to Sara, "Sometimes it still aches from time to time, they said it would take a while for that to ever stop."

"I've got a few that do that," Sara reveals, her hand leaving Ava's back to tap the scar resting in the contour of her ribs, "This one wasn't very deep but for some reason it hurt worse than the others." Ava's eyes wander to that very scar along Sara's side. She's wanted to ask about it and some of the others for quite some time. The scars along Sara's back are blunted and uniform, containing a unique look to them that Ava recognizes.

It's as if those deeper wounds had been cauterized, each of them burned over. But Ava's learned by now that asking Sara about her scars is not something Sara appreciates. So instead Ava hums now, looking back to the file as she does so. "So their biggest ally is just here hanging out in plain sight," Ava muses, flipping through the information Sara has compiled on them, "Filtering through the League's dirty deeds and never batting an eye when asked to funnel more support their way?"

A quiet snort comes from Sara just seconds before her body presses along Ava's side. Not sure what to do with the sudden invasion of space, Ava stiffens slightly. "This is their biggest political ally," Sara explains, her palm still brushing up and down Ava's back, almost as if she's prompting her to relax, "Once you do your thing to bring down the financial allies and we blow this place up, I should be free."

There's a wistfulness to Sara's tone that has Ava glancing her way once more. Sara's eyes are focused on Ava's shoulder, her lips turned down into something that isn't quite a frown. An urge to kiss Sara to remove that look wells up in Ava, but she promptly shoves it back down. "Do you go back to Star City right after this?" Ava asks, carefully measuring Sara's response as she shrugs, "I'll still have things to wrap up here, you could always stick around if you want," Ava clears her throat quietly, her gaze falling to her hands, "Maybe come get a drink with me?"

They have drinks every evening, but that isn't what Ava's asking. She's attempting to be just a bit braver than she has been lately. But apparently Ava's been reading too much into the newfound level of intimacy between her and Sara. The moment the words leave her mouth, Sara goes still, her hand jerking away from Ava's back as if she's been burnt. A bitter taste rises along the back of Ava's throat, her cheeks burning red and disappointment swelling low in her stomach. "In celebration of course," Ava tries to backtrack, turning her head to the side so Sara can't see her face, "Of you being free and me getting what should be the last piece of information I need."

"Ava," Sara murmurs, that edge back to her voice that Ava wishes wasn't there. Shame burns through Ava's body as she tries to roll away, only to be caught by a hand to her arm. Turning her head, Ava takes in Sara's pinched features. The frown along her lips has only deepened, her brows drawn in and her eyes cast down towards the mattress. Nothing about this suggests that Sara is about to accept Ava's proposal. "Ava if I could—" Sara cuts off with a short little exhale, her eyes lifting to Ava's own, "It would be with you, if I could."

Frustrated and not understanding Sara's words, Ava pulls her arm away and stands up. Already feeling far too exposed, Ava takes the top sheet with her as she moves, winding it around her body. Sara wants this. She wants this as Ava wants this but she is laying there saying no and it makes no sense to Ava. "What does that even mean?" Ava demands, backing away from the bed as Sara sighs impatiently and flops to her back, "You're free from the League once we do this, why can't you go out for drinks with me?"

This is not the conclusion to things that Ava wanted. This whole time some of her assumption in the beginning was that Sara was staying away from Ava for the same reason Ava kept her distance. Then Sara came back for this, asking for Ava's help on getting out of the League but they both know she didn't need Ava here with her. Clearly this wasn't only about a job for Sara, and Ava knows it wasn't just about work on her end either. Caring for someone in their line of work is dangerous and dates are nearly pointless when Ava is in a new city every week. But they're both leaving this world of assassinations and secrets and lies.

They're both about to get a fresh start in the real world where people don't move countries every few days and where they go on dates and where they get to be happy with someone else. Ava wants that and she wants it with Sara. It's taken her so long to acknowledge this one thing she really wants for herself, but here Sara is, saying that it would be a 'yes' if it wasn't a 'no'. "Because I don't know how to do this Ava," Sara says with a bitter laugh, her hand motioning between them.

"And I do?" Ava counters, her voice rising as Sara's eyes cut to the side, her frown more pronounced than Ava has ever seen it, "Let's be real, neither of us know how to do this Sara. We're used to being alone. But for the past two years you and I keep finding each other again and again and I know I'm not the only one invested in whatever this is between us. I—"

"I kill things Ava," Sara interrupts, sounding nothing but angry and still so deeply bitter. Her words slice through Ava, decimating whatever hope she had in a positive outcome here. "I am an assassin, killing things is what I do," Sara shakes her head, her voice quieting, "You would be no different."

Sara would choose now to suddenly adhere to some kind of a warped moral compass. Ava has seen her take down several men with a single shot and not even flinch, but now Sara is sticking to this idea of doing no harm. “You could have killed me the night you met me in Moscow,” Ava points out as Sara sucks in a deep breath, “You could have drugged my drink, stabbed me on the walk, shot me in your room. But you didn’t do those things and you never once tried to truly kill me after that either.”

That look is still on Sara’s face and Ava hates it. She hates it with an ache in her stomach that spreads to her chest, her limbs, her throat. When Sara shakes her head once more, Ava turns her face to the side, her eyes burning as she swallows around the thickness settling in her throat. “I’m not talking about physically harming you,” Sara murmurs quietly, “There’s more than one kind of death Ava.”

Ava nearly wants to laugh. She knows that Sara is harsh on herself, they both are in different ways. But to propose this idea that somehow Sara would kill Ava in some non-physical sense, well that’s just absurd. “You’re not a monster, Sara,” Ava argues, letting out a quiet laugh as Sara shifts on the bed, “How many times do I have to tell you this?” There’s no response from Sara, so Ava moves to the dresser that contains her clothing.

Not even bothering to look inside the drawers, Ava grabs things and throws them on, keeping a careful eye on Sara the entire time. She looks lost, sitting on the bed with the covers now drawn around her as she rests against the headboard. Their jobs have been cruel to them both, Ava knows that. But maybe they haven’t been cruel in the same ways. Maybe there’s something Sara’s grappling with that Ava just can’t understand.

Whatever the case is, Ava doesn’t think this means that Sara is beyond forgiveness. How could she when Ava’s done some of the same things that Sara has, from murder to torture to ruining lives from the inside out. “You don’t know everything that I’ve done,” Sara’s voice is so quiet Ava has to strain to hear it even as she comes closer to the bed, “You cannot possibly begin to understand the things that I did before I was an assassin.”

Maybe not, but Ava has a pretty good idea of where to start. Sara’s mentioned the drug, and she’s mentioned that this man, Anthony Ivo was performing experiments on people. Based on the rough mental timeline Ava’s pieced together, Sara would have been around for some of those experiments. She would have been so young—too young. It doesn’t take much thought to arrive at the conclusion that Sara likely would have been forced into helping conduct those evil experiments. “I don’t know everything, you’re right. But I don’t care that I don’t know it all,” Ava sighs quietly and looks to her feet as Sara lets out a stuttered exhale, “You don’t know all of my past either. Why is it different?”

There’s no reply and there’s no response Sara could come up with right now that Ava wouldn’t be able to immediately counter. Ava is a spy and Sara is an assassin, but they’ve both done their fair share of bad things. One could argue that Ava’s efforts to get close to people in order to then ruin them and their companies constitutes a uniquely cruel kind of emotional harm. Ava’s not lacking a long list of evil deeds in her own past.

When the silence continues to span on, Ava runs her fingers through her hair in frustration. “Well if you have no argument then why can’t we do this?” Ava pushes on as Sara’s gaze remains firmly fixed on the sheets in front of her, “Why can’t we do this and try to learn? If you can honestly tell me that you don’t want this, I’ll drop it—but I don’t think you can do that.” Once more, Sara is quiet, something that only makes the frustration and desperation rise and swell in Ava’s body.

She hates confrontation, so even doing this means putting herself in an uncomfortable position. But

it would all be worth it if Sara would just fucking talk to her. The silence is almost unbearable, the tension blanketing the room. Her eyes burning and her throat tight, Ava just nods her head curtly as the disappointment and anger ripples through her in waves, all directed at herself for putting herself out there. “Right,” Ava mutters, clearing her throat roughly and walking to the door, “I need a walk.”

“Ava,” Sara says her name quietly, but with so much resignation that it hurts.

Flinching slightly, Ava just shakes her head and keeps her eyes on her shoes as she slips them on. “I’ll be fine,” Ava deflects with a statement they both know is a lie, “I just need a few moments to myself. I’ll be back and we can go over the plans again.” Not giving Sara any room to protest, Ava opens the door with a jerky movement and steps out swiftly. Her breathing catching in her chest the moment she closes the door, Ava closes her eyes and stands there in the hall for a moment.

That had been a mistake. Ava should have just kept quiet about it all. It might have been worth it if they were different people with different jobs and different paths. But they’re not. Maybe this is the price that Ava gets to pay for years spent doing the work she has. Maybe one day when Ava leaves this job, she might find someone who knows nothing of who she once was and what she did. It won’t be the same though and she knows it. Part of what draws Ava to Sara is the fact that they just understand each other. Or so Ava thought.

Tears well in Ava’s eyes but she brushes them away before they can fall. Crying will solve nothing here. What Ava needs is a walk to clear her head before coming back and throwing herself into completing this last job. There’s a plan in place, and when Ava arrives back here, it’s time to cast personal matters to the side and focus only on her role. She’s just not sure how to do that yet. Pushing away from the door, Ava sets off towards the stairwell, her body craving fresh air and however much space it takes to gain some perspective before coming back to Sara and their room and everything that was just said. With one more quiet sigh, Ava pushes open the door and prepares herself for what is going to be a long walk.

Manila, Philippines — 22:34

Keeping a careful eye on the door leading down the basement steps, Ava wraps the final bomb that she brought with her around the pillar. There are six pillars in total down here and three bombs. Ava hadn’t wanted to do it anymore because the goal is not to destroy the entire block but rather to just demolish the building. Sara should have placed the secondary charges up on the middle floor of the building to help even out this process. If everything goes well here, they should be able to get far enough away before setting the bombs off.

Before coming here, Ava had made sure that the other buildings in the surrounding area would be empty just in case. It was easy enough to fake reports of a gas leak in the nearby area, her favourite go to plan. Sara hadn’t been confident that would be enough to get the civilians out, but a quick scan of the surrounding buildings revealed that they had been evacuated in full. There’s nothing in the immediate range of the blast, but Ava would rather be safe than sorry and Sara had agreed that an extra degree of caution was needed.

They’ve not spoken much since Ava foolishly attempted to ask Sara out. Ava had returned after an hour long walk, still feeling embarrassed, still not able to look at Sara. Some of the hurt had settled and faded by then, though it came up hours later when Sara had laughed at some silly thing Ava said. Sara’s good at acting as if nothing has happened between them, but Ava can’t bring herself to push that conversation from her mind. Instead she’s been going over every single word Sara uttered, every single expression that flickered over her features.

At this point Ava can confidently say that Sara has to have some feelings for her, at least in some capacity or another. What she doesn't understand is the full line of reasoning behind Sara's decision to shut down Ava's proposal. This constant balancing game between them seems to be reaching some kind of a tipping point and Ava's worried that it isn't going to land in her favor. For whatever reason, Sara doesn't seem to want this in the same way that Ava does. Sighing quietly, Ava carefully sets the charges and steps back. Around the room, each of the bombs are neatly placed and aligned, just waiting for her to press the button safely clipped to her belt. *"I'm on my way to the lobby,"* Sara's voice chimes in over the communication device tucked in Ava's ear, *"Are you good on your end?"*

"Yeah," Ava murmurs, adjusting the bomb once more before heading to the steps, "We should get out of here quickly—if we want to avoid being seen." As it stands Ava is going to have to wipe footage from the surrounding cameras in the area. It won't be hard to do, but she wouldn't have to do it at all if Sara had just let her cut the power to this block as Ava wanted. Instead Sara made Ava leave it on—all because she didn't want to take the stairs thirty stories up to the server room.

Heading to the stairs, Ava takes them two at a time and emerges into the lobby just as the elevator dings. Sara steps out with a series of files in one hand, her knife in the other. Just like Ava, she's dressed from head to toe in black clothing, though Sara had refused the protective vest Ava had offered her. What she had accepted was Ava's shoulder holster just in case there was anyone lingering in the building, but Ava never heard shots fired over the communication line so she's going to assume the building was clear. "Ready to get out of here?" Sara asks, tossing Ava one of the helmets they laid along the desk upon their arrival.

This plan required a speedy departure from the scene, so Ava had reluctantly agreed to ride along with Sara on the motorbike Sara had somehow found in the city. It wasn't ideal not only because Ava is still terrified of riding on bikes of that kind, but because it involved being pressed against Sara for the entire ride here. Now Ava gets to do that all over again. Placing the helmet over her head, Ava follows Sara from the building. "No speeding," Ava reminds Sara in a quiet grumble as she watches Sara mount the bike.

"You think anything two miles over is speeding," Sara scoffs as Ava just rolls her eyes. Throwing her leg over the bike, Ava settles behind Sara. Their hips align and that ache forms back in Ava's chest as she presses her body against Sara's back. Tentatively, Ava wraps her arms around Sara's waist and rests her palms flat over Sara's stomach. "You'll fall off if you hold on like that," Sara chides quietly, her voice soft as she guides Ava's arms further around her, "Can't lose my favourite spy tonight."

Her words hurt, but Ava just hums through the dull pain that throbs in her chest. Sara's trying to make light of this, to try and make things easier and Ava knows it. But there is nothing easy about wanting to be with someone who has made themselves unavailable. There's certainly nothing easy about continuing to work with someone after they rejected a rather feeble date proposal. "I think I'll be okay," Ava murmurs, tucking her chin over Sara's shoulder, "Just take us a few blocks away from here."

They still need to be in range in order for the blast to go off when Ava presses the ignition button. Already they have a planned location not too far from here. Holding on tightly this time, Ava leans into Sara as the bike engine kicks to life and Sara takes off. Ava's breath catches in her chest as Sara turns a corner at an angle that's just a little too sharp for Ava's liking.

The wind whips against Ava's clothing, sending the sides of her shirt fluttering as they ride along. It's cool and quiet out now, almost peaceful. That'll all change in just a matter of minutes. Ava almost feels bad for the chaos they're about to inflict on the area, but this is for the greater good in

the end. With this last location torn to the ground, Ava can then release all the information she and Sara have been stockpiling on the League. Once that's out there, the League will have a hard time finding their footing again and it should be the out that Sara needs.

Under Ava's palms, the muscles along Sara's stomach contract as they turn another corner. Up ahead is the parking deck Ava had deemed a safe location for setting off the blasts. As they get closer, Ava tucks her chin even further into Sara's shoulder, holding tight to her and bracing for the speed bump she knows that Sara has no intention of going slow over. They strike it going far too fast, something that jostles Ava's body against Sara's as she gently pokes Sara in the side.

All that comes in response is a laugh Ava can hear so clearly near her ear, a light and happy sound. "That wasn't terrible was it?" Sara prompts as she brings the bike to a halt. Letting out a tiny little snort, Ava carefully and quickly untangles herself from Sara's body and gets off the bike.

"It wasn't fun," Ava retorts, walking to the nearest garage window where she can see the outline of the building in the distance. This should still be close enough to complete the task. They're not so far away they won't be able to see immediate results and not so close that they'll feel the impact of the blast. "Are you sure about this?" Ava asks, unclipping the detonator from her belt and carefully laying it on the concrete window ledge, "The moment we do this, they're going to know that someone has targeted them, and it won't take the League long to realize it's you."

A series of shuffling sounds come from behind Ava and she turns over her shoulder to see Sara is removing something from her bag. "I'm sure," Sara nods her head, tucking something under her arm as she walks to Ava, "We bring them down, we bring down the League—goodbye house of cards." Humming quietly, Ava focuses on the building in the distance once more, only to feel something tapping against her elbow. "Here," Sara prompts quietly, her hand outstretched, "To muffle the sound."

A pair of ear plugs rest in Sara's open palm, wrapped in a little clear bag. Ava's eyes flicker to Sara, surprised that she remembered Ava always uses these when dealing with bombs. When Ava first offered Sara a pair of these, they were still fighting with each other—in a way. Touched by the gesture, Ava takes them from Sara's hand before carefully tucking each one in her ears. The world sounds as if it's underwater now, sounds muted in Ava's ears. "Here," Ava hands Sara the detonation button, "This is yours to do."

Sara takes the button in her hand, her eyes caught on the trigger resting just under her thumb. It's a significant moment for Sara and Ava knows it. Keen to give her the time that she needs, Ava leans against the edge of the window ledge and looks beyond them to the building in the distance. "Years stuck here, and this is my way out," Sara muses, her voice muffled as Ava turns to look at her, "It doesn't really feel real."

Offering Sara a small sympathetic smile, Ava reaches out and rests her hand over Sara's hand that isn't holding the detonator. Nervous blue eyes meet her own, Sara's lips pinched in a tight line. "You've got this," Ava encourages gently, nodding her head as Sara sucks in a deep breath, "All of this planning, all of the time we've spent collecting information—this is what it was leading to. Now you just have to finish the job off."

It's easier said than done and Ava knows it. This isn't just Sara crossing off the last task on a list, this is the beginning of a new life for her. Fingers wrap tightly around Ava's own, clinging to her palm as Sara takes a deep breath in. "Yeah," Sara nods her head, sounding a bit more sure of herself as she hums quietly, "Here goes nothing."

There's no countdown, but Ava was prepared for the blasts anyways. In the distance she hears them go off, four bombs, one right after the other. The windows blow out first, the sound of glass

raining down coming through the air so they can hear it this far away. Clouds of dust form and billow as the building sinks, collapsing down on itself. Even with the earplugs, the noise is thunderous and Ava can already hear the exclamatory shouting coming from the streets outside the parking deck. All that's left in the sky are the wisps of smoke and dust left behind, trailing through the night sky, illuminated in the lights cast from streets and other buildings.

Beside Ava, Sara is completely quiet but her grip on Ava's hand hasn't let up. Not moving, Ava stays there, stepping just a little closer to Sara in the chill of the night. A head falls against her shoulder, hairs tickling the sides of Ava's cheek. That aching flutter is back in her stomach, but Ava doesn't shift away. Sara needs someone here with her who understands, so Ava's not going anywhere. "That's it," Sara murmurs, her voice soft and sorrowful, "Now I'm out, I can go home."

The word lands hard in Ava's stomach, shifting some of that ache to the side and making room for something a bit more hollow. When Ava is done with her quest, there really is no home for her to go back to. "Yeah, you can," Ava swallows thickly as she nods her head, giving Sara's hand a gentle squeeze, "You can do whatever you want now."

A quiet hum falls from Sara's lips just seconds before she's pulling away. Sara rests the detonator on the window ledge then turns around and heads back to the bike. Picking up the detonator, Ava tosses it to the ground and crushes it under her heel. The pieces fold and break, leaving behind a tangle of plastic and wires that Ava scoops up and takes to the nearest trash can. Other than the bomb debris the authorities find at the scene, that detonator is the only piece of evidence they have linking them to the bombing this evening. Tossing it inside the trash, Ava goes back to the bike as well.

"I found something in the server room, in one of the offices on that floor," Sara speaks as Ava removes the earplugs and shoves them into her pocket, "It looked significant, so I took the whole box. Sometimes the League uses other organizations as intermediaries that pass messages through to them. I figured it wouldn't hurt to bring this with me in case it turned out to be relevant."

The bag Sara carried with her into the building rests on the bike seat, a thick brown wooden box tucked just inside. Glancing to Sara, Ava carefully slides down the edges of the bag before laying the box flat on the bike. It's a cigar box, one that contains no clear markings or labels. Carefully, Ava undoes the switch and pries the box open. Resting inside are a series of legal papers that contain letters and numbers running down the sides. "A cipher," Ava murmurs, tugging the papers out and handing them to Sara, "An incomplete one."

A stack of thick cards rest inside as well, each tucked into a starch white envelope. There's something underneath though, something taking up the majority of the room inside the box. Gingerly, Ava lifts the cards away from the box, only to immediately freeze as she sees what rests in the bottom. "Do you know what that is?" Sara prompts as Ava's throat restricts painfully and her stomach flips viciously.

It's a James Patterson book with a sticky note attached to the front cover. The writing is done in neat and precise lines with blurred and smudged ink marks. Her breathing catching in her chest, Ava just nods her head, words not coming to her at the moment. "Ava?" Sara tries, a hand gently tugging on Ava's elbow, "What is it?"

Clearing her throat harshly, Ava sucks in a deep breath before letting it out shakily. "Henry," Ava murmurs, nodding to the book, "He uses those books, for ciphers. And that handwriting, he uses this tool to align what he writes, it always smudges the ink all over the place." Too many times Ava's received briefs from him that contained words that were too blurred to read. Too many times Ava had to find the nearest bookstore to use their copy of one of these books to decode something

Henry sent her way.

Sara was right after all. Ava should have been more suspicious. She should have seen something like this coming. But Ava didn't want it to be true. She didn't want to think that the man that brought her into this world of spies and secrets could possibly be the person that seems to have turned against the Operative itself. "You think he's One?" Sara's question is a soft whisper and Ava instantly nods, "Are you sure?"

"It makes sense," Ava replies dully, her eyes still caught on the book, the symbol of this betrayal, "He was in the Navy so he would have used Naval codes. Henry seemed to be aware that the League was working to protect me in Moscow when neither Two or Three knew." There's other things of course, like the fact that the verbiage of the messages is similar to Henry's own. There's countless things that Ava chose to ignore because she needed it to all be a coincidence.

But this means that Ava is in real trouble here. "He'll know," Ava snaps her head up, looking right at Sara, "Henry, he knows my tactics, my ruses and routines. If he finds out that there were reports of a gas leak in the area right before a bombing, he'll know it was me here. Which means he'll know that you're here as well."

Frustration grips the inside of Ava's chest. She should have been more careful, more thoughtful. Because of this slip up, because of her need for Henry to be good, she might have really compromised her own plans here. "You should be fine though," Ava continues on, her brain running through all future scenarios for how this might play out, "If he thinks it's just me here, there's no reason he might suspect that you're alive as well. I haven't ever done well in partner work so he wouldn't expect someone else."

At least that's what Ava hopes. She hopes that she hasn't just put Sara's freedom at risk because she had been so thoughtless in her assumptions of Henry's innocence. "Hey," Sara's voice cuts through Ava's mental spiral, a hand laying on her shoulder, "You've lost it if you think I'm going anywhere while you're in danger." Bright blue eyes stare earnestly back at Ava as that warmth pushes aside some of the dull panic forming in her body. "If you're not out, I'm not out," Sara states firmly, her hand brushing up and down Ava's arm, "Simple as that."

It's really not as simple as that. "No," Ava shakes her head as she shoves everything back into the box, "You have a family in Star City waiting for you. You have a home to go back to Sara—" Ava pauses, her heart stuttering in her chest as she shrugs, "I don't. You should go home." Ava had been counting on getting Henry's help to settle down after leaving. She had counted on the fact that he would release her from the Operative once she had discovered some of the mutiny in their ranks. Now that's no longer the case. Henry is the traitor and Ava is in real danger.

"Ava, I'm not leaving until we're both safe," Sara counters, her body shoving itself into Ava's space as she blocks Ava's access to the bag. Sara is now pinned between Ava and the bike, their chests brushing as Ava's eyes fly all over Sara's face. This is a look she knows well. Ava has seen this look on Sara's face far too many times. It means that Ava isn't going to win here. "The deal was we both find our freedom," Sara continues, her eyes lowering to Ava's lips as Ava sucks in a quiet breath, "Together."

That's not a word Sara seemed to care about the other day when she was shunning Ava's date proposal. Or at least she doesn't seem to care about that word in the way Ava does. There are a lot of things that Ava would like to do together with Sara, but dragging her into the Operative's path is not one of them. "The last time you crossed paths with my organization they nearly killed you," Ava says quietly, firmly, "I'm not letting you take that risk again."

"I wasn't asking," Sara retorts. Everything in Ava feels as if it's at war. One half of her wants Sara

here for this. Ava knows that she's going to need help and somewhere along the line, Sara became this calming force. She helps ground the chaos of Ava's thoughts. But the other half of Ava can't stop thinking back to that phone call she got. That part of Ava can't relive the pain of something happening to Sara again. "Neither of us have been alone in quite a long time, not really," Sara continues on as Ava's eyes flicker over her face, "We've been together since we met in Moscow. I'm not ending things without you either."

The last of Ava's resolve crumbles the moment two hands settle on either side of her waist. Fingers drift over her skin, tracing patterns along her hip bones as Ava sighs and caves. "Okay," Ava murmurs, closing her eyes and shaking her head, "But if we're going to do this, we do this the safe way. After we go after him, you and I lay low until the danger passes." That could take a while and Ava knows it. If Henry really is working with the League, they're not just looking at corrupt Operative spies coming after them, they might have assassins tracing their trails as well.

Everything just got far more complicated and far more dangerous. "We're going after him?" Sara asks, her head tilting to the side as Ava nods her head, anger beginning to form in her stomach, "I know you just found out that he betrayed your organization bu—"

"He didn't just betray the organization," Ava cuts Sara off as she takes a step back, "He did so much more than that." Sorrow and anger battle in Ava's body, each one fighting to be felt more than the other. It's going to take a while for that to settle down and Ava knows it. This is a nearly eight year long betrayal. From the moment Ava met Henry, he has been lying to her. For all she knows, this might even be the tip of the iceberg in the evil Henry has committed. "Not even the head of an organization is allowed to get away with this," Ava states angrily, "I want to make him pay."

Sara's brows raise in surprise but Ava just looks away. Revenge isn't really Ava's thing, but she can make an exception this time around. Henry knew about the bombing in Bucharest and let Ava go into there with the others. He knew about Sara being targeted by the League and the Operative. Each and every time he pretended to be shocked, to be sympathetic, but it was all a lie. "Okay," Sara speaks, surprising Ava slightly, "Lucky for you I kept some of those explosives we didn't use. I think we can manage something."

Nodding her head curtly, Ava reaches around Sara and shoves everything into the bag once more. With the helmet in her hands, Ava lowers it over her head before waiting for Sara to get on first. Sara settles near the front and Ava swings her leg over before pressing herself close to Sara. This time Ava doesn't hesitate to wrap herself around Sara's back. "I'm sorry Ava," Sara murmurs, her hand resting over Ava's own along her stomach. Ava doesn't really know if Sara is apologizing for this, or for the strange distance that's settled between them this past day and a half. Whichever the case, it hardly matters right now.

"Yeah," Ava mutters, tucking her nose against Sara's shoulder as she hums. No other words are spoken as Sara turns the engine over and sets them in motion. Ava doesn't even know what there is to say anymore. Everything she knew was a lie and now Ava has no idea how many jobs she worked that were in Henry's interest rather than the Operative's. There's no telling if she ever killed someone that was targeting Henry rather than targeting the organization as a whole.

A deep hollow feeling settles low in Ava's chest, one that she imagines will be there a while. Resting her head along Sara's shoulder, Ava holds on tight as they take a sharp corner. With her arms wrapped securely around Sara, Ava closes her eyes as she breathes in the smell of the night air. The whole time they ride along the streets, Sara's hand remains over Ava's own. It's a little gesture but it means everything. That contact is Ava's tether to reality as her mind slips to the plans to come. With a quiet sigh, Ava tries to push everything else from her thoughts as she focuses on

the feeling of the wind and the sensation of Sara's thumb brushing over her knuckles.

Chapter End Notes

Alright I have to know, does anyone here watch 'Doctor Who' and are you mentally prepared for the final episode tomorrow? I have very strong opinions on the matter and if you do as well just say something here in the comments or I'm on tumblr @legendssoftomorrow. My feelings on the episode are incredibly mixed as of right now and I'm highly concerned it's going to be a trainwreck of a final episode....

I won't lie I am super sleep-deprived and brain dead so if you see a continuity error somewhere in this chapter, definitely point it out. As for Sara and Ava, they're going to get there (really soon), so I promise we're so close to being out of the angsty bits (kinda).

Part Fourteen

Chapter Summary

With their eyes set on Budapest and Henry's office, Sara and Ava embark on a crucial forty-eight hour mission to take Ava's mentor and handler down.

Chapter Notes

So here we are with part fourteen and we really are nearing the end. So far I have two planned endings and I think I'm just going to post them both at the same time. They're both different and I can't pick which one I like better so I'm just going to release them both and see what everyone thinks.

Normally around this time I would ask for suggestions on what AU people want to see next but we're going to go to the Ghost AU in what is probably going to be a late Halloween celebration lol. But I don't know which one I'll do after that, so for anyone else who wants to look everything over and suggest a prompt, the outline of further AUs coming up can be found [here](#) or there is a list of just the prompts themselves that can be found on the challenge page [here](#).

As always thank you to everyone who has been reading along and it has been so fun getting to hear everyone's thoughts and comments on past chapters!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Manila, Philippines — 1:03

As it turns out, getting a flight to Budapest has turned out to be more complicated than Ava would have liked. Instead of being able to fly out first thing in the morning, they're stuck waiting until tomorrow afternoon. Ava's not comfortable with waiting, not when she's already released the information they compiled on the League. It's only a matter of time before Henry realizes that Ava was involved in this and he'll likely be expecting them. The sooner they can catch him, the better.

Staring up at the ceiling, Ava listens to the sounds of Sara's sheets rustling around as she rolls in her bed. Neither of them said much after releasing the information and making flight plans. Once they arrive in Budapest tomorrow, that's when the real planning will begin. But for now all there is to do is sleep. Or at least try to sleep. Ava can't seem to get her mind to turn off and she can't stop feeling the way Sara's eyes are piercing through her.

Sara's not asleep and Ava knows it. She's spent enough time sharing rooms with Sara at this point to know just how Sara's breathing evens out as she's nodding off. But tonight they're both awake, both laying in complete and total silence. Earlier, Sara had tried to get Ava to talk but Ava hadn't been up for it. Instead she drank just a little too much and the room is still almost spinning around her.

The alcohol had been needed to numb the pain of Henry's betrayal. It might not have been the

healthiest coping mechanism, but Ava couldn't bring herself to care. The entire time Sara's watchful eyes had been on her and somehow that had almost made it worse. Ava didn't really want an audience to her internalized destruction, yet she had one anyway. It was Sara who walked Ava over here to her bed and had settled the covers over Ava's body. The whole time, Ava bit back tears that sprung to her eyes at the tenderness of the gesture juxtaposed against the raw anger and hurt that she still feels.

If Ava needed a final reason to leave the Operative, this was it. There's no more justifications she can make in her mind for why she might stay. Everything has collapsed out from under her and Ava's not keen to remain in the rubble once the smoke clears. The first chance she gets, she's done here. Once Henry is handled, there will undoubtedly be loose ends to follow up on, but Ava has no intention of alerting the Operative to this until she's sure that Henry is the only higher up involved in this scheme.

Even Sara had been shocked as they were going over things tonight, finding countless new pieces of evidence that demonstrated the collusion between the League and the Operative. It goes back years, far before Ava and Sara set foot into their respective worlds of secrets and lies. Part of Ava wonders if she's foolish for ever not seeing something like this coming. Sara's words from before had rung in her ears of expecting secret organizations to have their secrets. Maybe Ava expected some level of mystery, but she never saw this coming.

Again Sara shifts in her bed, this time grunting as she flips over to her side. Unable to stop herself, Ava glances over. Already Sara is looking back at her, her brows still drawn in concern, her lips pulled in a frown. Sighing quietly, Ava returns her gaze to the ceiling, staring at the rough looking popcorn texture above. "I'm fine," Ava says in a dull tone, feeling nothing but exhausted and exposed.

"You're not," Sara counters immediately, her words gentle despite the accusation. Tears spring to Ava's eyes once more, something that only serves to frustrate her further as she brings her hand up to clear them away. With her fingers, Ava roughly brushes under her eyes before inhaling deeply. But her breath catches in her chest, snaring in her lungs and staying there. When the exhale comes out again, it's stuttered and heavy, mixed in with an ache in Ava's stomach that has come back with a vengeance.

Covers shift and rustle, and Ava looks up just in time to see Sara drawing back the comforter of Ava's own bed before she's slipping underneath. Startled, Ava rolls to her side just a bit too quickly. The room shifts around her, the alcohol distorting her senses and making Sara's eyes swim in her field of vision. "Roll over," Sara prompts gently, her fingers nudging Ava's side.

Frozen in place, Ava stares back at Sara in confusion. Not even hours ago Sara was telling Ava that she couldn't do something like this, or that she wouldn't. Yet here she is, in Ava's bed, trying to comfort Ava. Too tired to fight it, too tired of closing herself off from help, Ava complies. The moment she's turned over on the bed, a body tucks behind her own. Slowly, arms encircle Ava, one under her neck, the other around her waist. Completely encompassed in Sara's warmth, Ava lets out another sigh that sounds just a bit too much like a sob.

No tears come though, Ava already shed those earlier in the shower. Sara hadn't said a word when Ava emerged with red and swollen eyes, she had just given Ava another worried look. "I'm sorry Ava," Sara murmurs again, a sentence that Ava wishes she would stop saying. She understands the sentiment, but it's not helping. No amount of apologies in the world are going to make this better.

Shuffling her legs under the covers, Ava just hums quietly and lays her hands over Sara's arm around her waist, holding her closer. The arm under her neck is outstretched along the bed, Sara's

fingers tracing patterns over the mattress as her chin comes to rest on Ava's shoulder. "I've been thinking about my parents," Ava blurts out, unable to stop herself as she continues to stare at Sara's hand, "My father, he never worked for the Operative but he worked for MI5 and he was close with Henry."

Behind her, Sara goes stiff, the implication of Ava's words clear. That's what had Ava so upset in the shower earlier, and is part of what is keeping her up now. Ava's parents died in the middle of nowhere. There really was a collision and it really was ruled an accident. But now Ava knows far more about this world, so she has come to understand that some accidents are anything but that. Some of the most brutal murders have been covered up as accidents. Ava would know, she's gotten quite good at doing that by now.

As Sara's body slackens once more, Ava remains quiet and absentmindedly presses the pads of her fingertips into the joint along Sara's wrist. "You think he had something to do with it?" Sara asks, her lips right near Ava's ear. At this point, Ava doesn't know what to think. She knows that Henry has pictures of himself and Ava's father in his desk in London. She knows that they were friends in childhood and went on to do this kind of job together. Ava knows that Henry has said that Randy Sharpe was his best friend.

But as it turns out, Henry has said quite a few things that turned out to be nothing but lies. "I don't know," Ava mumbles dejectedly, her chin tipped down towards her chest as she clings to Sara's arm with her other hand, "They died so suddenly, and Henry never came to the funeral. He wasn't around in general when I was little. I would have remembered someone like him." Ava wasn't so young that she wouldn't be able to recall who was there that evening of the funeral processions.

It's not something she likes to reflect on often, but she remembers the faces in the crowd, so she knows that he wasn't there. "Do you want to know the answer?" Sara asks after a moment's pause. Letting out a shaking breath, Ava lifts her shoulder in a small shrug. Her body betrays her, her chest spasming slightly as Ava lurches forwards only to be drawn back into Sara. Ava's eyes burn as she closes them tight, willing herself to breathe normally and not cry. But it's hard to be calm when everything has been burning down around her for so long now and she's only just noticed.

Swallowing around the thickness in her throat, Ava tries to force some of that pressure from her body. It's overwhelming her, filling her lungs, pressing into her stomach, making her limbs feel heavy and weightless at the same time. Lips press at the juncture of her shoulder and neck, something that jolts Ava back to the present moment. Doing her best to focus, Ava grounds herself in Sara and everything around her.

Fingers are brushing over the bare skin of Ava's stomach where her shirt has risen up slightly and the scent of Sara's shampoo fills Ava's nose. At this point she's sure that she could pick out that exact smell in a crowd. Ava knows all of these tiny insignificant things about Sara and still it doesn't feel like enough. She wants to know more. Ava wants things that she hasn't wanted before with someone else, and now she doesn't want them with anyone else.

Yet it's pointless to want those things. Sara's already told Ava in no uncertain terms that she couldn't offer them. But that had been a lie of sorts, because here Sara is, holding Ava together when Ava feels like she's falling apart.

The pressure in Ava's body slowly begins to subside as her breathing evens out and her eyes open once more. Everything around them is dark, yet Ava can still make out the freckles dashing and dancing along the skin of Sara's arm. Powerless to stop herself, Ava rests a single finger along the inside of Sara's elbow, tracing invisible lines between the darker freckles. "I'm sorry too," Ava murmurs as Sara lets out a stuttered exhale near her ear.

Along Ava's stomach, Sara's fingers falter for a split second before resuming their slow stroking motion. "I think I had known for a while that everything was not as it seemed at the League," Sara confesses as Ava hums, wishing that she could have had that kind of awareness, "But I don't think I cared. I'd already been doing the job for as long as I had, there was no pretending that leaving would somehow earn me salvation."

Salvation. Ava stares quietly at the soft skin along Sara's arm and turns that word over in her mind, testing it out with her tongue. "You think you need salvation?" Ava questions, turning her head slightly to the side and catching sight of the slope of Sara's nose and cheeks.

"You don't?" Sara returns the question. Humming quietly, Ava just nods her head in agreement. Maybe they both do for the things they've done. Ava wonders if that would still be true if they had both been working for the causes they initially thought they were. Are their jobs inherently bad, or are they bad only because they had done things they were unaware of the meaning of? It's not a question Ava thinks that she wants to consider much further lest she find something ugly lurking in the shadows. Already there's been enough bad deeds performed, no need to complicate matters further.

"Maybe bringing them down is how we get our salvation," Ava suggests with a shrug, turning to face forwards once more as Sara makes a quiet sound in the back of her throat, "You're taking away the power of the League, maybe that forces them to make changes. And I'm trying to remove the corruption that's taken over the Operative. A coup de grâce they don't see coming, a mercy killing of the worst parts that make up our organizations."

Sara is silent for a moment, her chin tucked over Ava's shoulder, her jaw working against the side of Ava's cheek. "You really think they'll change after all of this?" Sara prompts, her voice a mere whisper, "You really think that an organization like the League or the Operative is capable of changing after having spent so long set in their ways and their methods?"

Ava has to believe it's possible, or she would be a hypocrite. "I do," Ava replies evenly, carefully thinking over her next words, "I have no choice but to believe that they can, I've seen that change is possible even after time has cemented actions into habits and ideas into rules." Pausing for a moment, Ava lightly taps the crook of Sara's elbow with her finger, "I've changed, since meeting you."

As expected, Sara goes rigid again behind Ava, a sharp inhale sucked in through her teeth. Ava can't tell if the reaction really was as extreme as it felt this time, or if Sara is just so close that Ava can feel every physical shift in her body. Whatever the case, Sara remains tense, the motion of her hand halted over Ava's stomach, her fingers digging into the mattress where her arm is outstretched.

Resignation settles over Ava when the silence lapses on just a bit too long. But she doesn't regret telling Sara that she's changed. They've already talked about this. The only difference is that Ava has implied here that Sara might have been the catalyst in Ava's changing. She wonders what she might have changed for Sara, if she changed anything at all. "You should go back to your family instead of coming with me to Budapest," Ava changes the subject, not willing to risk Sara saying something Ava doesn't want to hear tonight, "I know you already said no, but you should go be with them."

"I'm not going anywhere," Sara mumbles, her head tipping down so her nose is brushing Ava's shoulder, her lips pressed just above Ava's shoulder blade, "Can't leave my favourite spy hanging." Despite herself, Ava feels a tiny smile tugging at the edges of her lips as she just hums quietly. The comment chases away some of the heavy feeling that had been lingering in her chest,

the joke clearing away the hurt. “Going back to my family, it’s—” a rush of air blows against Ava’s skin as Sara exhales heavily, “It’s a lot, so I need time before doing that.”

Resting her hand over Sara’s own, Ava gives her palm a small squeeze. Sara is still tense, but this time Ava senses a different kind of hesitation. It’s hard for Ava to imagine what it might be like to go home to her own family after so long spent in this job. But she thinks that if her parents were alive, they wouldn’t be as troubled by the things that Ava’s done seeing as her father was once a part of this world. Sara’s family on the other hand, they’ve never been exposed to this.

However, family is family, and Ava knows just how long Sara’s has been longing for her. “If I had the chance to have my family back, I would take it,” Ava whispers quietly as Sara exhales shakily near her ear, “I think you’d be surprised just how much people will forgive when it means having someone back in their life after they thought they were gone.” Certainly Ava knows just how much could be forgiven.

While she sometimes still feels a little raw sorrow over the fact that Sara never came back to let her know that she was alive, Ava thinks she understands it. Sara was trying to survive and keep moving while she could. It’s been longer since Sara’s family has seen her, but Ava’s seen the way that they’re still grieving her. It’s hard to imagine that Sara’s family would shun her reappearance in their lives. “I don’t know if it’ll be that easy,” Sara confesses as Ava sweeps her thumb over the back of Sara’s hand, “It’s been so long.”

“It might not be easy,” Ava indulges in a gentle tone as Sara sucks in a shuddering breath, “But it will be worth it.” A barely there nod comes against her shoulder before Sara’s grip on Ava tightens slightly. “Get some sleep,” Ava soothes quietly, settling her hand permanently over Sara’s own, “Tomorrow is going to be a long day.”

It’ll also be a hard day for both of them. Once they complete their plans at Henry’s office tomorrow evening, they’re on the run until the conclusion of this quest comes to them. “Yeah,” Sara murmurs, her lips pressing delicately along Ava’s shoulder, “Goodnight Ava.”

Swallowing thickly, Ava mumbles back a response. She can’t remember the last time someone said goodnight to her like that, tenderly, quietly. With a small sigh, Ava shifts just slightly in Sara’s arms to find a more comfortable position. Behind her, Sara has laid her head against the back of Ava’s own, her nose brushing Ava’s neck. The hold Sara has on Ava doesn’t loosen up even as Ava settles against Sara and the mattress. Ava almost expects Sara to pull away, but even as she’s closing her eyes, Sara doesn’t move. She stays close, in constant contact even as Ava drifts off to sleep.

Budapest, Hungary — 12:33

Soft music drifts through the air as Ava hums quietly to herself and kicks her feet up on the chair in front of her. Carefully drawing back the plunger of the needle in her hand, Ava fills the container with a neurotoxin from the little vial. This is part of the plan for tonight, or at least this is part of the original plan. Ava fully expects for them to run out of darts before they’re clear of danger and are able to get to Henry’s office.

Undoubtedly he will be expecting Ava at this point. There’s no possibility that Henry hasn’t heard the news of the League’s collapse and consequent withdraw from the world of clandestine organizations. Just this morning Ava herself had received word from the Operative itself about the League’s temporary demise—something she had shared with Sara on the plane ride here. But if they know, then Henry knows, and he’ll take one look at the wreckage and know that Ava

played a role in this.

Going to his office here in the city is a dangerous plan and Ava knows it, which is why she and Sara have several plans lined up. The first involves these darts on the off chance that Henry decides he doesn't need much protection. The second plan involves the countless guns and weapons that Sara and Ava are bringing as backup. And the third plan involves the bomb that Sara will plant on the ground and fifteenth floors that should wreak enough havoc to draw Operative attention.

As it stands, Ava plans on leaking some information this evening when everything is said and done so the Operative catches wind of the fact there's a mole in their ranks. While she won't release it all, she'll release enough to make the other higher ups suspicious. Ideally that will make it harder for Henry to follow them as Ava and Sara find a plan of attack for the final fight. Though hiding might not be as easy as it has in the past. Sara suspects that the League might offer Henry some support in the form of a few contacts they still possess at the moment. Ava's inclined to believe that she's right.

Looking up, Ava spots Sara where she's sat on the little porch that overlooks the city streets below. Sara's stretched out in a chair with a little table sat in front of her. The table is lined with knives of various sizes, something that had earned Sara a look from the next door neighbor not even minutes ago. Ava had to remind Sara that not everyone sits on their porch and listens to gentle jazz music while sharpening and admiring their knife collections. There's a knife in Sara's hand that she's swiping over a whetstone.

Ava's lips quirk upwards in a small smile as she takes in the peaceful look on Sara's face. It might not be considered normal by civilian's standards for someone to look as calm while sharpening their knives, but Ava thinks this might be the first moment she's seen Sara truly look at peace in a while. This morning Sara had braided her hair back from her face in twin plaits that frame her face, making her look that much younger. Her hair is still back, though there are hairs that have since fallen from the ties that stick out here and there.

Sara's dressed in black lounge pants and a soft looking grey shirt that she had immediately changed into upon their arrival here. Ava herself is still in the clothing she wore on the flight, consisting of a silky navy blue shirt tucked into brown pants. They flew commercial, which should have meant leaving their weapons behind, but Sara had somehow managed to find a way to get her bag of knives on the plane.

Once they were in the city, Ava found her local contact that Henry doesn't know about and had acquired everything else they needed. "Who does this apartment belong to?" Sara questions, her voice cutting through Ava's thoughts. When Ava looks up, Sara has turned around in her chair and a single arm propped along the back as she twists her body to see Ava. "Surely this can't be an Operative safe house right?" Sara continues as Ava hums and nods.

"It belongs to Gary Green, an associate of mine," Ava replies, pressing the needle plunger down and carefully filling one dart before reaching for another, "He works primarily in the States, but this is his family's old vacation spot." Technically Gary doesn't know that Ava's here with Sara, but she hadn't wanted to risk calling him when she has no idea if she and Sara are being monitored or not.

Filling another dart, Ava lays it with the others along the cloth she's settled over the table. Once these are gone, Ava will be officially out of her neurotoxin. It's too risky going to Dmitriy to get more at this point. And honestly, anyone who comes after Sara or Ava from here on out likely wouldn't hesitate to kill them so Ava doesn't care if they have to use real bullets. "Will we have enough?" Sara prompts as she pushes off her chair, abandoning her knife and stone behind.

Enough is a relative assessment here. There's no telling what they're going to walk into tonight so there's no way to judge if what Ava has here in front of her is going to suffice. "It will work," Ava concedes as Sara hums and comes to stand right near her legs, "We'll use them when we can. There's a chance some of the people there to protect Henry tonight might not know what they've gotten into. I know I didn't."

Henry's deception runs so deep that even Ava has reached a limit in what she can uncover. Everything else from this point on is the Operative's job once Ava releases information. Once they're safely out of this mess tonight, Ava will begin slowly leaking information to the right groups. There's a chance this could really damage the Operative as a whole, but Ava can't bring herself to care. While Henry seems to have done a thorough job in covering his tracks, Ava has to believe that some of the others within the organization knew of his schemes all along. A single person can only achieve so much on their own.

But the moment this information becomes public to other Operative members, surely someone will begin digging in further and rooting out the corruption. And at this point, if the Operative comes down as a result, Ava isn't sure she will care. "It also might be perceived as a sign of good will to the Operative," Sara notes as Ava makes a sound of agreement, "But for the plan tonight, are you sure that he's going to be there?"

Ava's pretty damn positive. If one thing is clear, it's that Henry has never once really considered Ava a threat. There have been clues scattered through Ava's years of service to the Operative that she completely missed because she wasn't looking for them. Undoubtedly this means there's a good chance Henry is going to continue to underestimate Ava. "He has a meeting at ten, and he'll be there," Ava responds, her shoulders falling as she sighs, "I doubt he'll see this kind of a plan coming."

The easy thing in all of this had been anticipating Henry's moves. He helped train Ava, so everything she knew came from him. That means she knows exactly how he might respond to learning Ava is coming for him. It's nice to hope they might encounter limited resistance this evening, but Ava knows that to not be the case. He won't be down in the action, he'll likely stay up in his office where Ava would clear all files if she was in his shoes. As for his escape plan, Henry always told Ava that up is better than down when being pursued, and there just so happens to be a helicopter pad on the roof. It's rarely used, but Ava knows it's there.

That's why they're cutting power to the building first thing. With no lights on the roof, the helicopter won't be able to land until everything comes back on. Ava wants him in his office, stuck there while she comes after him. The rest of the plan is where Sara's experience has come into play. She had been nothing but shocked on the plane ride here when Ava said that Sara should be the one to make the plans.

But there's a reason for this. Henry knows every move and countermove that Ava might make. What he couldn't possibly plan for is someone as unpredictable as Sara is. Even Ava's not entirely sure just what Sara is going to have them do once they get there, and it's something that has her a little nervous. However in this case, there's a benefit to the unexpected, so Ava's trying to lean in a best she can. "You look stressed," Sara comments, stepping closer. Hands land on Ava's calves, pressing her legs to the side so they fall off the chair.

Her feet strike the ground and Ava draws them back under her own chair once more as she watches Sara closely. Today Sara has been at Ava's side or in her sight at all times. Even this morning, Ava had woken from her sleep to find Sara packing everything up in their shared room in the Philippines. It had been strange, watching Sara throw Ava's own clothing into her suitcase and neatly pack weapons back into cases. Something about it felt painfully intimate in a way Ava

hadn't expected.

Throughout the airport, Sara had remained an arm's length from Ava the entire time. And of course, on the plane, Sara had all but leaned over Ava's lap so she could see out the window for takeoff. They even went to the weapons supplier and a general store together even though it would have been more practical to divide and conquer those chores. The whole time, Sara has been glancing at Ava intermittently to check on her.

It doesn't bother Ava anymore, neither does the gentle way Sara is regarding her right now. "I'm about to oust myself from the one thing I've known most of my adult life," Ava shrugs as she sets the needle to the side and wraps it in the cloth, "I think I'm allowed to be a little stressed." Humming quietly, Sara nods her head in agreement. Her eyes don't leave Ava's yet though, instead they scan her face as if they're searching for something.

Ava's never really gotten used to the way Sara looks at her and really sees her. Hiding things from Sara is a pointless endeavor by now; she'll find a way to draw it out. So Ava doesn't bother. It's hard being around Sara though, that hasn't changed since Ava's failed date proposal. But it stings just a little bit less. The ache has since faded into something dull, something resembling acceptance. Sara can't do this, she can't give Ava what she wants. Or rather she won't. Ava's not really asking for more than Sara's already giving her, she's just asking that Sara be upfront about what they are.

Though Ava herself isn't sure what they are. They're not friends, and they're not dating either. They're somewhere strange in between that Ava doesn't know how to define. Dating isn't something Ava knows how to do really, but she thinks that she could try with Sara. She wants to try. But even now, taking in the guarded look that has slipped over Sara's features, Ava knows that isn't an option either. "But, I know something that might help," Ava murmurs, reaching out and tangling her fingers in Sara's shirt, pulling her closer, "I've heard you have good recommendations for stress relief?"

It wouldn't be just stress relief and Ava thinks they both know it. But apparently that's what Ava has to label this if she wants to prevent Sara from running from her again or shutting down the conversation. Sara comes to stand between Ava's legs, her eyes flickering over Ava's face as a hand comes to skim along Ava's jaw. "Yeah," Sara replies, her fingers threading into Ava's hair as a thumb brushes near Ava's lips, "I could probably think of a few things." Staring up at Sara, Ava holds her gently by the hips and attempts to see through whatever veil has slammed down behind Sara's eyes, blocking her thoughts from Ava's view.

"Maybe just one," Ava prompts in a hushed tone, her eyes focused on Sara's still, unwavering in her attention. A barely there nod comes as a response before Sara is bending down and her lips meet Ava's own. The angle is awkward and Ava has to crane her neck up just to kiss Sara, but she doesn't mind. Along her jaw Sara's thumb sweeps over her skin, the warmth lingering there even as she pulls away.

Ava goes to reach for Sara again, not wanting her to leave. But Sara's hand curls around Ava's own before she's tugging Ava to her feet. Now understanding, Ava stands up and lets herself be guided to the bed that rests up just three stairs to the left. The sheets are a soft white color, decorated with countless throw pillows and blankets that rest up near the headboards. When Sara turns around right at the base of the bed, Ava gently nudges her backwards and straddles Sara's lap.

As Ava kisses Sara again, they tumble backwards, the soft sheets billowing around their bodies. Sara's lips move slowly against Ava's own, her chin tilted up as Ava cups her cheeks and presses

her fingertips into the bone of Sara's jaw. "Ava," Sara breaks away, her eyes downcast, her voice small, "I still can't give you what you want."

That ache curls through Ava, settling somewhere low in her chest as she swallows and nods her head. "I know," Ava murmurs, brushing her fingers just over Sara's cheekbone with a tiny sorrowful smile, "But for now, I think this can be enough." Sara's eyes lift to Ava's own, glimmering and filled with some emotion that Ava desperately wishes she could read. There's guilt there, without a doubt, and somehow that only makes the ache behind her ribs worse. "Can't it?" Ava prompts quietly, delicately pressing her thumb to the dimple tucked in Sara's chin.

When Sara swallows, Ava can see the bobbing motion her throat makes, the tension in her jaw. Little golden blonde hairs stray away from Sara's braids, sticking out to the sides in a slightly messy manner. Bright blue eyes stare up at Ava—unblinking, unwavering. Sara's beautiful, even when she's at war with herself. "Yeah," Sara lets out a quiet breath while she nods, "I think it can." Humming lowly, Ava leans back down and captures Sara's lips once more. It's not enough and it never will be, but it's what Ava can live with for now.

In everything that's changing, she can't lose Sara too. Ava can't lose the way that Sara's hands press so carefully along her spine as she holds Ava close, almost as if Sara's afraid she might break Ava. She can't lose the way that Sara's breathing catches as Ava maps her lips over the sharp bone of Sara's jaw. Ava can't lose the way that Sara somehow makes her feel safe. Sara makes Ava feel okay when Ava hasn't felt that way in a long time. There's so much more to lose here, so many things that Ava can't risk. So Ava might have lied and this might not be enough, but this what Ava has now, and she's not going to throw that away.

Budapest, Hungary — 22:56

Shots fire off inside the building, the sounds echoing through Ava's earpiece. Carefully peering through the scope of her rifle, Ava pulls the trigger and sends a bullet hurtling straight towards the man moving after Sara in the lobby. "What did I say about not making a scene?" Ava complains as she quickly ejects the cartridge and sends off another shot, before firing once more. Already there are eight metal cartridges resting near Ava's feet where they've tumbled down from the gun propped on the window.

"What did I say about bringing bigger guns?" Sara retorts with a grunt as Ava attempts to find her in the clear windows. Ava's across the street keeping watch after they both agreed that Henry would be expecting Ava to enter first. What he might not have anticipated was that Ava would send Sara in as Ava kept watch with her rifle across the street.

Already they've used all the toxin darts, so real bullets are the only option left behind. Not that it much matters, Ava would rather shoot the men inside the building than let them get near Sara. More gunfire sounds off inside her ear and Ava mutters another swear under her breath before lining up her sights with the building once more. There are dead bodies on the ground near the door, and Ava follows the trail of destruction to find Sara in the middle of a fight with a rather tall guard. "Count to three and get down," Ava instructs as Sara makes an affronted sound through the earpiece.

"Get down?" Sara repeats in a winded tone as Ava hums, "Ava, you better not shoot me."

"I won't if you can count to three and get down," Ava tells her, not really keen to have this debate while there are more guards undoubtedly coming down from the upper floors. When Sara makes another sound that has to be some kind of agreement, Ava just hums again before counting down

and pulling the trigger. Sara moves right as the bullet pierces the guard through the center of the chest and he drops to the ground. “See,” Ava lifts her head away from the gun with a small smile, “You didn’t get shot.”

A mumble comes through the earpiece that sounds a lot like a small insult, but Ava just smiles before carefully scanning the upper floors. There’s still movement in the building, though Ava knows at this point they’re all unfriendly enemies. Henry wouldn’t have let civilians get in the way of this. Even as they approached the block, Ava knew that something was wrong when she noticed there were no stray cars parked along the side streets. If Henry evacuated, it meant there was a nasty surprise waiting for Sara and Ava. So far it’s been manageable though. “I could use you over here now,” Sara says through the device, “There’s more coming down.”

That certainly is true. Nodding her head, Ava carefully removes her gun from the window and lays it out on the tarp spread along the ground. With quick hands, Ava breaks the gun down and wipes off each part before tucking them in the case and tossing it to the side of the room. It hardly matters if something like that is found. The Operative will likely come here to investigate, but Ava suspects Henry might have already tried to sell her out to the organization before she could release any information that might condemn him. Either way, they’ll know Ava was involved, so hiding it won’t matter.

With the gun handled, Ava slings her bag over her shoulder and throws her leg over the window ledge to set off down the fire escape. Taking the stairs two at a time, Ava makes it to the bottom and crosses the street with her hand gun already out. The glass pane of the front door shattered when Ava fired through it moments ago, so she just steps through the metal frame and takes in the mess inside the lobby.

Ava’s been here countless times, but she’s never seen it like this. The pristine white marble floors are streaked with blood where bodies have fallen and are no longer moving. Bullet holes riddle the wooden paneling along the wall behind the desk where Sara had been taking cover. Guns have fallen near the bodies, useless and discarded now. With a small sorrowful exhale, Ava steps over the body near her feet and makes her way to Sara who is tucking more knives into her vest. “You sure you can do this?” Ava asks as she hands the bag full of explosives over to Sara.

“It can’t be that hard,” Sara shrugs in a way that makes Ava want to pull the bag away from Sara’s hands once more, “You already showed me how to do it three times Ava, I think I’ve got it this time around.” Ava’s not convinced. The last time they ran through the bomb setup, Sara nearly touched together the two wires that would have brought the entire building down around them. Between the three trial runs they did, Sara only got it right if they’re counting the mashup of her efforts mixed together.

But she has no choice other than to rest her trust in Sara’s ability to get this done. Ava has other things to do in the meantime. “The basement and the seventh floor are your best bets,” Ava explains as Sara nods her head and glances over her shoulder to the stairs beyond, “I’ll be on the fifth floor with Henry, and I’ll meet you down here when we’re done.”

Blue eyes flicker over Ava’s face, that concerned look back on Sara’s features. But now isn’t the time for Ava to doubt herself in this. The longer they’re here, the more they’re in danger. Sara looks at her vest before carefully removing a small knife from the breast pocket and passing it to Ava. “Give him hell,” Sara encourages as Ava takes the knife from her and slips it into her own pocket, “Don’t go easy on that bastard, not after what he’s done to you.”

Swallowing thickly, Ava offers Sara a curt nod before turning around and heading to the stairwell that leads exclusively to the fifth floor. This whole building belongs to Henry, but Ava knows that

he has a panic location he goes to on the fifth floor. The entire place is lined with cameras and speakers, and the back room would have been an option for him to hide in, but Ava cut the power. He likely doesn't even know that the lock on the door won't be working right now.

With her gun raised, Ava sets off up the steps, careful to keep her movements quiet. Turning around each landing as she goes, Ava moves her eyes around the scene, still searching for any signs of danger. There aren't any guards at the top like Ava expected, a sign that Henry really is that confident in his ability to stay hidden and get away when this is all over. When Ava tugs the door open, the entire floor is dark and silent. There's a light along Ava's gun, but she doesn't dare turn it on and risk being spotted.

A sound to the side alerts her to someone's presence and she quickly fires off two bullets at the guard that had been lurking in the shadows. There's another along the opposite wall that Ava takes down as well. Now there's no chance that Henry doesn't know that Ava's here. With a small sigh, Ava makes her way across the open room and heads to the metal door along the back wall. There's a complicated lock system to the side, but the panel is dead and not a single light is present along the side.

Placing her hand over the handle, Ava gives the door an experimental tug. The door bends to her will, swinging open towards her as Ava peers inside. With her gun outstretched in her hand, Ava steps around the wall and comes face to face with Henry. His glasses are off and his cane is in his hand, all his features are bathed in the red emergency lights coming from the ceiling. "I truly was hoping that my suspicions were wrong and it wasn't you coming here this evening," Henry sighs as he leans against the far wall, "You were the most promising spy, never asking too many questions until recently."

Seeing Henry face to face is different than Ava directing her anger at a mental image of him. Anger blooms in her chest as Ava grips her gun tighter and steps into the room. "I was hoping that what I found was wrong," Ava replies, coming closer to Henry as she never once lowers the gun from his chest, "I didn't want to believe it at first, I didn't want to think that you would lie to me like that."

"Everyone lies in this world Ava, we just do more of it in this business," Henry waves his hand off to the side of his body as he talks. His nonchalance only serves to upset Ava more as she grits her teeth and comes to a stop two feet in front of Henry. "I told you that coming into this line of work would mean never knowing the full truth," Henry reminds her as Ava sucks in a quiet breath, "You had your warnings along the way."

He's right, and that's what Ava hates most about this. There were warnings along the way, but Ava never considered those would one day lead to something like this. "You knew about Bucharest," Ava accuses, shifting her stance as her jaw works, "You let me and five others go into that building, knowing that we might not come out alive again." Henry says nothing, just lifts his shoulder in a shrug. It hurts, standing in front of someone that Ava once thought she understood, only to see that she knew nothing of who they really are.

But there's a question Ava wants answered here, one that has been weighing on her since she learned the truth of Henry's betrayal. "My parents died in that car crash in France where there were no witnesses," Ava forces her voice to remain steady as she speaks, "It was all so neat, the investigation wrapped up in a matter of days." Swallowing around the choking sensation building in her throat, Ava adjusts her grip on her gun. "Tell me you had nothing to do with that," Ava says.

For a moment a look passes over Henry's face and Ava feels her stomach plummet. But then he just shakes his head with a bitter sounding laugh. "Your father cut ties with me once he learned

what I was doing,” Henry explains as Ava’s breathing stutters in her chest, “He found out about my involvement with the League, but instead of exposing me, he dropped all contact. Yet I never once tried to harm him. The accident that night was just that, the result of too little sleep and roads with too little light.”

Ava can’t decide if that’s a relief or not. She can’t decide if knowing the truth somehow makes the agony she’s sat through for the past thirty-six hours better. Something heavy has settled low in her stomach, something that makes Ava feel sick. “Why do this Henry?” Ava shakes her head, lowering her gun slightly as she stares at her handler and mentor, “Why work against our organization and why place our spies in danger?”

“Power. Everything in this world comes down to power, Ava,” Henry sighs, almost sounding disappointed, as if this is something Ava should have just understood on her own, “And I don’t believe that you have a right to lecture me about working with the League. I wasn’t oblivious to your interactions with the Canary—with Sara Lance.”

It’s not a surprise but still Ava stiffens slightly at the mention of Sara’s name. Before Ava can hear a single word, she hears a slight clicking sound behind her and turns just in time to fire off her own gun. Two bullets shoot off at once, one striking the guard in the chest and the other grazing Ava’s side. Stumbling backwards, Ava finds herself pinned. Arms wrap around her own and something with a sharp tip digs at the very edge of her neck. “We only found her because of you,” Henry mumbles, arm trapping Ava against his chest, “The League helped us, but we located her after intercepting a message she tried sending to you.”

Ignoring his words, Ava struggles to reach the knife in her pocket. Henry is a good few inches taller than Ava is, so he has the advantage here. But Ava can just barely reach the hilt of the knife that protrudes from her pant pocket. The blade at her own throat is digging into her skin and Ava can feel something tracking down the side of her neck, likely blood. “We tried killing her, but I’ve recently learned that she lived,” Henry continues on as Ava’s fingers fumble with the knife, “I told you to never get connected on the job Ava, and I—”

Something passes through the air right near Ava’s face, nearly clipping her in the cheek. Henry lets out a grunt of pain as his words die out and Ava looks up to see Sara there. Startled, Ava steps away from Henry only to watch as Sara grabs him and pushes him to the desk. There’s a knife embedded in the wall right where Henry’s face had been and Ava can see blood staining his ear. “You keep your fucking hands off of her,” Sara grits out, anger leeching from her voice.

One of Sara’s hands is pressing Henry’s face to the desk while the other forces him into a bent position. “Hey,” Ava soothes, finding her bearings again and carefully reaching out to rest her hand along Sara’s back, “Did you finish everything?” A curt nod is all that comes from Sara, but she hasn’t let Henry go and she hasn’t stopped glaring at him. There’s a data drive that Ava spots on the desk, likely all of Henry’s records he pulled before coming here. Pocketing it, Ava rests her hand along Sara’s arm and tugs gently, “Come on Sara, we should go.”

Bright blue eyes cut over to Ava’s own, still filled with so much anger. But they have to go so Ava tugs on her sleeve again. Slowly, Sara releases Henry from the desk, but not before picking up the knife that was near his hand and throwing it across the room. “Where were you hit?” Sara asks the moment they’re walking back through the open room, “I heard a gun go off before I made it back down here.”

There’s a slight stinging sensation along the side of Ava’s ribcage, but she doubts that the bullet did much damage. “Just along my ribs, nothing bad,” Ava replies, catching Sara by the elbow and dragging her to the more remote staircase before Sara can head to the main set, “You primed the

bombs?”

When Sara winces slightly, Ava almost stumbles over the step that she’s walking down. “I primed them yes,” Sara mutters, walking briskly in front of Ava as she takes another set of stairs, “There’s just—one little issue.” Coming to a stop, Ava waits for Sara to turn around to look at her. “I might have forgotten to pair it with the remote switch,” Sara continues on, not looking at Ava, her voice quiet.

“You what?” Ava blinks at Sara in surprise, “God Sara—okay, let’s just get out of here, quickly.” Picking up her pace, Ava sets off down the stairs with Sara beside her this time around. “How did you forget the switch?” Ava grumbles as they near the final flight of steps, “It’s the one thing that you got consistently right when we were practicing.”

In fact that was the one thing that Ava was certain Sara was going to be able to do this time around. “We didn’t deal with bombs in the League,” Sara defends as Ava just lets out a quiet little snort, “And you try remembering complex instructions when people are shooting at you, it wasn’t easy.” No, Ava imagines not, but still she is sure that Sara could have tried just a little harder to remember this given how important it is.

Not keen on having a building collapse around them, Ava shoves open the stairwell door and all but jerks Sara outside with her. Neither of them waste time in rushing through the shattered glass doors that lead to the streets outside. The building across the street is going to be their best bet at safety. The bottom level is a parking garage, so Ava guides Sara there by the hand, not willing to let go of her. “Behind there,” Ava points ahead to the solid concrete wall in front of them.

Ideally Ava would prefer to be somewhere uncovered just in case the blast is less controlled than she planned it to be. The goal wasn’t building demolition but rather just some structural damage. Still, it will be a significant blast and they’re going to need cover. Before Ava can even get them behind the barrier, the first blast goes off. The sound sets off ringing in Ava’s ears as glass rains down through the air and chimes as it strikes the pavement below.

Hands grab Ava’s arms as panic flares in her chest. Ava barely has time to think before she’s being pressed into the concrete wall and Sara’s chest is aligning with her back. Something closes over Ava’s ears as Sara’s head tucks near Ava’s neck. The second blast ricochets through the building, this time going off in the basement. Even with Sara behind her, Ava can feel the impact of the shock wave. Debris is raining down all around them, the air thick with dust and smoke. Ava’s heart is pounding wildly in her chest as she struggles to stay grounded in reality.

Her ears are still ringing as Sara keeps them both flattened against the wall. Ava reaches behind her with fumbling fingers to make sure that Sara is okay. Neither of them should move yet, not until they’re safe. She finds Sara’s waist with her fingers, then inches them up to Sara’s shoulder and slides them along her arms. Ava’s hands land along Sara’s wrists, finally understanding what it is that covered her ears. They’re Sara’s own hands, protecting Ava from the impact of the shockwave.

Warmth cuts through the panic as Ava tries to shift around in Sara’s arms. For a moment, Sara doesn’t let Ava move, still keeping her in place, but Ava lightly nudges Sara back away from her. The ringing in Ava’s ears hasn’t subsided as she comes face to face with Sara, their chests brushing. Ava looks over Sara’s shoulder to see that the bottom floor of the building has been blown out entirely. Debris is scattered over the streets, but there should be one final and smaller blast.

Sara’s hands have since fallen to Ava’s sides, her eyes scanning over Ava’s face rapidly. “I’m alright,” Ava tries to say, her words muffled to even her own ears. The final blast rings out, and on

instinct, Ava cradles Sara's head against her, protecting her from any flying debris that might come their way. The hands along Ava's back grip her tight as Ava rests her palm over the back of Sara's head and tucks her nose near Sara's ear.

The blast is smaller this time around, likely the second incendiary charge set to go off with the bomb that was placed on the higher floor. Ava can't tell if she's shaking or if Sara is. That panic hasn't left Ava's chest, flaring up through her limbs as she continues to hold Sara close. Fingers smooth over Ava's spine, reaching up her back and coming to tuck over her shoulder. "That's all of them," Sara murmurs, her voice sounding distant in Ava's ears.

Nodding her head, Ava doesn't let Sara go just yet, still trying to calm herself down. It is her shaking, not Sara. "We're safe now," Sara continues on, her hands both drifting up and down Ava's back in slow soothing motions. Ava just hums quietly, still holding Sara against her. She can almost feel Sara's heart beat against her chest, fast and rapid. Closing her eyes, Ava just lets herself remain still for a few more moments. "We should get going," Sara says, the sound more clear now as she steps back, "You ready to go?"

The answer is no, Ava needs a few more moments before she'll be okay. Already her heart is beating far too quickly in her own chest and her senses are clouded. They weren't meant to be this close to the blast and Ava was meant to see it coming. A hand wraps around Ava's own trembling one, squeezing her fingers tightly. "Yeah," Ava swallows and nods her head as best as she can, "We should go."

There's dust in Sara's hair and spread over her cheeks, little pieces of debris caught in her hair and along her shoulders. Sara reaches towards Ava, her hand landing along Ava's cheek and thumbing at her chin gently. When Sara pulls away, her finger is stained red. Ava raises her own hand up to gently touch the mark, the spot smarting with pain as she does. It must have happened as Sara pushed her against the wall, though Ava doesn't really remember much of what happened immediately after the bomb went off. "We'll clean that up when we're back," Sara murmurs, giving Ava's hand another squeeze, "Come on."

Too overwhelmed to argue, Ava lets Sara tug her along. The streets are in a state of ruin, the building not much better. Flames lick outwards from the upper level windows and Ava can just barely see the lights turning back on inside. Ashes flutter from the sky, filling the air with swirling flecks of decimated paper and ceiling tiles. Soon, Henry will escape just as Ava planned, and soon he'll come looking for them. But Ava knew this, and she's prepared. There's a plan in place, she and Sara just have to get out of here before the authorities show up. Following after Sara, Ava tries once more to calm herself down, allowing Sara to guide her through the destruction raining down on them.

Budapest, Hungary — 01:43

Aching and exhausted, Ava lays herself over the bed with a quiet sigh. As her back stretches out, Ava grunts quietly when a slight bit of pain ripples through her joints before they fully relax. Now freshly showered, all Ava wants to do is go to sleep. It's been a hellish day and tomorrow isn't going to be any better. Ideally Ava would have liked to get out of the country after the events of this evening, but Sara had been the one to state they both needed rest before going anywhere. She isn't wrong, but Ava doesn't like the thought of remaining here.

The bathroom door swings open and Ava tilts her head to the side to see Sara step out. Dark blonde waves rest along Sara's shoulders, still wet from her own shower. Sara has on just a white t-shirt that might very well be Ava's and a pair of grey sweats. Curling in on her side, Ava remains on the

bed and watches as Sara moves towards the kitchen. A small smile is thrown Ava's way when Sara glances up. Normally Ava would care that she's been caught staring, but she's given up pretenses at this point.

"You're bleeding," Sara comments, pointing at the front of Ava's shirt. When Ava glances down she finds that Sara is right, there is a spot of blood forming right along her ribcage. Earlier in the shower Ava had washed the place where the bullet nicked her. It's not very deep, and it likely isn't bleeding anymore. But it does still sting slightly as Ava shifts so she can tuck her arm under her head. "Let me help?" Sara asks, holding up the little first aid kit Ava laid along the counter this morning.

Nodding her head, Ava rolls to her back as Sara comes over with the case in hand. Without warning, Sara climbs onto the bed and settles over Ava's thighs. But this time Ava almost expected her to do that, so she doesn't fight, she just welcomes Sara's familiar weight against her. "You like getting shot, don't you?" Sara teases as Ava rolls her eyes and settles her hands on Sara's knees, "In the time I've known you, you've managed to take more bullets than I have, and I'm an assassin."

"Bullets aren't exclusive to just your world," Ava remarks as Sara shrugs, "And you're no longer an assassin, just as I'm no longer a spy." A mournful look passes over Sara's face as she hums, occupied with the kit she's spreading out near Ava on the bed. While Sara focuses on that, Ava turns her attention to Sara. She looks exhausted, but Ava expects they both do. Her eyes drift from Sara's lashes, to the bridge of her nose, down to the downwards turn of her lips. Sara's face is finally clear of dust and debris, revealing her freckles once more.

The car ride back had been a quiet one with Ava keeping an eye out just in case they were followed. This time when Ava instructed Sara to make several loops around the block, Sara didn't put up a single fight. All the while, Ava had been focusing on her breathing and Sara had kept her hand in Ava's own. There wasn't a single moment where Sara let go, not even as she was turning sharp corners.

Warm hands brush along the skin of Ava's stomach, drawing her back to reality. When she glances down, Sara is looking up at her, the edges of Ava's shirt gathered in her hands. Nodding, Ava rests her head back and lets Sara roll her shirt up so it rests under Ava's breasts. Ava's not wearing a bra, and she freezes as Sara's fingers trail back down her stomach with a delicate touch. "I thought I gave you a knife," Sara comments, turning her head to the side and examining the wound.

"I thought I had cleared the floor," Ava replies honestly as Sara's lips quirk in a small smile. Sara's hand reaches off to the side of Ava's body, and Ava watches on as Sara glances up at her. Confused, Ava tilts her head just moments before Sara is leaning down in her space. Lips meet Ava's own, soft and warm and tender. But the moment is ruined when something burns along Ava's side and she jerks away, sucking in a sharp breath through her teeth. "Damn it," Ava manages out, closing her eyes as the sting continues, "Why would you do that?"

"Sorry," Sara murmurs, her palm drifting up and down Ava's uninjured side in a soothing manner, "I figured a distraction might help." It didn't, not really—but Ava's not going to say no to kissing Sara. As Sara opens a small bandage, Ava rests her head back against the mattress and closes her eyes. Sara is humming something under her breath but Ava can't really tell what the song is supposed to be. It's soothing though, and the gentle sound is threatening to put Ava to sleep.

It's only when the bandage has been set and finger then drift along the side of Ava's neck that she opens her eyes once more. Again, Sara is in Ava's face, but her eyes are drawn to her own fingers. There's a cut near the column of Ava's neck where Henry had the knife pressed, but Ava had already taken care of it after her shower. "I would have killed him if he hurt you," Sara murmurs,

her tone low, her eyes so vividly blue when they meet Ava's own, "I almost did kill him."

Ava knows that. But she's never really known what to do when Sara's protective instincts are so suddenly directed at her. "I'm glad you didn't," Ava replies as she gently taps Sara's knees, "That would have made it a lot harder to clear our names." A barely there nod comes from Sara as her eyes flicker down. Her gaze catches on Ava's lips as Ava pauses, her breath catching in her chest. "You should let me take a look at your back," Ava manages out as Sara backs up, "I know you took some impact from the debris."

"Not much," Sara shrugs, slipping off of Ava's lap and settling to the side. Ava's muscles protest as she sits up, her shirt falling back down along her body once more. With her back to Ava, Sara shrugs her shirt up so Ava can see the damage that was done.

Mottled bruising covers Sara's skin, though it's hard to tell what came from the blast and what came from the fight. Delicately, Ava lays her hands over the worst bruise that's already darkening along Sara's spine. "Turns out in the fight of a metal railing against a human body, the railing always wins," Sara mutters as Ava traces the bruise down.

Lips quirking in a smile, Ava just hums, "So I can see." There's no visible cuts along Sara's skin, something Ava's pleased to note. Sara will be sore for a few days, but otherwise she's unharmed. "So next we go to the States," Ava mumbles, already dreading going there, "We'll wait things out in my safe house there and plan for the fight that will inevitably come out way."

Ava's counting on it being a big fight. With a little sigh, she flops back onto the bed and moves up the mattress so her head rests along the pillow. Sara follows suit, curling on her side right near Ava. There's plenty of space on this bed so Sara doesn't need to be this close, but Ava doesn't mind it. She welcomes the intrusion after everything that's happened recently. Sara's knees brush Ava's thighs, and her elbows are touching Ava's own upper arms. "And you're sure we'll know when he's coming?" Sara questions as Ava nods, "You're not worried about being caught off guard?"

The truth is that Ava is worried about that, which is why she's planned things the way she has. "There's a contact I keep in Croatia, the only one Henry really knows about. Undoubtedly he'll go there to look for me," Ava explains as Sara nods her head, "But I sent word to that contact today and gave him the address of my safe house in that country. He'll sell me out to Henry, I already know he will."

"But this is the safe house rigged with cameras and alarms," Sara muses in understanding as Ava gives her a small smile, "And he'll then trace us to the States, but we'll know how long we have." That's the plan exactly, and Ava offers Sara another little smile. There's a small room in the very back that contains the address to Ava's safe house in the States, laid out on a piece of paper. Ava planted it there when she and Sara started this because all of her backup files are stored in the States.

Gary has been taking physical backups to the safe house there each week, just in case something ever happened to Ava in the task of taking down the League and Operative. "You have a lot of hiding places," Sara comments, her voice quiet as her fingers wrap around Ava's wrist and trace over her pulse point, "I'll need to stop in Paris first, gather some things I stored there a long time ago that I want to take home."

It'll likely be easier for them to find some kind of a direct flight from a city like Paris, so Ava just nods her head in agreement. "We'll be in the woods, out in the middle of nowhere," Ava tells her as Sara raises her brows, "So you should bring whatever weapons you have stashed there too. We're going to need all the firepower we can get."

“A cabin in the woods huh,” Sara lilt, sitting up so she’s propped on her hand, “Sounds like a secluded place—plenty of time alone, plenty of silence.”

There’s a gentle challenge shining in Sara’s eyes, one that Ava already knows she’s going to accept, even as tired as she is. “Nothing’s ever quiet with you around,” Ava teases as Sara lets out a little laugh, “And I think I know a few things we could do while we wait for the chaos to come.”

“Do you now?” Sara leans in further. Ava’s vision crosses as she tries to keep Sara in focus. The blue of her eyes blurs, the freckles fade among Sara’s cheeks. Warm breath washes over Ava’s face and a nose comes into contact with Ava’s own.

With a little smile, Ava reaches up and gently cups both sides of Sara’s face. Smoothing her fingers over Sara’s cheekbones, Ava takes in the dimples in Sara’s cheeks and the soft blush taking over her skin. “Yeah,” Ava nods her head, their noses bumping together once more, “I do.” When Sara kisses her, Ava sighs quietly against her mouth. Threading her fingers into Sara’s hair, Ava brings her hands to the back of Sara’s head. There’s no telling how this will end, so for tonight, Ava’s going to hold Sara as close as she can and hope for the best.

Chapter End Notes

So that was part fourteen and I think there will be about two main chapters left and then the two endings. And I’m considering doing something for this story that gives Sara’s POV on some of these events/the events that have been mentioned but not seen. This has been a lot of fun to write and again a big thank you to everyone who has been reading along!

Part Fifteen

Chapter Summary

Sara and Ava flee to the States while they wait out the final leg of this fight against Henry and any corrupted spies and assassins. Without anything to keep them busy around the house, tensions begin to rise and a fight threatens to derail everything.

Chapter Notes

Alright, here we are with part fifteen and it's a little bit shorter than some of the other chapters. Now that we're close to the end, I have an exact chapter number for what's left. There are now two more chapters and then there are two ending chapters. The two endings are different and it will likely take me longer between the final chapter update and the ending update because I plan to release them together.

That being said, there's no real triggers that apply to this so, a violence free chapter—the first one I think. Ah, and I've not bothered with the location tags or the time stamps this go around after the first section because they're in the same place for this particular chapter. But I do hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Virginia, USA — 14:54

The incessant sound of fingers tapping against the passenger window is beginning to grate on Ava's nerves. Casting a glance Sara's way, Ava finds her still glued to the window, still rapping her knuckles against the middle of the car window. Sara has been like this since they arrived here in the States about three hours ago; not once has she stopped to sit still. While Ava thinks it's understandable that Sara might be on edge, she really could do without the repetitive noises.

Their flight had been Ava's least favorite flight she's ever taken. Ava's never been a fan of flying, and she had told Sara as much before entrusting Sara with the decision of their flight plans. Apparently Sara thought that it was suitable for them to travel via military aircraft. Originally Ava didn't think that was going to be terrible, until she realized it meant making the entire flight in the cargo bay where they were strapped to flimsy seats.

Everything had rattled the entire time and Ava had done her very best to ignore the fact that they were over expanses of open ocean. Sara did her best to occupy Ava with conversations, though Ava got the feeling that Sara wasn't so fond of being suspended over water either. The only good thing that came from this was that neither of them had to discard the weapons they had prior to leaving Europe. Though they did still stop at Ava's local weapons supplier here and picked up the first round of weapons and explosives they might need.

Needing something other than the tapping to fill the silence Sara has instilled between them, Ava reaches out and flicks on the radio. It's just a generic station, something playing overly enthusiastic pop music. With a quiet sigh, Ava sinks back into her seat and grips the steering wheel tight. In

seconds, the radio clicks off, and Ava glances up just in time to see Sara's hand retreating from the control. "Not in the mood," Sara mumbles sullenly before slinking back to her hunched form near the window.

Doing her very best to not be irritated, Ava just hums and nods her head curtly. Sara hasn't been in the mood since they landed, and Ava's beginning to wonder if she will ever get into the mood at this point. "Once I turn down this road up here, we're on a gravel road for about three miles," Ava explains, nodding to the GPS mounted just along the dashboard, "This is your last chance to tell me you want to be dropped off somewhere so you can go home to your family."

Given Sara's mood, Ava has just assumed that her attitude and demeanor has everything to do with the fact that Sara could be going home to her family right now. Ava's given her several outs, and Sara has yet to take them. While Ava could greatly benefit from Sara's help in this, the last thing she wants is for resentment to build in Sara. "You don't have to help," Ava reminds Sara, turning her head to see Sara's look of confusion, "There's a regional airport around here that could have you back in Star City in just a few hours."

This part of everything is Ava's mess to clean up. Drawing Henry out here for a final fight is the only real option when it comes to determining who is on his side and who isn't. Now that Ava's tapped into the Operative's primary messaging system via the data drive she collected from Henry, she'll know who's acting to support him. Whoever comes here to Virginia for the conflict will also help clear things up. If Ava trusted the other two members that serve as the heads of the Operative, she would just turn everything over to them. But Ava can't prove they're not in on this, and she won't be betrayed again.

"I'm not in a bad mood because I don't want to help you," Sara mumbles, letting out a rushed sigh before running her hand through her hair, "It just—got a lot more real now that we're actually here in the States. There's a lot to consider about going home." Because Ava can't really relate to that, she remains quiet, figuring it's best to let Sara talk about this without interruption. "I don't even know how to tell them I'm alive, it seems like a shitty thing to do to just pop back in with no warning," Sara continues, propping her feet on Ava's dash.

Choosing not to comment on the feet this time around, Ava just lifts her shoulder in a small shrug and carefully turns down the gravel pathway. "Do you want my take on this?" Ava questions, her eyes flickering to the right as Sara nods her head, "I don't think there is a good way or bad way for you to come back into their lives. I think that no matter how you choose to do it, it'll come as a shock to them." A quiet grunt comes from Sara as she looks out the window and Ava looks at her. "But I don't think they'll care about how shocking it is," Ava continues, "They're your family Sara, and they love you. They want you back."

That's one thing that Ava is certain of after watching Sara's family for such a limited time. Even Gary had noted the ways that Sara's family still mourns her, and he had only been checking on them periodically while Ava thought Sara was dead. "I don't even know how to be part of a family anymore," Sara's voice is so quiet Ava has to strain to hear it, "I'm not the same person they lost—not even close. They're going to be disappointed."

There's a note of resignation in Sara's tone, as if she's just made up her mind that this is the way things are going to be. Ava's not as convinced, but then again, she can't really pretend to know what this is like for Sara. "They're going to need to adjust," Ava replies delicately as Sara's eyes jump to her, "And it might be hard for them, and hard for you. Everything takes time, and everything runs its course. Eventually things will settle down for all of you."

It's really the best advice Ava can offer Sara. She doesn't know how to be part of a family either,

so it's not as if she can give Sara any recommendations on how to remedy that lack of knowledge. "But I know one thing for sure here," Ava speaks, slowing down as she takes the time to really look at Sara. Blue eyes find Sara's own as Sara's lips twitch down in a confused frown. "I highly doubt they'll be disappointed," Ava tells her with a little smile, "I've never once been disappointed by you—not truly."

A soft pink color rises to Sara's cheeks as her lips quirk upwards. She averts her gaze, turning her head back to the window, but Ava saw that light flickering in Sara's eyes once more, and she saw her blush. Humming quietly to herself, Ava speeds up once more and drives down the gravel road that leads them further back into the woods. There's not a single other being out here, Ava made sure of that when she had decided to go with this location as her safe house. The closest neighbors are miles away, and Ava's never even met them.

This is the place that Ava feels safest, even with all of the security measures she installed in her bunker and house in Croatia. Up ahead there's another path that diverts sharply to the right and Ava takes the car down it. "You know when you said this place was off the grid, I don't think I was expecting this," Sara comments as Ava smiles, "This really is in the middle of nowhere isn't it?"

Continuing down the drive, Ava just gives her head a small nod. The house is in the background, tucked in a little gravel clearing. It's not a very big house, just a simple and small one that Ava's been coming to for years when she needed a break. It's familiar, and maybe as close to home as Ava has. "We'll get the weapons out in a bit," Ava puts the car in park and switches off the engine, "First I just want to get our bags moved in, then we can handle the rest."

Sara mutters something in agreement but Ava doesn't hear it, too busy shoving her door open. The gravel crunches under her boots as she steps out of the car and pockets the keys, taking in the wooden cabin in front of her. This will be the first time that Ava's let someone other than Gary into the house. There's not much that Sara can get into, but Ava wishes she had the chance to take some things down from the shelves and walls before now.

There's a small porch lining the front half of the house, complete with a porch swing that was once painted mint green. It's faded over the years, but there's still a little handprint in white paint on the top left side of the bench—Ava's own handprint that her father had placed there when she was only four. Sometimes she can't tell if she actually remembers that story or if her parents told it to her so many times that she's formed a false memory from the tale alone. Either way, it hardly matters now. The handprint is so smudged and distorted from sun exposure that it's hardly identifiable, erased with the passage of time.

A sound comes from the back of the car and Ava turns to see that Sara's opened the trunk. Making her way over, Ava takes the bag that Sara's offered her and slings it over her shoulders. With a tired sounding grunt, Sara raises both her arms over her head and stretches out. A patch of pale skin appears between the hemline of her black shirt and the waistband of the olive green joggers Sara's been wearing all day. Averting her eyes as her cheeks flush, Ava adjusts her bag over her shoulder. "Come on," Ava prompts, already getting her phone out, "There's a lot I have to show you."

The app on Ava's phone pulls up and she uses it to disarm all of the remaining alarms that she had left on as they were approaching the house. There are perimeter cameras all around the house as well as motion sensors. Each one is solar powered to prevent losing vision if the power cuts out. Everything here is solar powered, though there is a generator at the back of the house that can be used if needed.

Ava takes the steps two at a time, coming to stand in front of the door before twisting the key in

the lock. Everything inside is just as she left it. There's a box of files crowding the island in the kitchen, and a suit draped over the back of the forest green couch. "This is not what I expected from you," Sara steps inside, nudging her sunglasses down her nose and peering around the room, "This almost looks—"

Her words instantly die, but Ava can't help but flinch. Already she knows what Sara's next words were going to be. "Like a home," Ava fills in, her throat tight, her voice coming through with an edge. When Sara makes a face and winces, Ava just clears her throat and closes the door behind them.

It does look like a home, Ava knows that—and it once was. But it hasn't been one in a long time. And it was never really Ava's home. Still, the dark wood walls shroud memories from Ava's years spent here in the summer with her family. There's a chip on the kitchen counter where her father once dropped a ceramic bowl and somehow the bowl was fine but the counter wasn't. There's a chair pushed against the far window in the room because Ava's aunt had once tried to teach her to rollerblade inside the house but Ava wasn't very good at it and needed a landing pad.

The record player off to the side of the television contains countless vinyls stuffer along the shelves under it. Each one has scratches and groove marks from years of use and years of Ava trying to learn how to properly drop the needle down. One of the kitchen barstools is missing a rod along the back because Ava had a habit of twisting them around while waiting for dinner and one evening it just broke off.

Everything here is an homage to the past, and sometimes Ava can't stand it. This is where she feels safest but it's also the one place that makes her feel alone. "Ava," Sara murmurs quietly, her voice soft. Taking in a deep breath, Ava looks up and hopes that she's managing to pull off a neutral expression. "What is this place?" Sara questions, her gaze shifting around the room, landing on the shelf where picture frames rest, "Is this—"

"It used to be my aunt's house," Ava cuts Sara off, not wanting to hear that word again, not wanting to say it herself, "We used to come over here in the summers and odd times throughout the year to visit her. She was pretty paranoid, so most of the security cameras and alarm systems were already in place." What Ava leaves out is that her aunt only became that paranoid after Ava's father died. Now Ava thinks she might understand why. Her father told his sister everything, so surely she knew about Henry.

Sara is still watching Ava with those piercing eyes, and this time around Ava does shift under the intensity of her stare. "She died when I took up work at the Operative so, I bought it," Ava shrugs, walking to the kitchen counter and setting her phone down there, "I added some new security measures, switched out the door leading to the basement and converted the place into a safe house. All my physical copies on the Operative and the League are downstairs."

Ava nods to the back hallway that disappears beyond the kitchen before walking that way herself. There's a bedroom downstairs, but it's relatively small and it's the one that Ava used to stay in, so she'd rather not put Sara in that room. Instead she sets up the little staircase that leads to the hall upstairs. Two bedrooms sit up here, one that used to belong to Ava's aunt, and the other that served as a second guest bedroom. Ava's cleared everything out of these rooms other than the books and pictures that rest along the shelves. She couldn't bring herself to move those.

Leading Sara into the room to the right, Ava comes to a stop near the bed. "I figured it would be safer for us to both be on the same floor," Ava explains as Sara throws her bag onto the mattress and sits down. Sara gives the mattress an experimental bounce and Ava can't help but smile. "Comfortable?" Ava teases gently as Sara raises her brows.

“Wanna come find out?” Sara immediately throws back as Ava feels her smile widening. Shaking her head in amusement, Ava walks to the blinds and quickly closes them one after another. The room itself isn’t very big. It’s really just the bed pressed against the far wall with a nightstand and a dresser. A mirror stands in the corner of the room, and above the dresser are three little shelves that contain a few scattered books and photos. “Look at you,” Sara muses as Ava turns around, “You were so little.”

There’s a photo in her hands of Ava when she was about nine, smiling at the camera as she’s sandwiched between her parents on the bench. It was taken the summer before they died, only a few months before Ava turned ten and her world drastically changed. An ache forms in Ava’s chest as she walks over and quickly takes the photo from Sara’s hands. “We were all little once,” Ava replies curtly, replacing the frame face down on the shelf, “There’s nothing special about it.”

Ava can feel Sara’s eyes on her even as she turns her head away. It’s not fair to Sara for Ava to snap at her, but this subject of family has always left Ava feeling just a little too raw and too exposed for comfort. “Do you miss them?” Sara pushes on, clearly not understanding that Ava wants to drop the topic.

Clearing her throat, Ava just lifts a single shoulder in a small shrug, occupying herself with staring at the patterns swirling in the wooden walls. “I guess,” Ava murmurs, her throat feeling tight as she sucks in a deep breath, “Sometimes I can’t remember them. I can’t tell which memories are real, and which ones I’ve imagined through stories my aunt told me. Some memories I think I just wanted to be real, so I made them seem as if they had actually happened.”

It’s a painful truth to think about, but there are times where Ava tries to pull her parent’s faces to the front of her mind and realizes that she can’t get the details right. Sometimes she can’t remember if her mother’s hair was more blonde than brown or not. Sometimes she forgets that her father had deep-set smile lines. And other times, Ava gets assaulted by a random memory that feels so strong, so tangible that she swears it was real. It rarely is though. It usually just turns out to be some figment of her imagination—a story of someone else’s parents that she heard along the way and reinvented to fit her family.

“The truth is that my parents weren’t around a lot,” Ava continues on, turning so she’s facing Sara and taking in that sorrowful expression Sara is wearing, “I like to imagine they always were, but summers here is when I saw the most of them. Other times my father was traveling for work, and my mother kept long hours.” With another shrug Ava glances back to the photo frame resting down, “It was usually just me, and sometimes a nanny.”

Ava knows that her parents loved her, and she knows that they did their best to be around. But given how soon they were ripped from her, it never really feels like it was enough. Sometimes she resents them for being absent, because that’s easier to stomach than the ache and the pain that comes from missing them and the moments they were around. Across the room, Sara makes a sound that sounds almost like a hum, almost like a cough. When Ava glances up, there’s a hand outstretched her direction.

Eyeing it in confusion, Ava glances at Sara’s face and spots the barely there smile tugging at her lips. Sara’s fingertips wiggle, and Ava takes a step towards her. Delicately, Ava places her hand in Sara’s own, only to be tugged forwards the last few steps. Arms encircle Ava and she feels herself go stiff, not having expected this. “What are you doing?” Ava asks, her arms trapped against Sara’s chest, her cheek brushing Sara’s own.

“Hugging you,” Sara retorts with a fond sounding laugh, “Don’t spies give hugs?” There’s not a rule against it, but Ava doesn’t just hug people for the hell of it. Ava’s spent countless evenings

tangled under covers with Sara and exploring bare skin and hard lines of muscle, but somehow this feels strange and unfamiliar. It's no different than the position they were in just a single night ago when the bombs were going off in Budapest. Yet it's completely different. This time there's no danger.

However Sara doesn't seem as if she's going to let go anytime soon, so Ava forces herself to relax. Pulling her arms free, Ava tentatively brings them around Sara's body. One arm settles around Sara's waist, the other rests along her shoulders. "See," Sara hums near Ava's ear, the soft strands of her hair tickling Ava's cheek, "Normal people things."

A small laugh bubbles up from Ava's chest as she tips her chin down and rests her cheek against Sara's shoulder. "Normal people hug each other when they should be setting up bombs and weapons around the house?" Ava teases as Sara's shoulders shake when she laughs, "Normal people hide out in houses in the middle of nowhere waiting for a team of spies and assassins to come and kill them?"

"Well, we can pretend," Sara shrugs, her shoulder lifting against Ava's cheek before settling once more. The word strikes something inside Ava's chest that has been hidden and tucked away for a while now. A dull ache settles there behind her ribs, something she felt for the first time in a hotel room, in a shower, watching Sara under the water. It's never really gone away since that day, and Ava thought maybe it would become more manageable. She was wrong—Ava's really come to hate that word; pretend.

Clearing her throat, Ava carefully steps back and unwinds her arms from Sara's body. "We can pretend as we set everything up," Ava clarifies, not daring to look at Sara's face right now. She's not sure what she might see there, but she doesn't think that she can handle anything else right now. Being in this house with Sara saying words like pretend and hugging her is hard enough as it is. "Come on," Ava heads towards the door, not bothering to check if Sara's following her, "We have a lot to do."

The sound of yet another record being stopped and restarted comes from just a few feet away, and Ava does her best to remain calm and silent. Tapping her fingers along her knee, Ava glances over the top of her book and looks to where Sara is bent over the record, trying to align the needle perfectly with the grooves of the second song. This is now the third time that Sara has played the song, and Ava doesn't think she can take anymore of it.

When the synth beats of "Take Me Home Tonight" thrum through the speakers, Ava suppresses a groan and jerks her book back up to obscure her face from Sara's view. A content hum comes from Sara, something that has Ava tapping her fingers along her knee at an increased pace. This has been going on for the past hour. It's raining outside, and Sara has taken that to mean that she has to be in this house, in this room, playing that damn song over and over.

It's been two days since they arrived, and Ava is starting to get her first real glimpse of just how rare it is for Sara to actually remain still. Neither of them are used to being stuck in one place like this with nothing to do, but Sara has already reached a level of boredom that Ava didn't anticipate she would hit until a few more days had passed. Already this morning there have been two near conflicts.

The first came when Ava had stumbled down to the kitchen at seven in the morning after she swore she heard a glass break. By the time she came down, Sara was at the stove, making an omelette and eating oatmeal as if nothing had happened. Ava had been too tired to really ask what the sound was. Instead she'd just resigned herself to the fact that she was awake for the day. About

an hour later Ava found a shard of glass on the floor near the sink, and the rest of the broken glass wrapped neatly in a paper towel in the trash.

It wasn't a nice glass, but Ava had been more than just a little frustrated that Sara had been pretending she hadn't broken it that morning. But she'd said nothing, just bit her tongue and started going through the Operative transmissions that were coming through her computer.

Two hours later the rain had started for the day. Ava had been at the counter, still going over everything when Sara had burst through the door, her clothing soaked. She had been out checking the perimeters of the house. Of course Sara doesn't have to do this, she just wants to, so Ava hasn't said anything about it. But today she nearly did when Sara was explaining how she swore she saw a bear, her clothing dripping water all over the floor and carpet as she talked.

Still, Ava said nothing. It's been two days of this. Two days of Ava trying to read while Sara sharpens her knives at the counter. Two days of Ava going over messages while Sara explores the house over and over, never once sitting down. They've spent time together, but never in a situation where there wasn't an immediate task or danger awaiting them in the coming hours. This time around, they're playing a waiting game and Sara is particularly bad at it.

Ava had tried giving Sara things to do but Sara had quickly snapped at Ava, insisting she didn't need a list of chores. Then Sara immediately came back an hour later and asked Ava what the tasks were. So Ava had shown Sara how to check all the cameras and how to navigate the alarm system. They'd gone out the first day here and made plans on where to put everything in terms of the traps Ava plans on laying out.

But Sara had done most of the work. It was Sara who laid the iron spikes over the single road that leads here. And it was Sara who had dug the holes along the road that they will eventually place the explosive inside. When she was finished with that, Ava showed Sara the basement and how everything was organized. Also in the basement are spare weapons, IDs, and cash just in case everything goes south.

It's been hard adjusting to each other in this setting. Ava's used to silence, something that Sara never has known the meaning of. But it hasn't been all bad. They do work well together when going over the files. Ava has Sara go through the Operative transmissions with her each evening and Sara in turn had shown Ava how she was monitoring any activity in the League as well. So far the Operative has discovered Henry's office in Budapest, and there has been some chatter about that in the transmissions, but nothing that would suggest either guilt or innocence of numbers One and Two.

In the kitchen, Sara is humming to herself and Ava can hear it from here. Lowering her book down once more, Ava watches on as Sara stands near the counter and skims through the reports on the computer. She's wearing grey joggers and a black shirt, one that ends just above the waistband of her pants. The sleeves are cut short and the neckline dips low, revealing the bruise along Sara's collarbone that Ava left there last night.

That's been the most confusing and frustrating part of this all, and maybe the real reason that Ava herself is on edge. Since getting here, Sara has been playing this game of pulling Ava in before pushing her away. Just last night, Sara had been the one to drag Ava up the stairs, kissing her as they went, pinning Ava to the wall just outside the bedroom and latching her lips to Ava's neck. It had been Sara who started that, just as she had the nights before.

But last night, only seconds after Ava had collapsed to her back on the mattress, still panting quietly with her eyes closed, Sara had all but dismissed her from the room. That's happened every night since they arrived here and Ava doesn't get it. All she knows is that she can't handle it. She

can't handle Sara kissing her sweetly in the kitchen while Ava makes lunch only for Sara to be halfway through their meal and blurt out some excuse to go outside again. Ava can't handle the way Sara had fallen asleep with her head on Ava's lap the other evening just to jolt up from a nightmare and barricade herself in her room until dinner.

As much as Ava wants to let this be enough, it isn't, and she can't do this anymore. "Can we turn the music off," Ava snaps, shoving her book down into her lap and glaring over at Sara. A look of surprise flickers over Sara's face as if she's never once considered the fact that playing the same song three times in a row is annoying. "I think we can do without the music," Ava continues as Sara leans on the counter, "The rain outside is plenty of noise for now."

"You want me to listen to the rain?" Sara implores as Ava nods her head, realizing it's a stupid suggestion but not willing to backdown. With a small scoff, Sara turns her attention back to the computer, "I'll pass."

Frustration bubbles and swells in Ava's chest as she stares at Sara, waiting for her to move to the record player. But Sara doesn't. Having had enough of this, Ava lays her open book over the top of the couch cushion and swings her legs off the couch. In a few strides she's in front of the record player, already flipping the power switch. The music comes to an abrupt halt as the needle lifts from the vinyl. "What the hell Ava?" Sara turns around, her brows drawn, "I don't want to just sit around here and be bored."

"This is supposed to be boring," Ava gestures around the room as Sara's brows crease further, a frown forming along her lips, "We are currently hiding in the middle of the woods waiting for members of my organization, and your organization to try and kill us. You should be thankful that it's been this boring so far, because when they come, it's going to be far from that."

When Sara's features pinch inwards, Ava already knows that Sara's going to try and fight her on this. "I would take being shot at over being stuck in this house listening to the passive aggressive page turning you've been doing all day," Sara retorts as Ava purses her lips, "Every since we got here, all you've done is sigh every single time I so much as move, or watch me to make sure I'm not going to break something."

"You already broke something," Ava points out, knowing that she shouldn't be unable to stop herself from a momentary petty indulgence. A bitter laugh falls from Sara's lips, one that makes Ava ache, "You didn't have to come. I told you that I could handle this on my own. And you can still leave, nobody is keeping you here."

Anxiety forms in Ava's chest as the words leave her mouth. She doesn't want Sara to go, but she doesn't want Sara here if they're just going to get into fights all day long. "I can't just leave," Sara shakes her head, sounding almost amused as she folds her arms over her chest and uses a single hand to gesture Ava's direction, "You helped me get out of the League, I can't just strand you here now."

Somehow that's really not what Ava wanted to hear. Swallowing past her disappointment, Ava nods her head and looks to the far window. "I don't want you here out of some kind of obligation," Ava says quietly, watching the rain strike the glass. Beads of water form and pour down the panes in rivulets, carving paths through the surface. The lights inside the room glow a soft amber color, reflecting off the water droplets. Ava can just make out the shapes of her and Sara in the glass, her outline along with Sara's blurred form. "You should go," Ava turns around once more, staring back at Sara, "I can't keep doing this."

Instantly the frown disappears from Sara's face, replaced by that emotion that has taken over her features each time she's run away from Ava since they arrived here. But this time, Ava knows

what it is. It's fear. "I can't keep doing this with you," Ava shakes her head, speaking the words even though they hurt as Ava forces them from her mouth, "You can't keep telling me that you can't be with me and then kiss me in kitchens and hallways. You can't keep letting me hope."

Sara's not dumb—she's incredibly smart. And Ava might be a spy but she never could hide from Sara. She knows that Sara is aware that Ava hasn't stopped hoping she might change her mind. Already Sara's posture has shifted. Her shoulders are hunched inwards, her eyes averting Ava's own, her jaw working. "Ava," Sara lets out a frustrated sigh, running her hand through her hair, "I'm trying—"

When Sara cuts off with another angry exhale, Ava's eyes flicker over her. "Trying to what?" Ava pushes, not willing to let this go, "What are you trying to do in all of this? Because it's not fair to me, not even remotely—not when I care about you. So what is it that you want here?"

"Fuck Ava," Sara lets out a stuttered and bitter laugh as she looks to the ceiling, "Do I have to have all of the answers now?"

Pursing her lips, Ava does her best to shove down the hurt welling up inside her chest. It's overwhelming her, threatening to spill over at any given moment. "When it comes to this?" Ava begins as Sara's eyes cut towards her, "Yes, you absolutely do." Even if it's not the answer Ava wants, what she needs is for Sara to pick something. What Ava needs is for Sara to say a simple yes, or a simple no to whatever it is Sara thinks is happening between them.

Ava thrives on rules and definitions and she's tired of all these blurred lines resting between them. Someone has to draw a line in the sand, and Ava wants it done now. At the counter, Sara is avoiding Ava's gaze again, instead staring off at the door. When her eyes flicker to the boots resting near the door, Ava has her answer. "I'm going for a walk," Sara announces as Ava sags against the record shelf. Sara's movements are stiff as she walks to the door, her jaw still working, her eyes never once meeting Ava's own.

"It's raining," Ava points out quietly, uselessly.

"I know," Sara mumbles, her back already to Ava as she slips the boots on, "It's just rain." Those are the last words Sara speaks before she jerks the door open and it slams behind her.

The windows rattle slightly, shaking down the droplets that hadn't yet finished forming. Everything inside Ava's chest breaks free as her body tenses and a single tear spills from the corner of her eyes. Angrily reaching up, Ava swipes it away only for two more to fall. "Damn it," Ava mutters, bringing the neck of her shirt up and trying to clear the water from her eyes.

It's what Ava expected. It's maybe what she saw coming all along. Doing her best to keep everything together, Ava walks back to the couch and falls into the cushions there. Bringing her legs up, Ava spreads out along the couch and stares at the ceiling. Her eyes burn as she looks up to the ceiling fan. The blades spin in dizzying circles, chasing the others around but never once touching. Another sob grips Ava's chest but it never breaks free. It tangles in her throat before Ava swallows it down. Grabbing her book on the back of the couch, Ava tries to look at the words. She tries to read, tries to focus. But mainly Ava tries to pretend she's okay—it's all she has now.

Something touches Ava's arm and she jolts upwards, suddenly awake. Her hand reaches for the blade tucked under the couch pillow but something blocks her efforts. Turning around, Ava sucks in a deep breath when she comes face to face with Sara. "Sorry," Sara murmurs, pulling her hand away from Ava's wrist and sitting back on her heels, "I tried saying your name but you were out."

Blinking wearily, Ava stretches out her arms and legs as she flops back down onto the cushions. Her heart is still pounding in her chest as Ava turns her head to the side and takes Sara in where she's kneeling by the side of the couch. She's soaking wet, her hair plastered to her cheeks, her clothing sticking to her body. Already there's a small damp spot forming on the carpet at Sara's feet and knees where they make contact with the fabric. "What are you doing?" Ava asks, her voice still raspy, still sounding half-asleep, "Did you just get back?"

A nod comes as an answer, Sara's gaze cast to the side, her lips already drawn in a frown. Sitting up slightly, Ava fumbles with the book that had fallen to the side of her body and closes it. Sara doesn't move though, still in that crouched position with her hands laid over her knees. "I need to shower and warm up," Sara comments as Ava slowly nods her head, still feeling confused. Blue eyes turn upwards suddenly, catching Ava off guard, "When I get back down here, can we talk?"

Those words never come before something good. Ava's had enough for the day, and she desperately wants to say no. But there's something in Sara's eyes that stops her from doing that. There's something about the draw of Sara's brows and the slack position of her shoulders that gives Ava pause. A pressure builds in Ava's chest as she nods her head once more, trying to find something to say. "Yeah," Ava manages out, her voice quiet as Sara looks away once more, "We can do that."

No reply comes from Sara as she pushes up off the ground and sets off towards the stairs. Still on the couch, Ava watches her go, staring at Sara's back until she disappears from view. Wet footprints are left behind on the ground, but Ava doesn't care about those right now. Anxiety swirls with a tight heat in her chest, snaring around her heart and making it beat faster. Ava doesn't move as the water kicks on upstairs, the sound of the shower taking over the silence that has fallen over the house.

It's stopped raining outside, that much is clear. When Ava turns to look out the windows, there's nothing but darkness outside. The clock lets her know that three hours have passed since Sara left the house, two hours since Ava checked last before falling asleep. Shifting on the couch, Ava draws her knees up to her chest and stares at the steps. A numb feeling has settled in Ava's chest now, a result of her thinking and overthinking everything before her eyes closed.

This is the moment that Sara leaves and Ava knows it. This is the moment that Ava's left here alone to handle everything. It'll likely be better this way anyways, that's what Ava had reasoned prior to succumbing to sleep. Ava started this on her own, so it only makes sense that it should end this way as well. And Sara's already made it clear that she is here only out of obligation. Ava doesn't ever someone staying with her out of obligation, so as much as it hurts, she knows that she is going to have to let Sara go.

With a quiet and shaking sigh, Ava leans her head back against the pillow and grabs at the blanket draped over the back of the couch. Tucking it around her body, Ava shifts to her side and stares at the record player. She doesn't regret talking about this with Sara. Ava can't regret it. They've been running around each other for so long and Ava's tired. At some point the chase had to stop—that was something Ava knew from the beginning. She just never thought this is where they would end up.

Initially, Ava always assumed that Sara would just disappear one day. She thought that their fights over targets would come to an end. Then she thought Sara might get bored of her and their hook-ups in closets and offices and hotel rooms. And then Sara died. She died and Ava hated that it took something like that happening for her to realize why Sara always unsettled her and why Sara always made Ava ache in that way she hadn't for so long. Now Ava's losing her all over again.

Yet she can't regret it because she's learned far too much to wish this experience away. Sara was this shock of reality that Ava needed. Now Ava knows what she wants, and what she's willing to fight for. This particular fight just didn't happen to end the way Ava wanted it to.

Upstairs, the shower has turned off, and Ava hears the sound of rusted door hinges squeaking open. Footsteps sound at the top steps and Ava props her head up to see Sara there. She's dressed in sweatpants and a loose grey shirt now, her hair hanging in waves at her shoulders. Sara's hair is still wet, the water leaving damp patches along her shirt. Drawing her legs up, Ava lets Sara settle at the end of the couch.

Silence fills the room as Ava watches Sara and Sara stares at the far wall. Her body is tense and rigid, her hands settled in her lap. Ava brings her knees up to her chest once more, needing something to hold onto. If Sara's not going to be the one to speak, Ava will. "I understand that you need to go," Ava begins, playing with a loose thread along the blanket in her lap as she stares to her fingers, "It's far too dark to be out driving tonight, but in the morning I'll ta—"

"Who said anything about leaving?" Sara interrupts, her voice slightly scratchy, her eyes caught on Ava's own. She looks confused, and Ava feels herself mirroring the same expression. "Why would I be going somewhere?" Sara asks as Ava stares at her.

Ava was convinced that Sara was going to leave. Some of that pressure lets up inside her chest, but the rest of it remains behind. Not understanding, Ava waves her hand to the record player. "Because we had a fight?" Ava explains, not sure why Sara needs a recap of what happened, "Because I said that I care about you and you just walked away for a three hour long walk?"

Guilt flickers over Sara's features, and this time she doesn't tuck it away. This time the emotion stays there for Ava to see. "We had a fight but I'm not leaving Ava," Sara shakes her head. Conflicted blue eyes scan Ava for a moment before Ava watches Sara's throat bob. A hand stretches out, reaching towards Ava's knee. With her gaze caught on Sara, Ava frowns and takes her hand. "I'm sorry about the noise," Sara speaks as her fingers close around Ava's own, tangling around her palm, "I'm really not used to so much silence."

That much is clear. But Ava knew that about Sara before. It's the fact that Sara hasn't once slowed down since they got here that has Ava on edge. It's as if Ava can feel the anxiety leaching from Sara at any given moment and all it's done is make Ava's own that much worse. "It's not your fault," Ava tells Sara, giving her hand a squeeze, "I'm still not used to having someone around all the time. Sharing rooms in cities for a night or two is nothing compared to this—and I haven't shared a space like this with someone in a long time."

Ava hopes that Sara understands what she's trying to say here. She hopes Sara understands that this isn't really about Sara, it's just about the two of them trying to learn, trying to adjust. "I hate the quiet," Sara murmurs, her eyes trained on the ground now, her grip on Ava's hand tightening, "It reminds me of the ship." Understanding washes over Ava as she tips her head back with a quiet hum.

With a gentle tug to Sara's hand, Ava draws her closer on the couch. Sara shuffles over the cushions as Ava sits up a bit, resting her bent knees over Sara's thighs. "It was always quiet there at night," Sara continues, her fingers rubbing at the fabric of Ava's pants over her knee, "Every once and a while, a sound would come through the silence. Sometimes the ship groaning, sometimes a wave slamming into us—but usually someone screaming."

Ava's throat is tight as she rests her arm along the back of the couch behind Sara's neck, her fingers rubbing lightly at the side of Sara's shoulder. "So you make sure there's no silence now," Ava muses as Sara nods her head, "You're afraid of what you might hear in it." A stuttered exhale

falls from Sara's lips as she closes her eyes and gives a small nod of her head. It makes sense to Ava, even though it's not something she experiences. But she aches for Sara, and she hates that she never put this together on her own.

Untangling herself from Sara, Ava pushes up off the couch. A small mumble of complaint falls from Sara's lips, but Ava ignores her and heads for the record player. There are far more suitable albums on the shelf than something by Eddie Money, and Ava slides one from the collection. It's one of her father's old jazz albums, something with no lyrics and soothing tempos. Flipping out the jazz vinyl for the one still on the turntable, Ava sets the needle down and flips the switch.

The gentle sounds of a trumpet come from the speakers almost instantly. Adjusting the volume, Ava tucks the empty sleeve to the side and heads back to the couch. Sara's eyes are trained on Ava, her lips slightly parted and her features far more relaxed. "Better?" Ava asks as she slips back down near Sara again.

A barely there nod comes as Ava tucks herself along Sara's side the same way she was before. For a moment neither of them talk. Ava rests her cheek along her own arm, just watching Sara, taking in her side profile as Sara closes her eyes. Sara's cheeks are still flushed from the heat of her shower, a soft pink color tinting her skin. Clusters of freckles dot along her cheekbones and jaw, some even stretching up her temples and tangling with into her eyebrows.

When bright blue eyes turn Ava's way, Ava doesn't avert her gaze—she's done doing that with Sara. "We just need to find a balance," Sara speaks as Ava lifts her head from her arm, "I'll go outside when I need something to do and you're trying to get some peace in here."

It's a reasonable compromise, so Ava nods her head. "And when it's raining, I can go downstairs," Ava tells her as Sara hums, "It's relatively soundproof, so you can play Eddie Money as many times as you want." A barely there smile tugs at Sara's lips, one that Ava finds herself mirroring. "Is that what you needed to talk about?" Ava questions, searching Sara's face.

Something almost unreadable flickers over Sara's face, but Ava catches that little bit of reluctance in the drop of Sara's smile. Ava knows this look, the look that comes before Sara is about to say something Ava might not like. The look that comes just a moment before Sara says something important. The couch cushion shifts under Ava as Sara turns inwards, now curling her body so it's facing Ava.

Sucking in a breath, Ava's eyes catch movement and she glances to Sara's hand that's coming towards her face. Slowly fingers slip along Ava's chin up to her jaw. Sara's palm is warm, her thumb ghosting over Ava's cheekbone. Silence lingers between them, heavy and thick. Soft blue eyes scan Ava's face, as Ava's gaze drops to the slight lift of Sara's lips. "I'm not here out of obligation," Sara shakes her head as Ava drags her eyes upwards once more, "I'm here because I want to be."

The light from the kitchen turns the drying strands of Sara's hair to gold. Shadows dip and dance around Sara's face, settling near her eyes, near the slope of her nose, near the line of her jaw. Fingertips scratch gently behind Ava's ear, almost fond in their movement. That smile still sits along Sara's lips and pulls out the dimples tucked in the corners of her mouth. "You've never been an obligation," Sara murmurs, "Not even once, not when I care about you the way I do."

All the air leaves Ava's chest in one breath. The pressure is back but this time it's in her stomach, swirling and tumbling around. "You're right, I haven't been very fair to you in this," Sara continues with a quiet sigh, her eyes falling down for a moment. Reaching out with her hand, Ava finds Sara's free palm and grips tightly to it. She needs Sara to explain that, she needs Sara to finish whatever she's trying to say here. Ava's good at reading between the lines but she is tired of

having to do that. “I want this Ava,” Sara exhales, her brows raising slightly as her eyes meet Ava’s own once more, “I just have no idea how to do this.”

Disbelief is the first emotion Ava processes, then shock, then surprise. Staring back at Sara, Ava takes in her earnest and worried expression. Ava thought that Sara was leaving, but now she’s here telling Ava this. Now Sara is taking everything back. “Neither do I,” Ava rushes out, shaking her head slightly. Sara’s hand falls from her face and Ava instantly misses its warmth. But she continues on, leaning in towards Sara. “I don’t know how to do any of this,” Ava confesses, watching as Sara’s lips curl upwards slightly, a barely there quirk before they even out once more.

Hope flutters wildly in Ava’s chest, in her stomach, in her throat. Sara is silent but this time it doesn’t feel suffocating. This time Ava thinks that she might be safe to feel that kind of hope. “I want this,” Sara mumbles, her fingers gripping the front of Ava’s shirt and giving a small tug, “With you—whatever this looks like.” Ava’s heart stutters slightly, the rhythm falling out of sync as she takes in a deep breath. “I’m so tired of fighting this,” Sara shakes her head, releasing Ava’s shirt and skimming her fingers along Ava’s temple, tucking hair just behind Ava’s ear, “You’ve fascinated me since the beginning.”

Memories from that night dance through Ava’s mind. It feels so long ago. It feels like it’s been longer since Ava first saw Sara in that dress in the bar. So much has happened and everything has changed. Ava’s not the same person anymore and Sara isn’t either. “Moscow,” Ava says with a small smile, smoothing her thumb over Sara’s hand.

“No,” Sara replies as Ava looks to her in surprise, “A year before that, in Prague. I didn’t see your face at the time—you had on sunglasses. But you poisoned a man in broad daylight with an umbrella.” Surprised, Ava leans backwards with a quiet hum.

She remembers that. The tech CEO who had been running around spilling secrets to anyone who asked. It was too hard to get into his office so Ava had loaded up her umbrella and set out on a cloudy day. The moment where she pricked him happened in seconds. Sara had to have been paying attention to her before, or she would have missed it. “You never said anything?” Ava questions, her head still tipped to the side as Sara shrugs.

“I never knew it was you until we met,” Sara explains as Ava shifts closer once more, resting her head on her arm again, “It wasn’t until I saw you in that bar and realized that I knew that coat. I’d seen it before.” The coat had really been the same one. It’s one of Ava’s favorites for colder weather, but it’s also fairly plain—not really something that should stand out. “I know you think I break rules all the time, but I don’t,” Sara continues with a little smile, “But I did break them in Moscow—I couldn’t help myself.”

Ava’s pretty sure Sara really does break the rules quite often, but she says nothing. Instead Ava lets out a quiet sigh as warmth floods her chest and eases any remaining ache that has been forming for years now. “I’m glad you didn’t,” Ava tells her honestly, too tired to hold back the truth any longer. Sara deserves to know just how glad Ava is that Sara had thrown away what little self-control she had. She deserves to know how just one night changed the course of Ava’s life before she even knew it.

Sara’s lips twitch once more. Her smile forms slowly, with just a single side shifting upwards before the other joins. Dimples appear in her cheeks as Sara’s eyes shine softly. “Yeah?” Sara teases gently, her hand tugging at Ava’s shirt once more.

“Yeah,” Ava nods her head, mirroring Sara’s smile. A laugh tumbles from Sara’s lips, delicate and light and happy in a way Ava’s not heard in a while. With a small smile and content exhale of her own, Ava tilts her cheek against her arm, trying to hide the blush sneaking across her cheeks.

The cushions shift as Sara pushes up onto her knees. Already knowing what's coming, Ava turns so she's facing forwards and reaches out to steady Sara. A leg slings over Ava's lap as Sara comes to straddle Ava and settles over her thighs. This position is familiar, comfortable, and almost safe. Though it might just be Sara that Ava associates with safety. Hands frame Ava's face as Ava keeps a hold on both Sara's hips. "I don't want to hurt you," Sara breathes out, one side of her mouth tipping downwards as she thumbs Ava's cheeks.

"So don't," Ava replies simply, delicately sweeping her fingers under Sara's shirt and finding the bare skin along her hips, "Or try not to at least."

Sara shakes her head slightly, just the smallest movement as her eyes flicker all around Ava's face. A hand raises to Ava's forehead and brushes hair from Ava's face, smoothing it back down near the nape of her neck. "I don't want to," Sara confesses as Ava stares up at her, "What if it's not that easy?"

"What if it is?" Ava counters, sliding her hands to Sara's back and pressing her in closer. Sara doesn't fight it, she simply shifts so she's pressed against Ava's stomach, her arms trapped between their bodies.

"What if you see something in me that you don't like one day?" Sara's voice is quiet, mournful. That look is back in her eyes, the nearly empty look that Ava saw the night she found Sara alone in the darkness, drowning in cheap vodka and past memories.

Later, Ava wants to talk about that. Later she will properly address all the ways in which she never could believe Sara to be a monster. But for now, Ava presses the pads of her fingers into Sara's spine, almost wishing she could transfer her thoughts through touch alone. "And what if I think I could only ever see the good in you?" Ava redirects while Sara lets out a small exhale of what might be amusement.

A smile appears on Sara's lips as she hums, her hands coming back to frame Ava's face once more. Shining soft blue eyes look into Ava's own, as Sara raises a brow, "Are you going to answer all of my questions with another question?"

"Do you want me to stop?" Ava replies, unable to help herself. This time when Sara laughs, Ava joins in. She can feel the sound under her palms, the low vibrations sounding off in Sara's chest. Gone is the haze that's settled over them since Ava dared bring this up in a hotel room. It's only been a matter of days since then, and Ava's glad that no longer has passed. She couldn't take the tension lingering between them. Something about Sara has always felt inevitable—from the very moment Ava stumbled across her murdered contact and that damned note.

"You're an idiot," Sara teases, her tone so filled with fondness and affection that Ava's heart falters in her chest once more. It's been there the whole time, Sara's care for her—Ava realizes that now. There's nothing new about Sara's tone, or that look in her eyes. Ava just hadn't wanted to see it, and then later she hadn't been able to see it when she was too focused on Sara's rejection.

They're both just stumbling around in the dark as they try this, and it's going to take some patience. But Ava doesn't mind—not at all. "That's not a very kind thing to say," Ava lectures playfully as Sara lifts her shoulder in a small shrug and grins down at Ava.

Warmth bubbles and swells inside of Ava, shoving out everything that had been overwhelming her before. This is still overwhelming, but in a completely different way. Later Ava will have time to overthink everything that comes along with this change, but for now she sinks into it comfortably. "I was right you know," Sara muses as Ava tilts her head to the side, not following. A thumb comes to trace the corner of Ava's lips, dipping down near her chin before sliding up her jaw, "I

knew you'd be dangerous one day."

Memories flicker through Ava's mind of handcuffs and Sara hovering over her just as she is now. Ava remembers waking up to watch Sara get dressed. She remembers the words Sara spoke as she snuck from the room and the way that they had confused Ava. Everything slides and clicks into place, the final pieces of a puzzle Ava's been trying to solve ever since she met Sara. Her fingertips pressing into Sara's sides, Ava stares up at her in awe. She's always been dangerous to Sara in the same way Sara was to Ava. Sara was always in this with her, even before Ava knew what this was. "A good danger?" Ava tests, swallowing quietly.

When Sara's smile comes, it's nothing but gentle. Sara leans in, her nose brushing Ava's own, her eyes blurring from focus even as Ava tries to sort through shades of blue. "The absolute best," she replies, her lips brushing Ava's own. Leaning forwards, Ava kisses Sara and holds her close. Her hands slip up Sara's back, keeping Sara against her as Ava shifts and captures her bottom lip. Affection sets off behind Ava's ribs, chasing away doubt and fear and worry. It burns through every ugly feeling that has accumulated and every piece of Ava that had been holding her back.

The hands along Ava's jaw are insistent but soft. Strands of damp hair fall in Ava's face but she doesn't care. All she cares about is Sara and the lips moving against her own. Though eventually Ava does need air, so she reluctantly pulls back. When Sara's eyes open, they're darker than they were before. Her lips are slightly swollen, something that has pride echoing in Ava's chest. Sara's forehead tips down against Ava's own as Ava removes her hands from under Sara's shirt and brushes her hair from her face. "I want this," Sara murmurs, both hands fisting in Ava's shirt and tugging gently, "With you."

It's another repetition of words already spoken but Ava thinks she could hear them over and over and not tire of them. "So do I," Ava replies honestly, earnestly. A soft rush of air comes against her lips as Sara nods her head. Her forehead moving along Ava's own, her skin warm. "I have for a long time," Ava confesses as she watches Sara's lips quirk upwards, "So we just try together—learn together. It's the best that we can do."

When Sara laughs, she doesn't bother backing away. The sound is happy and light, echoing in Ava's own chest as she smiles. The muscles in her face nearly hurt from smiling at this point, but it's a good kind of pain. "Ava Sharpe, you have changed," Sara teases as Ava lets out a small laugh, "Making up things as you go, throwing away all of your neatly laid plans."

Ava would throw away most plans for Sara—she already has. With a small smile, Ava leans in and kisses Sara softly, quickly, just because she can now. Now Ava gets to kiss Sara whenever she wants without worrying Sara will read into it. Now Ava wants Sara to read into it, she wants Sara to know just how much she means to Ava. Though Ava suspects maybe Sara has known for a while. "I think it will be worth it," Ava tells her as Sara smiles, her dimples taking over her cheeks, "It has been so far."

As Sara shakes her head with a breathy laugh, Ava tenderly sweeps her thumbs over Sara's cheekbones. Seconds later, Sara kisses Ava again and Ava lets her. Ava lets Sara push her back into the cushions. Ava lets Sara press their bodies together as hands cup Ava's face. While Sara kisses Ava, Ava lets her in. It will be worth it. Somehow when it comes to Sara, Ava doesn't really need a plan. In a world of constant and turbulent change, Ava just knows that they will be okay—she has no doubt about that.

See, I said that the really angsty bits were over soon. I hate unresolved fights that go on for too long so, here's the resolution. The rest of the week is going to be fairly chaotic for me and this was my one real writing chance before the crazy starts. I'm not sure when I'll be back with an update but I don't imagine it will be longer than a few days. Writing is usually my relaxation time for the evening when I manage to get it lol. But as always, thank you so much to everyone who has read along and I hope to be back soon with an update!

Part Sixteen

Chapter Summary

As they wait for the fight to come, Ava and Sara try to find ways to pass their days in the cabin.

Chapter Notes

Well it's certainly been longer than I intended but here is part sixteen. Things got unexpectedly busy here and I had no energy or time to spend writing but finally I've finished this chapter. This is the second to last one before the two endings, though the two endings are relatively short. Hopefully I'll get time to do some writing over the course of this week and have something ready by the weekend.

And of course a big thank you to [Crincher](#) who looked all of this over for me and helped to spot some mistakes made along the way!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Virginia, USA — 23:00

Rain beats against the windows in the kitchen as Ava twirls her spoon in her tea cup and works to fight against the tight pressure in her chest. Outside, the sun already set hours ago, plunging the cabin's surroundings into impenetrable darkness. Next came the rain, courtesy of a storm that has been charging through the state and has settled over the cabin now. The constant rain and lack of sunshine has meant it was necessary to switch over to the backup generator, which was quite the task.

It might not have been such a terrible ordeal if Ava had help, but Sara had taken one look at the lightning carving through the sky and had asked Ava in a small sounding voice if Ava would be fine on her own. Ava was fine on her own, but she had returned soaking wet and just a little bit irritated that it was too dark to see much outside. Her irritation had melted the moment that she found Sara huddled on the couch in just a blanket, the edges raised under her chin, her legs curled up with her on the couch.

For a moment Ava had been taken aback. She knew that the storm had bothered Sara but she hadn't realized just how bad it was. With slow and worried movements Ava had approached the couch and tried asking Sara what was wrong, but Sara wouldn't tell her. She had just tugged Ava down to the couch with her and mumbled the word, "Storms." It wasn't much of an explanation, and Ava's chest had felt tight as she let Sara guide her so her head was resting along Sara's knees. Though Ava was concerned of Sara's behaviour, she didn't know how to ask her any further questions without upsetting her.

Ava looks over to the couch now, staring at the cushion that holds that same blanket, this time without Sara wrapped up in it. The television drones on in the background, listing out news for Star City. There's been an accident of some kind in the town, what appears to be an earthquake that has

all but leveled an entire section of neighborhoods and businesses. Images from the destruction flash across the screen seconds before Ava raises up the remote and clicks the television off.

Silence descends on the room as Ava turns her attention to the staircase Sara had disappeared up only ten minutes ago. The moment the news program was playing on the screen, Sara had all but bolted from the couch. At the time, Ava had her head laying on Sara's legs as Sara was running her fingers through Ava's hair. The motions were soothing, calming, and Ava had nearly been asleep when Sara first went stiff and then Ava's head was suddenly crashing to the couch cushions. It was a jarring change of pace, but Sara hadn't explained her behaviour before simply stating in a strained voice that she was tired, that she was going to bed.

As Sara walked off towards the steps, Ava had sat there on the couch, words caught in her throat that wouldn't come out. She wanted to ask Sara to stay, and she wanted to ask her what was wrong. But each time Ava tried to voice them, the words lodged firmly in her throat and never actually left her lips. Instead she sat there silently, uselessly as Sara walked up the steps and disappeared around the corner of the upstairs hallway, wondering why it was so hard for her to just try and comfort Sara.

This is a deviation of the routine they've been in for three days. Since talking everything through, things between Sara and Ava have been good, more than good actually. Ava wakes in the morning to find that Sara has made her tea the way she likes it, she then usually finds Sara outside working on something to keep her busy, and then they'll discuss plans for the day. A relative peace has finally settled between them, and Sara has stopped closing herself off from Ava. Evenings usually end with them tangled together on the couch watching some mindless show before splitting up for bed.

Ava should go check on Sara, she wants to go check on Sara. But doing so could risk this routine and this calm feeling that has settled over them. It's a fragile kind of truce, so going up to Sara's room means there's a chance Sara could shove Ava away again. Ava doesn't think that she can bear more distance built between them. Even the thought of Sara pulling away makes Ava's stomach twist with nerves. Going up there means risking Sara retreating into herself tomorrow morning. And going up there means Ava has to figure out a way to help someone else when Ava doesn't even know how to help herself most of the time.

Outside, the rain continues to beat against the sides of the house as Ava brings her tea to her lips and takes a small sip. The liquid inside has gone cold, the result of her neglecting it in favor of worrying over her options this evening. The metal spoon strikes the rim of the cup and a resounding clink travels through the room. With a quiet sigh, Ava stands from her chair and takes her cup to the sink. Going up to see Sara could be a mistake, but Ava's not going to let her stay up there alone when she's struggling.

After rinsing the cup, Ava rests it in the sink before turning everything off and making her way upstairs. Her own bedroom lights are on, the door cracked and revealing Ava's made bed and neatly folded clothing on the dresser. It would be easy to just go inside. It would be easy to simply check on Sara in the morning. In the sake of not disturbing Sara further, Ava's nearly tempted to do just that. But instead she turns down the opposite side of the hallway and walks to Sara's room.

The door is closed, but a sliver of light can be seen underneath the door. Inside, Ava can't hear anything, however she knows that Sara is likely still awake. Slowly raising her hand, Ava gently knocks at the door. A mumbled reply comes from inside, one that Ava can't decipher so she pushes the door open. Not speaking, Ava steps inside and glances to Sara who is sat up in the bed.

Blonde hair drapes the sides of Sara's face, obscuring her features from view. Her shoulders are

caved in and she's hugging her knees loosely by her chest. "I'm fine," Sara mutters with a small shake of her head. She's not fine, and they both know it. Tentatively, Ava walks a bit closer, trying to gauge Sara's reactions. "I don't need a babysitter Ava," Sara continues on, her voice still sounding strained, "You should just go to bed."

Maybe so, but Ava's here now. With slow movements, Ava comes to stand near the foot of the bed. She leans her knee on the mattress, looking to Sara for any sign of a rebuke. But nothing comes. Still testing out Sara's responses, Ava shifts to the mattress, settling just along the edge. Sara's head is bowed, her chin resting on her arm as she turns her face to the side. Along the neck of her shirt are small damp splotches, a sign that Sara had been crying. An ache forms in Ava's chest as she tries to angle her head to see Sara better.

What Ava wants is to get closer, to hug Sara to her. But she gets the feeling that's not something that would go over well right now. If Ava were this raw and exposed, she's not sure she would want something like that either. Right now though, Ava doesn't know how to help Sara. "What's wrong?" Ava tries, shifting restlessly on the mattress, "And don't say that nothing is wrong, we both know that something has happened."

It has to do with the Glades, that's all Ava knows. Sara had only reacted to the report of the destruction there. When Sara lifts her shoulders in a small shrug, Ava scoots further onto the bed. She's now sitting in front of Sara, her body angled sideways as Sara's toes bump into her hip under the covers. "My sister used to work there from time to time," Sara confesses quietly as Ava tilts her head back, "I doubt she was there—it's so late. But I don't have a way of knowing who was hurt."

Neither of them do. The only way to know if Laurel is unharmed would be to go to Star City and check. They both know from their jobs that mass casualty events take a long time to sort through. There likely won't be a victim name list that is shared with the public until they have a more conclusive understanding of how many died. Already the news stated that there could be upwards of two-hundred casualties. But Ava saw the destruction—she knows that is an underrepresentation of the real number of victims they'll find.

"What can I do?" Ava asks nervously, her question feeling stupid given the circumstances. But it's the only thing she knows how to ask. Ava's not really sure how to comfort Sara right now. She's not sure how to comfort anyone.

As Sara's head lifts up, Ava catches the first glimpse of her face. Her eyes are rimmed in a light shade of red, her cheeks are flushed a soft pink color, and dried tear tracks carve down her face. New ones gather just in Sara's lashes, threatening to spill over. Taking in a quiet breath, Ava forces herself to remain where she is and not move towards Sara. Everything in Ava aches to get closer to Sara, to ease the pain that she's feeling right now. "Nothing really," Sara shrugs again as a single tear escapes. Sara roughly wipes it away with her sleeve before looking to the side, "There's not anything anyone can do."

Nodding slowly, Ava brushes her palms over her own pant legs, unsure what to do now. There is one obvious answer here, but Ava's almost hesitant to offer it up. However this isn't about her right now, this is about Sara. "We could get there by morning if we leave now," Ava tells Sara, shoving down her selfish desires to just remain here, "Star City isn't too far from here—it would be a long drive but we could make it."

Leaving right now would be dangerous. If they get word that Henry and the others are on the way while they're in Star City, it would take time to get back here and prepare for the fight to come. Yet Ava almost doesn't care about that. She would prefer that Sara is here with her for the final fight, but Ava won't keep Sara from her family. In her periphery, Sara is shaking her head and

rubbing her sleeve under her nose. "Going home right now wouldn't do anything," Sara replies in a dull tone, her eyes focused on her knees, "It'll be days before they find all the—"

Her voice carries off, but she doesn't have to finish that sentence. The buildings in the Glades were nearly flattened. Search and rescue could be out there upwards of a week just scouring through the wreckage for bodies. "Yeah," Ava murmurs, letting out a quiet exhale, "I'm sorry Sara."

That statement isn't really enough to convey what Ava means. She is sorry of course, but she also understands. Ava's been where Sara is now before, stuck waiting to hear the news of her family. It was only a decade and a half ago that Ava herself was stuck in a state of suspended animations as the adults around her tried to figure out why her parents hadn't come back. Reaching out, Ava rests her hand over Sara's own that clasps her arms together around her knees.

Blue eyes lift to Ava's own, looking sorrowful and just a little too empty for Ava's comfort. If there was more to be done here, Ava would do it. However she's not willing to keep pushing tonight. Ava doesn't want to muddle the waters between them now that everything has finally settled. Torn between leaving and staying, Ava perches there on the edge of the bed a moment longer. Sara's eyes have fallen to her lap once more, her hair hanging limp around her face.

Something heavy settles in Ava's stomach when Sara's chest spasms with the ghost of what might be a sob. No sound fills the air though, nothing other than the quiet and stuttered exhales falling from Sara's lips. "Is there anything else I can do?" Ava repeats her question from before, hoping that Sara says yes, hoping that she asks for help in an area where Ava can ease her suffering tonight. But instead Sara shakes her head. Gentle disappointment drops in Ava's chest and blankets the hope that sat there in her chest.

Leaving isn't what she wants, she would prefer to stay. Though Ava's not willing to push past whatever boundaries Sara has laid down, even if it does mean leaving her sad and alone in this room. With a gentle squeeze of Sara's hand, Ava releases her and pushes up of the bed. She doesn't get far though before fingers wrap around her wrist and tug gently.

Turning around once more, Ava finds Sara's gaze is turned away, her lips pulled down in a frown. Just a flicker of warmth rises in Ava's chest when Sara drops her hand and flicks the covers to the side. Understanding the message, Ava toes off her house slippers by the side of the bed and silently thanks herself for changing into her pajamas earlier. Sara moves over as Ava climbs under the covers with her and rests her head on the pillow.

The light is still on, so Ava turns over her shoulder and flicks it off, plunging the room into darkness. Covers rustle around Ava's body as Sara slips down the mattress to lie down as well. The bed dips near Ava's side and a knee bumps into her own. Darkness still blankets the room and Ava's eyes are adjusting so she can't make Sara out just yet. She can however feel the warmth radiating from Sara's body and feel the cool fingers that have wrapped around her wrist once more. "You don't have to stay," Sara whispers, her voice closer than Ava expected.

It's a little too late to say something like that seeing as Ava's already in bed with Sara, but she understands Sara's message. This is Sara giving Ava an out. It's just not an out that Ava wants. "I know," Ava replies evenly, shuffling closer on the bed. Curled on her side, Ava reaches out and gently nudges at Sara's shoulder. The message is clearly received as Sara turns over so her back is to Ava. Just in case Sara doesn't want this, Ava moves slowly.

She encroaches on Sara's space a limb at a time. First her arm slipping under Sara's neck between the mattress and soft blonde hair. Then an arm around Sara's waist. Ava shuffles so her legs brush the backs of Sara's own. Sara doesn't show any signs of stopping Ava, so she brings her chest flush with Sara's back. A quiet and stuttered sigh falls from Sara's lips, her hand gripping Ava's tightly

where it rests along Sara's stomach.

Two nights ago, Sara had snuck into Ava's room after they had split up to go to bed. She'd been in a robe only, one that she dropped to the ground as Ava raised her brows and tossed her book she had been reading to the side. Afterwards, when they were sweaty and tangled in Ava's covers, Sara had nestled into Ava's side and rested her head over Ava's heart. It felt so painfully vulnerable, so Ava had made a joke about Sara being touch starved.

It hadn't landed well. Sara had instantly stiffened as Ava tried to backtrack, but it was much too late for that. As Ava had stumbled through an even lamer apology, Sara had assured her it hadn't bothered her. But that was a lie and Ava knew it from the stiff way that Sara was tying up her robe and slipping from the room. They never talked about it in the morning, but Ava's tea cup was there along the counter all the same—made just the way she likes it.

The truth is that they're both not used to this constant freedom to be close to one another. Before this, Ava was used to the harsher aspects of touch. She was familiar with split lips and bruised knuckles, cracked ribs and bullet wounds. With Sara, it's been a challenge learning how to accept the gentleness that can come with touch—the care and affection that pours from Sara's fingertips to Ava's skin. If everything before was a fight or a battle, this has been a dance of surrender in which Ava learns to give up a little more each day.

Clearly Sara is learning to do the same. Against her chest, Sara has caved backwards, letting Ava support her weight. Ava's happy to do this, she's used to being leaned on. This is different though. This isn't Henry trusting her to get a job done well, this is Sara trusting her with a vulnerability neither of them could afford before. Unable to stop herself, Ava dips her head down and presses a feather light kiss along Sara's shoulder.

A shiver passes through Sara's body. It's a small one, but this close, every one of Sara's movements feels like an earthquake. With her shoulder, Ava shrugs the covers further up her body before tightening her grip around Sara's waist. Her nose finds vanilla scented hair as Ava nuzzles her face close on the pillow. "Get some sleep," Ava soothes when she hears Sara's breathing catch slightly, "We'll know more in the morning."

"Yeah," a tiny exhale comes from Sara, her body tensing slightly. With a light touch, Ava sweeps her fingers up and down Sara's stomach until Sara relaxes once more. The darkness in the room is all encompassing, the only source of light coming from the far window in the room. Outside the storm continues on, the rain no longer pounding down but instead just grazing against the glass. The storm is passing by, slowly but surely. "Ava," Sara murmurs, as Ava hums sleepily, "You don't—"

"Have to stay," Ava supplies as Sara nods her head just once, "Yeah I know." Another nod comes as Sara's fingers settle over Ava's own, clinging to them despite her statement that Ava is free to go. "But I'm going to stay," Ava tells her quietly, feeling the way that the remaining bits of tension in Sara's body finally slip away. In Ava's mind, her staying has been something that has been established for a while. Even before Sara's fake death, Ava would have stayed if Sara had asked.

That's what made Sara feel dangerous in the beginning, though Ava didn't know she had everything mixed up. Back then she didn't know that she'd been running for so long that she didn't know the difference between safety and danger. Now though, Ava thinks she's learning to tell the difference. With a quiet sigh, Ava tugs Sara even closer as a sense of calm settles over her body. Fingers run along Ava's wrist and the back of her palm, just a barely there touch that Ava hardly feels. Her mind quiet, her body heavy, Ava closes her eyes and surrenders to sleep.

The car hits a bump in the road and Ava winces as her pants graze over the wound resting just on the back of her thigh. Instantly Sara's head turns, her eyes sparkling. Clearly Ava wasn't subtle in hiding her response to the bump, and seconds pass before light sounding laughter fills the air. With a scowl, Ava turns to look out the window. "Shut up," Ava mutters as Sara's laughter only continues, "This is your fault you know—how could you just forget to mention that the burner was hot?"

"How was I supposed to know you were going to sit on it?" Sara fires back, that wide and cheeky smile still on her face when Ava turns to level her with a glare. It was not that Ava sat on the burner, it was that Sara lifted Ava up to the counter. This morning Ava had arrived back from a much needed run and she had hardly stepped foot in the kitchen before Sara had tugged her in and kissed her. Before she knew it she was pressed against the counters and Ava hadn't thought to check if the burner was going to be hot before Sara sat her down on the edge.

It's hardly a large burn, but it has been a pain to deal with considering Ava's pants are constantly rubbing along the bandage. Sara had done a decent job of repairing the burn, murmuring rushed apology after rushed apology between trying to hide her laughter. Ava had been nothing but mortified as she laid on her stomach on the couch and did her best to ignore Sara's gentle teasing. "That's the last time we try to have sex in the kitchen," Ava grumbles, propping her elbow on the window edge and leaning her chin on her hand.

"Come on Ava," Sara jests as an elbow nudges Ava in the side, "Sex scars are the best kinds of scars." Mumbling under her breath, Ava just shakes her head in disagreement. This had better not scar. Ava does not need a reminder on her body that she had been too wrapped up in Sara to pay attention to where she was sitting on the counter. It's embarrassing is what it is, and she gets the feeling that Sara is not going to let this go anytime soon.

Already Sara has been incorrigible in her teasing this morning. They had to go into town to get some things from the store and Sara had made comment after comment the entire time. The pink blush on Ava's cheeks hardly left for a single second, and it took swatting at Sara's leg in the checkout line to keep Sara from bringing up any innuendoes to the cashier. There's only so much that Ava can tolerate in the form of public humiliation.

Still, this has been the happiest Sara has been since they heard of the news in Star City. Ava will take this gentle teasing over the sorrow that has clung to Sara from the moment they saw that news report. While they didn't go to Star City, Ava did find a way to get into the security feeds from Laurel's job where Sara was able to see that her sister was alive and well. It wasn't until Sara saw Laurel there on the screen that she had finally relaxed and melted into Ava's side on the couch. Ava hadn't really known what to do other than secure Sara to her side and sit there with her as they watched the feeds until Sara was finished.

While Ava knows what it's like to lose her parents, she doesn't know what it's like to lose her family while they're still alive. That's a burden unique to Sara's experience. At first Ava didn't understand Sara's hesitation to go back to them, but she thinks that she gets it now. After everything Sara has seen and done, she doesn't feel worthy of her family. That wasn't clear in the beginning, but it's clear to Ava now that she's had longer to get to know Sara.

The car strikes another bump in the road as they turn the corner to the house, and this time Ava jolts in her seat. "Sara," Ava warns, turning to look at her. But Sara isn't looking at Ava. When the car slams to a stop, Ava startles and looks out the front window. The house is just ahead, and pulled outside the front is a car that Ava doesn't recognize. It has Virginia license plates but Ava's house address isn't on a map, and it would be hard to accidentally find this place. "Pull right here," Ava motions to the tree just in front of them.

Her heart picks up in her chest as Sara maneuvers the car so it's partially hidden behind the tree. It won't offer them much cover, but it's more than they would have if they pulled right outside the house. Ava's eyes are trained on the house and the partially opened front door. There's no movement inside, but someone is clearly here. Silently, Ava motions for Sara to get her weapons from the backseat. The bag brushes Ava's arm as Sara pulls it forwards and a gun is offered from Ava's right. Nodding her head in thanks, Ava carefully opens the car door and steps outside.

Both Sara and Ava leave their doors open as they progress towards the house together. The gravel crunches under their boots as they walk slowly together. While Sara focuses on the house, Ava scans the open expanse around them. The surrounding woods are silent and empty but still Ava keeps an eye on them as she approaches the porch. No movement comes from the periphery of the house, but that doesn't mean that they're safe. Sara climbs the steps first as Ava hangs back. With her hand on the door, Sara looks back to Ava who just nods her head curtly and brings her gun up.

The moment Sara nudges the door open, Ava pushes inside and swings her arms towards the kitchen. Humming comes from a figure standing near the stove and Ava lets out a rushed exhale when she sees who has broken into the house. "Damn it Gary," Ava sighs impatiently, her heart rate flaring in her chest. Once she's spoken, Gary lets out a startled sound and drops the file that he had been going through at the counter. He whips around to face Ava who stands with Sara right at her side. "What are you doing here?" Ava demands as Gary raises his hands in the air.

"Sorry," Gary manages out, his voice high as his eyes flicker over to Sara. Glancing over as well, Ava finds Sara beside her with a knife poised between her fingers and a glare on her face. With a quiet sigh, Ava reaches out and lowers Sara's hand down, ignoring the look Sara levels her way. "I didn't know you were going to be here," Gary says nervously, his fingers coming to nudge his glasses up, "I thought you were still in Europe."

This isn't entirely his fault. Ava never did explain that she was going to be back here in town. But she only did so to keep him safe and to keep him away from this mess. Now Gary has just waltzed in without knowing the danger that he could have placed himself in. "What did I tell you Gary?" Ava demands, placing her gun down on the table by the door and motioning for Sara to do the same with her knives, "Every time you come here to check the house, you tell me—every single time."

A sheepish mumble falls from Gary's lips, one that Ava can't quite hear. The adrenaline is still running through her veins as she shakes her head in slightly annoyance. "Is that—," Gary looks to Sara, then to Ava who raises her brows. Gary's gaze flickers back to Sara before he raises his hand to his mouth so only Ava can see his lips as he whispers, "Is that her? She's the—you know."

The whisper was loud and exaggerated, so of course Sara hears him. And of course she instantly scoffs. "The assassin?" Sara supplies sarcastically, already kicking off her boots and slumping onto the couch, "Yes Gary, that would be me. So you're lucky Ava came in first and knew who you were because I could have and would have killed you."

"Okay," Ava sighs in exasperation as she turns to Sara with an admonishing glare, "That's your one threat to kill someone today." An amused smile curves over Sara's face as she rolls her eyes. Fighting back a small smile of her own, Ava focuses her attention back on Gary. "Gary it's not safe for you out here, so you have to go—now," Ava tells him as Gary frowns slightly, "Thank you for coming here to bring those spare files, but until I contact you, don't come back here again."

There's no telling how long it might take for Henry to realize where they are, so Ava doesn't want Gary accidentally coming here in the middle of a firefight. "Are you in trouble?" Gary asks with a deep frown. Another scoff comes from Sara as Ava leans against the arm of the sofa and lifts her

shoulder in a noncommittal shrug. There's no need to fill Gary in on the details. "From work or—" Gary cuts off and peers around Ava to look at Sara who has since spread out on the couch. He then shields his mouth again and Ava rolls her eyes as he whispers, "From her?"

"She's absolutely lethal," Ava remarks as Sara lets out a proud sounding hum, "But she's not where the danger is coming from this time around." A foot prods Ava right in the hip and she reaches behind her back to smack at Sara's ankle. Gentle laughter comes from Sara as the offending limb retreats and Ava folds her arms over her chest. "Go on Gary," Ava nods her head to the door, "I'll contact you if something comes up, but do not come back here until I send word."

After giving Ava one more look and casting a nervous glance Sara's way, Gary slips from the kitchen and heads to the door. The door closes behind him and Ava remains where she is, watching through the window as he gets into his car. "Sorry about that," Ava shifts on the arm of the sofa to look at Sara, "I forgot he was coming. He comes here once a month to check on everything here at the house and bring whatever new files I've sent him for storage."

An amused smile rests on Sara's face as she pushes up into a sitting position and comes to rest near the end of the couch where Ava is perched. "He's not what I expected," Sara muses, resting her chin on Ava's knee as Ava combs her fingers gently through Sara's hair, "But he clearly has been a good friend to you, right?"

Friend might not be the word Ava would use seeing as she hasn't really let herself make friends. But if she had, maybe Gary really would be one. Lifting her shoulder in a small shrug, Ava continues brushing her hands through soft blonde hair. The ends slip through her fingers before falling along Sara's back once more. Each strand is wavier than normal, the result of Sara braiding her hair back before bed last night. Ever since the news of Star City, Ava hasn't slept in her room alone.

It's another new routine that they've accidentally settled into and haven't talked about. But this time around, the lack of communication doesn't really come from hesitation to do so. This time around it's just what is comfortable. When Sara never left Ava's bed that night after but instead brought the covers around their naked bodies, Ava hadn't even thought twice about it. She had instead made herself comfortable in Sara's embrace where she fell asleep quickly in her arms.

"So," Sara's eyes flick up to Ava's own, that wide smile lifting her lips as her hand tugs gently at the hem of Ava's shirt, "Care to finish what we started before we had to go to the store?" Insistent fingers slide up Ava's side, skim her ribcage, and drift to the clasp of her bra behind her back. With a little smile of her own, Ava just lets out a content sigh before leaning down in Sara's space.

"That depends," Ava tells her as she tucks her fingers under Sara's chin to lift her head up, "Are you going to burn me again?"

When Sara laughs, the sound is light and clear. It echoes in Ava's own chest as warmth floods her body and her smile nearly hurts the muscles of her cheeks. "Maybe," Sara teases in that low tone, her nose nudging Ava's own gently as Ava's eyes flicker down to her lips, "Only if you ask nicely." Sara's eyes sparkle with that glint Ava has come to adore so much and those dimples are already set in the corners of Sara's mouth. Shaking her head with a little chuckle, Ava tips Sara's face up further and leans down to kiss her.

Barely a second has passed before hands land on Ava's hips and she finds herself toppling off the side of the couch onto Sara's lap. Laughing into the kiss, Ava is quick to reorient her body so she's laying down. When Sara comes to hover over her, Ava holds her close, her hands cupping Sara's cheeks. They break apart, and Sara goes to pull away but Ava holds her steady. "You're trouble," Ava tells her, gently thumbing at Sara's lower lip, "What am I going to do with you."

“I have a few ideas,” Sara replies, her lips already lifting as Ava raises her brows, “But I think it’s best if you let me show you what you could do.” Heat curls low in Ava’s stomach when Sara’s fingers slip between the waist band of her pants. That’s an idea Ava could get on board with as well, one that she very much can agree to. Nodding her head, Ava draws Sara in and captures her lips once more. They should be moving the car, or getting the groceries from the car, or even checking the cameras. But Ava can’t bring herself to move away from this. Those things will have to wait—this can take priority over melted ice cream for now.

As oil drops into the pan, bursts of the liquid fly off the hot surface. Ava pulls her hand back just in time to avoid being burned. The oil inside the pan sizzles and jumps in the air as Ava covers it carefully with a lid and lowers the heat. “I told you that was a bad idea,” Sara mumbles from inside the downstairs room. Quietly grumbling, Ava shifts her focus to the peppers sitting on the cutting board. Sara had told her it was a bad idea but it was the fastest way to see if the pan was hot enough for Ava to throw the peppers on.

“Do you want to cook?” Ava challenges, peering over her shoulder to where she can just barely see Sara moving around inside the little room. A snort comes from Sara, a clear answer as Ava just rolls her eyes fondly. “Are you nearly done counting the rounds?” Ava checks as she slices through the final peppers and neatly sweeps them into a bowl, “We need to make sure that I have enough for the rifle.”

Some kind of mumbled reply comes from Sara, but Ava can’t make it out. They’re going over all of the weapons inside the house to make sure that their plan is ready and in place. It’s now been nearly two weeks since they arrived here in the states, and day by day Ava gets a little more nervous. The only sign that the Operative even knows about what happened in Budapest were a few sporadic mentions Ava picked up over the wire transmissions. But none of them suggested that the other higher ups have sided with Henry or even know about his betrayal.

“How many long rifles do you really need,” Sara complains, her voice coming closer as she steps from the room. There’s a smudge of grease along Sara’s cheek, likely where she wiped her face after taking apart one of the firearms. A bubble of affection rises up in Ava’s chest as she motions for Sara to come over to her. “I’m just saying you have a lot of guns,” Sara mumbles as Ava cups her chin gently with a small smile, “Knives would be a lot easier to handle.”

With a fond smile, Ava gently rubs at the stain on Sara’s skin with the wet paper towel. “Not all of us can throw and shoot with the same level of accuracy,” Ava reminds Sara teasingly. The grease comes away with little difficulty, leaving Sara’s face clear and clean. As Ava backs up, her cheeks flush when she realizes that Sara is staring right at her. Bright blue eyes scan Ava’s face as Sara’s lips lift in a smile. “Anyways,” Ava clears her throat quietly with her own smile, “Guns are going to be more practical in this fight.”

They’ve talked about this, so Sara knows that when Henry comes, he’ll do so under the cover of darkness. “Maybe,” Sara shrugs, not sounding at all convinced as she steps to the sink to wash her hands, “But we already have explosives laid over the roads in here, and spiked traps to puncture tires. How many people do you really think he’s going to bring here?”

Too many. That sinking feeling returns to Ava’s stomach as she lifts her shoulder and turns her attention back to the stove. “A lot,” she replies, removing the cover from the pan and tossing the sliced peppers inside, “Henry trained me, so he’ll be prepared for a fight. I think that we should expect anywhere between twenty and forty men coming here.” At least Ava is hoping forty will be the largest number of men Henry brings. He could very well bring more.

Right now, they're in the end of this waiting game, that much is clear. The final fight is coming, and all this wait has done is left Ava with this sick feeling of anticipation. Her stomach twists as she pokes roughly at the peppers and takes in a long breath. "He wants me dead," Ava states dully, that ache flaring up in her ribs once more, "He knows that if I survive—and if you survive—there's no way he can continue to keep everything he's done a secret."

Hands slip along Ava's waist, pausing just at her sides. Ava momentarily goes stiff when the touch comes, her breathing catching in her chest, her hand pausing its motions over the stove. "Can I?" Sara asks, her voice a barely there whisper that has Ava swallowing. Offering up a small nod of her head, Ava tries to relax as Sara's arms wind around her from behind. Warm palms settle over Ava's stomach and she looks down to see Sara's fingers interlocking in the middle.

Against her back she can feel the slow and calming beat of Sara's heart and the rhythmic motions of her chest as she breathes. When Sara shuffles, her cheek comes to rest against Ava's shoulder blade and her elbows tuck just under Ava's own. Warmth chases away the lingering anxieties in Ava's chest as Sara presses a series of feather light kisses along her shoulder. "We're going to make it through this," Sara says with a confidence that Ava wishes she could share in, "You and I spent the past week turning the forest out there into some kind of 'Home Alone' scheme."

This isn't the first time that Sara has made that movie reference, but it still brings a smile to Ava's face like it did when Sara originally said it. "I don't remember 'Home Alone' having any murder," Ava remarks as Sara lifts her shoulder in a shrug along Ava's back, "And I don't recall the burglars in that movie being internationally wanted criminals."

"Do you know how many times they would have died if that movie reflected reality?" Sara laughs as Ava raises her brows in agreement, "There's only so many times someone can get hit with a brick before they have permanent brain damage." Another laugh bubbles up from Ava's chest as she just smiles and stirs the peppers on the stove. "Nobody but the bad guys are dying in this either," Sara says quietly, her chin coming to rest on Ava's shoulders, "You and I have both survived plenty of close calls, we just have to make it through one more time."

It's the stakes of this plan that has Ava so worried. In the past, she's been alone. While Ava of course took care to manage her own safety, it wasn't something that she spent time thinking much about. This time around, Sara is here. If something happens to Sara, Ava already knows just what kind of pain that would cause her. Resting her hand over Sara's own, Ava lets out a quiet hum and tries to push down the swelling concern that's forming in her stomach. "One more time," Ava agrees, doing her best to sound as if she means it.

Another kiss is dropped on Ava's shoulder, then a second one is pressed to her cheek. "I'm going to go change, I got grease all over my shirt and pants," Sara remarks, her lips lingering along Ava's skin, "Then I'll come back and take over for you—you should sit down some, you've not rested much today."

No, Ava hasn't. She woke up this morning from a pretty bad nightmare and hasn't exactly settled down since then. Sara had tried to calm her after she burst in the door, worried something was wrong, but Ava hasn't been able to shake her worries all day long. "Yeah," Ava nods her head in agreement when Sara prompts her, "I should change too, I'm still wearing the clothing from fixing up the perch."

Sara and Ava had both repaired some of the wooden boards along the sniper's perch that Ava had carefully constructed over the past few days. It should give her perfect visibility of the incoming road and anyone who might travel down the path. "I'll be right back," Sara promises, her lips meeting Ava's cheek once more as she backs away, "Try not to scald yourself with that oil in the

meantime.”

With a click of her tongue, Ava turns her head to the side and watches Sara go. Sparkling eyes smile back at Ava just seconds before Sara disappears around the corner and walks with loud footsteps up the stairs. Alone again, Ava returns her attention to the quickly softening peppers sitting in the pan. Now that Sara is gone, the heaviness sneaks back in and the anxieties come with it. There is a lot riding on this plan, and the trouble is that it’s hardly even a well thought out plan.

Because they have no way of knowing how Henry is going to attack the house, they have no way of really preparing for one set course of action. This meant making a plan with moving pieces, something that Ava has never been good at. Sara has been nothing but perfect and patient in covering every single flaw that Ava finds with whatever suggestion Sara makes, and yet Ava still is worried that what they have isn’t enough. They have enough guns to supply a small militia, enough explosives buried under the road to level a house, and enough contingency plans to make this fight last days if needed.

Yet Ava still doesn’t feel ready. Swallowing thickly, Ava does her best to shove down the pressure in her throat, but she fails miserably. This is a fight against her mentor, the one person that Ava always wanted to trust in the beginning of her time at the Operative. While she constantly held Henry at an arm’s distance, he has been her sole source of constant contact over the past years. Ava has Dmitriy, and Gary, but she has known Henry the longest. Ava knew Henry before she was what she is today—he helped make her into who she is.

Now she has to work against him, and even work to destroy him. It’s not going to be easy at all, and Ava hopes that this doesn’t come down to a stand off between the two of them alone. Footsteps sound on the steps again and Ava does her best to straighten up and wipe the worry from her features. “Do you think we should consider adding another set of explosives further back along the road?” Ava asks as she hears Sara’s feet strike the wooden floors, “I was just thinking that we should be prepared for multiple vehicles taking the property.”

There’s no response, only silence that comes from Sara. “Unless you think that’s overkill,” Ava quickly amends as she nudges the peppers in the pan once more, “I know we already have everything set up—and it would take a considerable amount of time to lay another trap.” There’s still no answer, something that has concern bubbling up in Ava’s chest. Abandoning the stove from her attention, Ava turns over her shoulder.

Instantly her heart falters in her chest as she comes face to face with a very bashful looking Sara. Ava’s eyes flicker rapidly over Sara’s face as she feels her own lips part. Sara did change, but she didn’t put her pajamas on like Ava expected. Instead she’s wearing a silky black slip dress that has a slit curving perilously high along her right thigh. Slender straps hold the dress up, draped over bare and freckled shoulders. The front of the dress dips low, revealing sharp collarbones and scarred skin along Sara’s chest. “You changed,” Ava manages out with a small little clearing of her throat, that warmth fluttering in her stomach

“So I did,” Sara replies, her lips lifting slightly as a gentle pink blush spreads along her cheeks. Sara hasn’t done much with her hair, but it’s been twisted back along her head so that only a few pieces fall down to frame her face. She’s stunning, and Ava cannot take her eyes off of her. “You’re going to burn those,” Sara nods to the stove as Ava clears her throat and feels her cheeks burn.

“Right,” Ava mumbles, quickly snapping her attention to the pan and carefully sweeping the peppers into the skillet that holds the pasta she already made for dinner. “Where did you get that dress from?” Ava peeks over her shoulder, once more feeling a blush forming along her cheeks as

Sara tilts her head with the side with a gentle smile, "I said we were hiding out in the woods for what could be a month and you brought an evening gown."

A small laugh comes from Sara as she pushes off the counter she had been leaning against and comes over to Ava's space. Ava's breath hitches in her chest as Sara reaches out with a single hand and draws the cooking spoon from Ava's hand, her eyes never leaving Ava's own. "I wanted to be prepared," Sara replies, her eyes sparkling slightly, her lips curved up in that lovely smile Ava adores, "And you're in luck, I tossed yours in my bag too."

That's news to Ava. It has to be the dress that Ava had haphazardly flung into her bag at the very last minute when they were in Croatia. But Ava swore that she had sent that back to the safe house in a box. "Oh?" Ava speaks, slightly confused as she steps away from the stovetop to let Sara take over, "And why are we getting dressed up?"

There's an answer that Ava wants to hear. Her heart thrums wildly in her chest as she looks to Sara, her eyes caught on the motions of Sara's hand as she stirs the peppers into the pasta. "You know," Sara lifts her shoulder in a small shrug, her eyes cast to the stove, "I just thought it would be nice to have an evening in." Every evening here has been an evening in. Leaning against the counter, Ava eyes Sara, that ache forming in her chest as she silently wills Sara to say the words. "I don't know," Sara continues on softly, "It could be a date too, if you want?"

Sparks of warmth ignite where the ache had been, scattering Ava's worries back to the corners of her mind. A flush spreads over her cheeks as Ava dips her head, completely unable to keep what has to be a very stupid smile off her face. "I think I could want that," Ava replies, rubbing her fingers at a little scuff mark on the counter before looking at Sara. Blue eyes are already focused on Ava, cautious and bright. "I do want that," Ava says decisively.

The smile that spreads over Sara's face starts slowly, the process unfolding in front of Ava's eyes. First her lips twitch slightly, then the corners of her mouth lift up in a smile, then the edges of her eyes crease slightly. "Well good," Sara nods her head before returning her attention to the stove, "Then it's a date." Taking in a quiet pleased breath, Ava hums through her exhale and shifts from one foot to another as her stomach flips with the kind of nerves that feel good this time around. "But you'd better go get changed," Sara says with a smile and a pointed look, "You're very undressed right now."

That might be an understatement. Ava is wearing her sweatpants and Sara's ratty shirt that she insisted she didn't care if Ava got dirty. This is not the outfit Ava wants to wear for her and Sara's first date. A silent thrill passes through Ava's body, lighting up the excitement that bubbles through her veins. "You say that like we'll stay dressed for long," Ava teases gently as she pushes away from the counter.

"Is that a challenge?" Sara throws back, a single brow raised as she lifts the spoon away from the stove. With a quiet little laugh, Ava just shakes her head fondly before heading up the stairs. After casting just one more look back at a now smiling Sara, Ava feels her own grin still nudging at her cheeks while she walks the rest of the way up.

With rapid footsteps, Ava walks into her own room and quickly closes the door. There's a dress laid over her bed, folded in a neat bundle of dark green silk. This is the dress that Ava thought she sent back, and she has no idea how Sara managed to take it from the pile or why Sara did this. But Ava's not going to question it. Shedding her clothing, Ava holds the dress out in her hands before carefully slipping it over her head.

The silk slides over her skin and settles around her body in a gentle embrace. Across the room is a mirror that Ava comes to stand in front of, fiddling with the sides of the dress and working to

smooth out the wrinkles. Normally Ava is not a dress person, but she can make an exception for Sara tonight—and their date. Another smile curves its way across Ava’s face as she looks to herself in the mirror.

Her hair is a little bit of a mess, already falling from the braid that she tied it up in before. With quick and nimble fingers, Ava undoes the hair tie and skims her hands through her hair to try and smooth out the mess. She rests her hair over her shoulder, settling it over the loose thin straps of the dress. It’s a little longer than Sara’s, but this dress also has a cut out that comes up the side of Ava’s leg. The forest green material settles gently over her stomach and chest, not too tight but not overly loose either.

Nerves flutter and flare inside her body, but they’re the kind of nerves that Ava gladly welcomes. “A date,” Ava murmurs to herself, looking at her smiling reflection. The blush hasn’t left her cheeks and Ava wonders if she looks as young as she feels right now. It’s been a long time since something this simple has had her smiling and blushing in this way. It’s a nice change. Ava will happily take this over the stress and the worry that has been hanging over her. While those negative feelings aren’t gone, the anticipation of this dinner is already soothing the worst of the ache in Ava’s bones.

Fiddling with her hair again, Ava tries adjusting it to the other shoulder to see if she likes that any better. This is the first time in a while that going on a date has really meant something to Ava. Normally dates are something Ava partakes in just to get close to a target, but this time around she chose this. This time around Ava doesn’t want to make any mistakes, not because she can’t, but because she wants this to go well. A slight spike of anxiety pierces through Ava’s elation for a moment. “It will be fine,” Ava instructs herself quietly, still facing her reflection, “This is Sara, everything will be fine.”

Even if things go slightly wrong, Ava has the feeling things will be okay. If she and Sara can survive a faked death, a near death, and several ups and downs along the way, they can make it through a date. With a stuttered exhale, Ava checks her reflection one more time and does her best to gather her nerves. Letting out the sigh, Ava sets towards the door and lets all of that residual hope flood her chest.

“I can’t tell which track I like best,” Sara murmurs, turning over the vinyl cover in her hands as she examines the song list. With a little smile, Ava remains reclined in her chair, just watching as Sara makes her way through the collection of records. Several sleeves line the shelf where Sara has discarded them, stating that they weren’t suitable options for the remainder of the evening. She’s taking her task very seriously, though maybe a little too seriously.

Stifling a laugh, Ava just hums quietly as she watches Sara frown at the record in her hands. “That one is a good one,” Ava tells her, nodding to the Sam Cooke album resting just off to the side, “It’s a collection of the best songs.” Looking pleased, Sara lifts the album up before discarding the sleeve and settling the vinyl there on the turntable. As Sara finishes setting everything up, Ava lifts her water glass to her lips and just watches on.

Empty plates rest on the little table Sara had dragged from the spare room while Ava was upstairs. She had covered it with the blanket that the guns had been wrapped in, something that prompted Ava to give her a look when she noticed. They don’t have candles, so Sara had improvised with the collapsable camping lights that Ava had stashed in the basement. The lights are a soft orange color and Ava thinks they mimic candle light in a way.

Dinner had been spent talking about anything and nothing. They went over upcoming plans and

talked about their plans in town tomorrow. There is a topic neither one of them touched, and that's what comes after this. Ava just needs to get through this before she can even think about what might come after they succeed.

But dinner had also been spent with Sara trying to make good on her promise of that challenge Ava mentioned regarding them not remaining clothed long. However Ava had been trained to avoid letting her composure break, and she had really needed that tonight. When Sara ran her foot up the side of Ava's bare thigh under the table, Ava had made direct eye contact and kept eating. Her skin burned where Sara was touching her, desire and want curling low in her stomach, but she had kept up the act.

When Sara had trailed her fingers delicately along the rim of her own glass, the motions pointed and suggestive, Ava had just sipped from her own glass. Over and over Sara tried to distract Ava, and each time Ava deflected her. It was a game like the kind they used to play before, but this time, they both knew that it was a game, and they both know just how invested the other is. Somehow knowing these things for sure makes it all that much thrilling. Ava knows they'll end the night together and there's a kind of rush that comes along with the safety of that knowledge.

The speakers thrum to life, drawing Ava's attention back to where Sara is carefully adjusting the volume on the turntable. Orange and yellow light coming from the lantern casts Sara in warm shadows and strikes the blue in her eyes in a way that makes them seem that much brighter. "Dance with me?" Sara requests in a light tone, her hand extended out to Ava, that cheeky smile on her face.

The sounds of "Cupid" fills the air, the gentle percussive beat thrumming through the room. With a smile of her own, Ava reaches out and takes Sara's palm. So many other times she's resisted dancing with Sara, but this time Ava raises from her chair willingly and lets Sara draw her close. "I lead of course," Sara explains as she settles her hand on Ava's waist, every single one of her freckles visible when they're pressed together like this.

Complying with a slightly flutter of warmth that beats in her chest, Ava hums and brings their joined hands between their bodies. Ava winds her arm around Sara's neck and leans against her, letting Sara sway them gently. This time Sara brings them around the small space in a series of little steps that has Ava laughing. When Sara gently spins Ava outwards, Ava doesn't fight it. She just spins, locking her eyes with Sara, stuck on that grin that hasn't left Sara's face.

As Ava comes to rest against Sara once more, she nuzzles her nose against the side of Sara's neck. Sara is humming quietly, her voice soft and tender as she sings a few words here and there. Fingers slip along the silk of Ava's dress near her back, running up and down in a soothing manner. An overwhelming sense of peace and safety washes over Ava. Between the wine they've had, the soft music, and the fingers dancing along her spine, the world has shifted out of focus for Ava, blurred around the edges and gentle in a way reality rarely is.

With a quiet contented sigh, Ava presses her lips to the column of Sara's throat. A responding hum comes from Sara, the vibrations able to be felt against Ava's nose. This is the calm before the storm and Ava just wishes that she could stay here. She wishes that she could stop time in this moment where she's tucked in Sara's arms, where nothing feels sharp or jagged or rough or hard. The world has gone soft, cast in those beams of gentle orange and yellow light, bathing Ava in a warmth she doesn't want to leave.

The song comes to an end, fading out as Sara continues their swaying. A gentle scratching sound comes from the vinyl, a product of years of use. When the next song comes on, a bittersweet ache forms in Ava's chest. "My dad loved this song," Ava murmurs in a hushed tone.

Melodic violin and piano notes swim through the air, marking the beginning of “All the Way”. Sara doesn’t say anything, but her grip on Ava tightens slightly and Ava’s glad for that. In her periphery, Ava can see the gentle slope of Sara’s nose and the delicate lift of her lips. With this song playing, everything feels so intimate that the ache only swells in Ava’s chest. That longing forms lower in her stomach too, more tender and almost painful. “I bet he never thought you might dance to it with someone like me,” Sara mumbles quietly as Ava lifts her head slightly, “Not many fathers wish for their daughters to get close to assassins.”

There’s a look on Sara’s face, something resembling self-consciousness. Her gaze flickers to the side as Ava scans her features. “Maybe not,” Ava replies as Sara’s breathing hitches against her chest, “But I think my parents would have loved you.” It’s a speculative statement, however Ava is convinced that her mother and father really would have liked Sara. They always wanted Ava to venture out of her comfort zone as a kid, and nobody has nudged Ava from the comfort of her shadows and secrets more than Sara has.

“You’re just saying that to be polite,” Sara attempts to deflect as Ava’s lips lift up. Shaking her head in amusement, Ava lets her nose bump along Sara’s cheek until she finds her lips. After kissing Sara gently, slowly, Ava withdraws and finds surprised blue eyes looking back at her.

“I thought we established a while ago neither of us was interested in just being polite,” Ava jokes as Sara’s cheeks color a soft pink color. A little spark of pride courses through Ava’s body as she follows the path of Sara’s blush with her eyes, trailing it down to where it rests along the pale skin of Sara’s chest. “They would have liked you,” Ava reassures her again, brushing her fingers along the underside of Sara’s chin in a fond movement, “Though I think my mother would be appalled that you used a waterproof tarp to cover a table for dinner.”

A quiet laugh falls from Sara’s lips, her shoulders shaking slightly under Ava’s arm. “I couldn’t find anything else,” Sara defends as Ava just smiles. She doesn’t care that Sara used their weapons tarp to cover the table. Somehow it just makes sense when it comes to them—there was something soothing and familiar about the intimate dinner being shared over a blanket used to hold the guns they have stashed in the next door room.

With another little hum, Ava hides her face back away against Sara’s neck and lets Sara resume their gentle swaying. Sara’s light humming has resumed as the song plays on and Ava holds Sara close. Draping her fingers over Sara’s collarbone, Ava can’t help but wonder what comes after this. When the fight comes and goes, when the dust settles, what do she and Sara do next? Sara goes home to Star City and Ava settles everything with the Operative, but after that, Ava doesn’t really have anywhere to go.

The music plays on and an ache forms and swirls in Ava’s stomach at the thought of just parting ways from the intimacy that she and Sara have draped themselves in these past days. When this is over, Ava has no choice but to return to Europe for a bit so she can tie up loose ends. But she doesn’t want to go there where she’ll be alone again. Now that Ava has someone she can trust, she doesn’t want to lose that even for a few weeks. “Ava,” Sara murmurs, backing up slightly as Ava’s brows crease and she looks to Sara in confusion, “I can hear you thinking.”

Concerned blue eyes flicker along Ava’s face, settling on her lips more than once or twice. “Well some of us do think all the time,” Ava deflects in a teasing tone. A single brow arches in response as Sara looks back at her, her fingers squeezing Ava’s hand in a gentle prompt. Releasing a quiet and resigned sigh, Ava tries to loosen some of the worry that has a tight grip inside her chest. “I just—” Ava tries before cutting off with a tired exhale, “I just can’t stop thinking.”

“You can,” Sara replies as Ava looks at her, not understanding, “Let me show you.” Before Ava

even has the chance to blink, Sara's lips are on her own. The kiss is soft and gentle. Ava can nearly feel the affection and care pouring from Sara's lips to her own. Tension slips from Ava's body as Sara's hand leaves her own and instead sneaks between their bodies to cup Ava's jaw. Warm fingers brush the edges of Ava's cheek, prompting her to sigh quietly into the kiss.

Tucking her worries and fears to the side, Ava lets Sara take over her senses. Warmth flares in her stomach as Sara's hand holds her face steady, her kisses growing more insistent. With careful steps, Ava backs them up so Sara's knees bump the edge of the couch. Breaking away from the kiss, Ava gently nudges Sara so she's sitting down. Dark blue eyes stare up at Ava as Ava comes to stand just before Sara.

With her breath caught in her throat, Ava trails her fingertips along Sara's neck to her collarbones before ghosting her touch along Sara's shoulders. The straps of Sara's dress catches along her fingers, moving with Ava's hands as she gently nudges them down Sara's arms. Slippery silk cascades down Sara's body, her dress pooling at her waist. Sara is bathed in the warm tones of the lantern light, shadows catching along her cheeks and the slope of her nose. "You're beautiful," Ava confesses, something inside her loosening as she says the words she's wanted to speak for so long.

Her admission sends a blush dancing along Sara's cheeks, the delicate pink color just making her look that much more lovely. A smile lifts at Ava's lips as she reaches down to help Sara step from the dress. Black silk forms a puddle at the ground, leaving Sara completely bare. Raising a single brow, Ava looks to Sara in amusement when she notices that Sara has forgone wearing anything under her dress. "You said we wouldn't be dressed for long," Sara says by way of explanation as Ava's smile widens, "I decided to make things easier for you."

"How thoughtful of you," Ava remarks with a grin as Sara shrugs playfully, "Care you help me out with mine now?"

"I thought you'd never ask," Sara teases gently as Ava's cheeks flush warmly. Slipping her arms free from the straps of her dress, Ava lets Sara tug the light fabric down her body. Forest green silk joins black along the floor, the colors slipping and mixing together. Sara's gaze burns where her eyes light a path of fire over Ava's skin, her fingers settling over Ava's hips. "Lace," Sara tucks her fingers in the waistband of Ava's underwear, her eyes lifting upwards with a playful sparkle, "Never took you as a lace kind of girl."

Her words are a direct echo of the ones spoken in a hotel in Germany where Ava was still desperately trying to keep Sara out. Back then Ava had no idea just what kind of relief and peace letting Sara in could come with. Back then they had barely started on this journey and Ava was still swearing up and down that Henry wouldn't betray her. Back then Ava hardly knew anything at all. She's not sure what she knows now, not exactly, but she does know that things make more sense when she's around Sara. "There's a lot you don't know about me," Ava teases back, repeating her own words from before.

A gentle laugh tumbles from Sara's lips, settling somewhere behind Ava's heart with such a sweet tenderness. When Sara tugs at the hemline of Ava's underwear, Ava stumbles forwards with a laugh of her own before straddling Sara. Settling along Sara's lap, Ava winds her arms around Sara's neck and presses their foreheads together. Her hair falls around them, blanketing them in their own little bubble. "I don't know," Sara replies, her nose bumping Ava's own as she tips her head up, "I wouldn't be so sure about that—I think I know you."

Ava knows that she does. Sara's known her for a while, Ava just didn't want to admit it. Now she's ready to though, now she's ready to let Sara in. "Yeah?" Ava prompts, her lips ghosting just over Sara's own as Sara's breathing catches.

“Yeah,” Sara replies, giving a barely there nod before hands cup Ava’s jaw and lips land on her own. Warmth ricochets through Ava, filling her with light and something so sweet it almost aches with how new it feels. Hands holds Ava steady as she tosses aside thoughts and worries of the future and focuses on the only thing she can right now—the present. With Sara kissing her on the couch as dulcet piano notes chase through the air and hazy yellow light blankets them, Ava sinks into the moment.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like after 15 chapters of them kind of dancing around each other a little break chapter was maybe needed before the ending. But I hope that you liked it and now there’s just a chapter left before the end which seems a bit crazy to me that this fic is wrapping it. It was never meant to be this long but here we are anyways. I haven’t yet decided what AU is going to come next but I think I’m going to go the fantasy route again so if you have a preference between demons/witches, ghosts, or angels let me know!

Part Seventeen

Chapter Summary

When Henry and his team descend on Sara and Ava, they're ready for the final fight. In the aftermath, Sara and Ava prepare for their next steps.

Chapter Notes

Well here is the final chapter before the endings, which seems a bit crazy that this is finally coming to an end. Action scenes are not ever going to be my forte so I'm not overly pleased with it but here it is anyways.

Warnings from before apply for violence and everything that had been mentioned in previous chapters. And a big thank you to [Crincher](#) who has been looking over this story for me.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Virginia, US — 04:34

Dim light filters in through the hallway and spills across the bed as Ava reverently traces her fingers along Sara's collarbones. Ava should be sleeping right now, but she woke from a nightmare and wasn't able to get back to sleep. So she'd rolled on the bed and found Sara here beside her, splayed out on her back with the covers shoved down near her waist. Soft pale skin is illuminated by the delicate light beam that filters into the room, catching along Sara's stomach and shoulder as it fades to the dark of the room.

The sound of Sara's heavy and peaceful breathing fills the room, soft puffs of air billowing against Ava's shoulder and the side of her neck. As soon as Ava had turned to her side, Sara had nestled closer in her sleep, tucking her body along Ava's chest and turning her face into the crook of Ava's neck. That small unconscious movement on Sara's part had flooded Ava with warmth that stretched from the back of her throat all the way to the tips of her fingers. Even now a smile comes to her face as Sara lets out a quiet sound and a little sigh before shifting her hand along Ava's chest.

With a gentle shushing noise, Ava runs the back of her hand along the soft curve of Sara's cheek. Instantly Sara settles under her touch, something that has that same light curling through Ava at the realization that she can somehow bring Sara peace in this way. As Sara's movements slow, Ava lets her hand fall back down to Sara's chest and resumes her ministrations. Using her fingertips, Ava traces over swaths and paths of freckles that delicately decorate Sara's skin.

Thousands of shaded freckles dance along her collarbones, dip down near her chest, and dapple her shoulders and neck. Ava delicately maps her hand over them, trailing just the pads of her fingers down Sara's abdomen before brushing back upwards again. In the past two days, Ava has learned that not only does Sara not like silence, but she doesn't like being alone for long periods of time. It was something Ava noticed before, but it became very clear just yesterday when Ava had been puzzling through Operative communications and Sara found her way down to the basement.

At first Sara had remained across the room, flipping through her own stack of documents to look over. But it hadn't taken long before she was slowly encroaching on Ava's space and peering at Ava's tablet over her shoulder. By now Ava is used to Sara's presence, so she hadn't even moved when Sara draped her arms around Ava's neck and had propped her chin on the top of Ava's head. "Wanna go upstairs and do this?" Sara had prompted as she nudged at the tablet with her pointer finger, "The couch has to be more comfortable than this chair."

There really wasn't anything wrong with the chair at all. But Ava knew that it wasn't really about the chair at all. It was about the silence lingering in the house and the fact that there was no second chair in the basement for Sara to perch in. So Ava had gathered what she could and moved upstairs. Not even seconds after she sat down on the couch, Sara was spreading herself out over the cushions and curling up with her head resting on Ava's thigh. Ava had just smiled down at her, elation echoing in her chest as she adjust her papers in her lap so they weren't poking Sara in the face.

That has become a daily occurrence now. Ava will be off doing something and Sara will inevitably find her and make herself comfortable in Ava's space. Each time Ava welcomes Sara, letting her tuck her body in against Ava's own on the porch swing, or along the couch, or even sitting together in the barstools. It's something Ava understands, a need to be close, and she wants it as well.

Sara shifts in her sleep once more, a quiet mumble falling from her lips as she curls further on her side, her back arching so her chest presses into Ava's own. The arm that was tucked between them now slings around Ava's waist, fingers clumsily and sleepily fumbling along Ava's back. "Why are you awake?" Sara mumbles grumpily, her brows creasing as Ava's lips quirk upwards slightly, "It's not even dawn."

"I couldn't sleep," Ava replies, bringing her hand up to sweep tangled hair away from Sara's face, her smile only widening when Sara hums and leans into her touch. "I was just thinking," Ava continues as Sara only nuzzles closer, her head coming to tuck just under Ava's chin as a warm palm slips along Ava's spine, "Do you think we have enough ammunition for this? I was thinking about the guns and I—"

"Aves," Sara murmurs, the nickname breaking something loose inside of Ava as she sucks in a quiet breath. Ava's caught off-guard as three neat kisses are pressed to the side of her neck, Sara's lips moving over her skin, "We have cleaned the guns and taken them apart nearly three times to make sure everything is working, we have enough ammunition to support a small army, and we have laid more bombs in case we need them. Everything is going to be okay."

It might not be okay though. Worry spikes low in Ava's stomach as she wraps Sara up in her arms just a little tighter. If something happens to Sara, Ava won't ever forgive herself. She's spent the past two weeks learning the ins and outs of Sara Lance. Staying in hotels for a few days at a time didn't really allow Ava to explore and witness all the ways that Sara operates. But now Ava knows too much to ever consider letting Sara go again.

It isn't as if Sara does anything special, it's the opposite. Everything Sara and Ava have done together here is mundane, ordinary, almost boring. After a life on the run and a life spent in constant fear of being caught, Ava now craves this domesticity and the slow flow of events. There's no point keeping Sara at a distance anymore, so Ava stopped a while ago. Now they fall asleep in the same bed each night, usually tangled together with sweat damp skin under lightly draped sheets.

Now Ava knows each reaction she can draw from Sara when they find their way together in the night. Ava has mapped her lips over every single scar along Sara's body. She knows which ones

make Sara shy away, which bring Sara pain, and which makes Sara's back arch off the bed when Ava sinks her teeth into the sensitive scar tissue. Sara likes to be close, her hands touching Ava at all times, their fingers tangled together along Sara's stomach as her chest heaves. Ava loves that closeness too, she loves draping herself over Sara's body so she can feel every tremble of Sara's legs, every hitch in her breath, and every clench of her muscles as Sara comes.

But Ava loves the other things too. In their time here, Sara has gone soft in Ava's vision, gentle and blurred around the edges. Now she lets Ava in too, she lets Ava see that she's just as broken as Ava is at times. Both of them had their lives ripped from them before they were tossed into a new world of danger, violence, and always looking over their shoulders. Neither of them have to look when they're together in this cabin. They're both finally safe for the time being—at least until the threat comes their way.

Ava doesn't want this to end. She wants to voice those thoughts out loud so they stop crashing around inside of her ribcage—she wants to free them. But as always, her vocal cords are being stubborn, stopping the sentence from rising up in her mouth. Instead she holds Sara closer, her fingers carding through silky soft blonde hair. "Everything will be okay," Ava echoes, trying to convince herself as Sara hums quietly. The vibrations push through the skin of Ava's neck, buzzing in her own throat before lips meet the hollow of Ava's collarbone.

"Try to get some more sleep," Sara soothes, her fingers now sweeping up and down Ava's spine. The motion would be soothing on another night, but tonight it does relatively little to calm the storm of anxiety swirling viciously in Ava's body. "Roll over," Sara encourages, her arms retreating from around Ava's form as she backs up slightly on the bed. Too tired and too filled with concern to complain, Ava listens to Sara's instructions and flips around so she's no longer facing Sara.

A warm body presses against Ava's own, soft skin and strong muscles slotting against her spine. When Sara's arms come around Ava, Ava takes Sara's hand in her own and tucks it close against her chest. Tonight Ava needs Sara near her. She needs a physical reminder that Sara isn't going anywhere for the time being. "Promise you'll be careful?" Ava whispers, her eyes caught on the sheets, her lips brushing Sara's knuckles as she dips her head down, "Promise you won't do something stupid and play the hero?"

That's Ava's real fear when the danger comes—that Sara will do something reckless and put herself further at risk. The stakes are higher now that Ava is so tangled together with Sara. This time around Ava knows that losing Sara might shatter her. Even just the thought of something happening has a tight ball of worry forming in Ava's stomach. "I'm not a hero," Sara murmurs with a slight shake of her head, her hair tickling Ava's shoulder blades, "But I promise not to do something stupid, yes. You too?"

Doing something stupid really isn't in Ava's rule book. The only thing that might make her do something reckless and dumb is if Sara is hurt or in danger. "I promise not to do anything unwarranted," Ava replies, trying to dodge a commitment she knows that she won't keep, "I won't do something that isn't necessary." That's all Ava's willing to concede tonight. She hopes that Sara understands that. She needs Sara to understand the words that Ava can't seem to push from her lips.

A barely there laugh falls from Sara's lips, warm breath washing over Ava's neck and shoulder. "Clever," Sara murmurs as Ava just hums quietly, "No more taking bullets for me this time around, no risking yourself." Ava's breathing catches in her throat, her chest tightening as she taps her fingers nervously over the back of Sara's hand. "Can you promise me that?" Sara prompts, her voice low and right near Ava's ear.

It would be easy to lie, but Ava's tired of lying to Sara. She ran out of ways to lie to Sara a while ago. "No," Ava replies, the utterance a near whisper as she tightens her grip on Sara's hand, "I can't promise you that." Behind her, Sara stiffens slightly but Ava clings to her arm and hand, not allowing Sara to leave her space. Somehow this is easier without Sara's eyes on her, staring through Ava as if she's trying to pick apart her thoughts. "I'm not losing you again," Ava mumbles against the tops of Sara's knuckles, hoping that Sara hears her because she doesn't know if she could confess that again.

Near silence falls between them, the only sound coming from the slow and shallow breathing near Ava's ear. Still not letting up her hold on Sara's arm and hand, Ava leans her chin along the top of Sara's palm. "Okay," Sara exhales slowly, her body relaxing muscle by muscle. Her chest folds itself along Ava's spine once more, their bodies melting into one another again. "Ava," Sara murmurs, her lips brushing against the shell of Ava's ear as her nose bumps Ava's head, "I really am sorry, for leaving you—for everything that you thought happened in Gdansk."

Ava doesn't want to talk about Gdansk. She doesn't want to think about that town or the file that contained the details of Sara's death. She doesn't want to think about the way that one event had unraveled the reality Ava had fooled herself into believing about her job. "It's fine," Ava manages out, her throat tight, her stomach forming knots, "I told you already that I understood why yo—"

"But I never fully explained myself," Sara interrupts. When Sara moves away from Ava, the cold that settles along the skin of Ava's back is nothing but unsettling. Tentatively rolling to her back, Ava finds Sara there propped on her elbow. Blue eyes glance down at Ava, and it's far too dark in the room for Ava to make out the expression on Sara's face, but from the frown settled on her lips, Sara isn't happy. "I stayed away to keep you safe, that is part of it," Sara confesses quietly, her palm settling over Ava's chest, warm fingers splaying out, "But I also stayed away because even back then I wanted this—I wanted you. If I came back, I knew I wasn't going to leave. I knew I was going to drag you down with me."

Ava doesn't need to see Sara's features to understand that this is guilt. Shifting to her side, Ava shakes her head vehemently, not allowing Sara to think that way. "You didn't drag me anywhere," Ava argues, leaning up so she's face to face with Sara, "I could have walked away from you. I could have said no." When Sara's eyes flicker over her face, her brows drawn and her lips still tugging downwards, Ava realizes that maybe she isn't the only one who was scared to cling to hope. "I wanted to be with you too," Ava tells Sara gently, her lips quirking up in a small smile as her thumb brushes along the dimple in Sara's chin, "I did long before Gdansk—even if I didn't know how to be with you."

It's a simpler version of the truth. There's no use recounting all of the inner turmoil that happened, or all the times Ava's stomach twisted up when Sara would call them friends, or say that dreaded word "pretend". They both know now that the struggle was a mutual one. "I'm still sorry," Sara apologizes again, a single corner of her lips lifting up before falling once more, "I never meant to hurt you. I didn't mean to leave you, but I didn't know how to come back without risking your safety."

By now Ava does know that. It still sometimes sets off that twinging sorrow in her chest when she thinks of those months she spent thinking Sara was dead, but she understands more now. "I know," Ava tells Sara calmly, laying back down on the pillow before rolling to her side once more, "Now come here, we need some sleep if we're going to get up early and make it to town before the farmer's market closes."

Between cleaning guns and checking cameras today, Sara had brought up the idea of going out to get real fresh strawberries about three times. At a certain point, Ava had run out of reasons to keep

saying no, so she had caved. The market is only a half hour drive from the house, plenty of time to make it back if the alarms go off.

Warm arms envelop Ava once more as Sara tucks herself along Ava's back. Three gentle kisses are laid against Ava's shoulder, Sara's breath ghosting over her skin. "Are you actually going to sleep?" Sara murmurs quietly, her nose brushing the skin just behind Ava's ear. Lifting her shoulder in a slight shrug, Ava sinks backwards as she forces herself to relax. "Just try," Sara encourages gently as Ava nods her head.

A palm comes to rest over Ava's still bare abdomen, fingers sweeping up and down along her navel. Something tender blossoms in Ava's chest as Sara continues her ministrations, her lips meeting Ava's shoulder here and again. Allowing herself to be held and looked after, Ava closes her eyes and lets out a quiet sigh. Against her back she can feel Sara's rhythmic heartbeat, a sensation that Ava latches onto as she tries to will herself back to sleep.

No sooner has peace settled over Ava's body than her phone is chiming, breaking up the delicate silence in the room. Jolting upwards, Ava throws her arm out and fumbles for the device resting on her nightstand. Her heart beating rapidly, Ava reads the message there on the screen. "Is that our cue?" Sara asks as Ava's throat tightens, her eyes sweeping over the message once more, "They're on the way aren't they?"

"Yeah," Ava breathes out, anxiety snaring tightly around her heart and lungs, "I give them two days. One to realize that we're not in the bunker there either, and then one to get here." On the screen, the words flash in a soft blue light, letting Ava know that her safe house in Croatia has been breached. Sinking back into the pillow, Ava stares at the sentence, her fingers gripping the phone tight. "This is your last chance to get out," Ava clears her throat quietly, looking to Sara beside her, "I wouldn't blame you for wanting to just go home to your family."

That is the truth, but Ava wants Sara here with her. She needs Sara here with her. "When are you going to learn?" Sara murmurs with a little smile, her fingers plucking the phone from Ava's hands. After tossing the phone to the side, Sara turns back around, her hand slipping over Ava's skin and settling over Ava's heart. Soft blue eyes stare back at Ava, a barely there smile along Sara's lips as she whispers, "I'm not going anywhere."

Ava's breath catches in her throat as she nods her head, her gaze fixated on Sara's eyes. "It would be better for them, for your family, if you were to go back now," Ava tries to argue as Sara already begins shaking her head, "They don't even know that you're alive, and if you stay here you might not make it out—"

The words die in Ava's mouth as Sara's lips land on her own. It's a brief kiss, one that leaves Ava silent as Sara retreats back into her own space again. "I'm not going anywhere," Sara repeats once more, her fingers skimming up the side of Ava's neck. A thumb tenderly brushes over Ava's cheekbone. "You're stuck with me, remember?" Sara muses as Ava feels her own lips quirking up slightly, "All this time and you can't seem to get rid of me—why would I change things now?"

Warmth settles over Ava, fluttering loosely inside her chest as soft blue eyes stare back at her with unabashed happiness shining in them. Letting out a disbelieving sigh, Ava just smiles. "You just want a chance to save my life so you can be in the lead again," Ava teases, feeling a bit of the nerves in her chest begin to loosen. When Sara laughs, Ava's smile widens as she gently nudges Sara in the side. "I'm pretty sure that I'm still beating you in that department," Ava continues on as Sara rolls her eyes.

When Sara slips down the bed and reclines against the pillows once more, Ava follows. This time Sara lays on her back and Ava tucks herself against Sara's side. From this side of Sara's body, Ava

can't rest her head over Sara's beating heart, so she settles for laying her palm there instead. A gentle thrumming vibration echoes under her fingers, the pulse thundering through Sara's body. "Maybe you're right," Sara proposes as Ava settles her head along Sara's shoulder, "Maybe I just want to win."

With a little laugh of her own, Ava shifts closer to Sara and slings a leg over Sara's own. An arm wraps around Ava's body, holding her close, holding her tight. "That sounds more like you," Ava tells her quietly as Sara hums, her sound audible under Ava's ear as well as coming to her through the air. Sara settles the covers around them, wrapping them in warmth and a gentle kind of seclusion. That little bit of worry still sits just behind Ava's ribs, a worry that will likely grow in the morning. But for now, it's chased off by the delicate embrace Ava's wrapped in, her cheek pressed against warm soft skin.

"Goodnight Ava," Sara murmurs, her lips meeting the top of Ava's head as Ava taps her fingers gently against Sara's chest. Mumbling back a reply of her own, Ava shifts once more before closing her eyes. In the morning they have to go over everything, and the trip to the market will have to be postponed. But nothing can be done right now, so Ava closes her eyes and lets the rhythmic rise and fall of Sara's chest lull her to sleep.

Nervously drumming her fingers along the table in front of her, Ava keeps her eyes trained on the cameras that show nothing but an empty road. Rustling comes from across the room, but Ava doesn't look up. It's just Sara, checking outside once more, fiddling with the blinds in the same way she's been doing for about twenty minutes now. "You'd think they'd be more punctual than this," Sara mutters as an anxious laugh bubbles up from Ava's chest.

This morning Sara had used one of her local contacts to get a list of all flights that were coming in from Croatia, including those that aren't sanctioned flights. They'd found the craft they believe that Henry and his group will be traveling on, and if the record is correct, they should have landed three hours ago. But there's been nothing but silence, and now that darkness has fallen, the paranoia and worry is taking over Ava's body.

The chair near Ava scrapes along the ground as Sara takes a seat, laying her knives along the top of the table. "You okay?" Sara checks, her voice soft as Ava chances a look over to her. Sara's dressed in all black, they both are. Each of them has on a vest, though Ava's is strapped with bullets while Sara's is covered in various knives of different sizes. Soft blonde hair has been braided away from Sara's face, a pattern that Ava wove with her fingers only four hours ago as Sara sat between her legs.

"I'll be fine once this is over," Ava replies curtly, not really wanting to talk about this. Heaviness settles in her stomach at just the thought of coming face to face with Henry again. He's made it perfectly clear that there is no length he won't go to in order to keep his secrets, so Ava knows that allowing him to live past this night is not an option. "I just don't think I can do it," Ava mumbles, dragging her eyes back to the camera screens, "I might have never trusted him in full, but I don't know if I can be the one to kill him."

This was easier when they were in Budapest. The plan that evening was never to kill Henry. They needed to lure him and his supporters out so they could determine who was on Henry's side and who wasn't. Now that they succeeded in doing that, Ava isn't sure that she can be the one to pull the trigger and end Henry's life. "Well good thing you have an assassin here," Sara speaks with a gentle tone, her fingers landing over the ones Ava has spread along her own knee, "If you can incapacitate him, I'll handle the rest."

Nodding stiffly, Ava clings to the hand that's slipped around her own. Sara's fingers are warm and Ava rubs her own thumb over the smooth calluses along Sara's palm. There's something comforting in the familiarity of Sara's hands. Ava maps her fingers over each ridge of Sara's palm as she looks to the table in front of her. "Are you sure that he'll be here?" Sara asks as Ava sucks in a quiet breath, "Seems like a lot of trouble for him to come all this way himself. Why wouldn't he just send a group here while he stays somewhere away from the fight?"

If it was anyone other than Henry, Ava might think that Sara has a point. However she knows her mentor, and she knows the lessons that he drilled into her. "Henry won't trust others to do the job the way he wants it done," Ava explains, turning to Sara and taking in the frown tugging at her lips, "He's going to be here. He's worked so hard to keep this secret over the years, he won't just sit out on something this big."

At least that is what Ava is counting on. Several parts of their plan rely on Henry being here. They had taken a lot of care to think through how Henry would form this attack. No part of their plan is something that Ava was taught at the Operative. They're using Sara's tactics and Sara's strategies with the hope that it will be enough to catch Henry off guard. At the very least, Henry won't be expecting the bombs seeing as he always hated them.

Before Sara can even reply, the tablet is chiming on the table. Her breath caught in her chest, Ava turns and looks to the screen. On the very outskirts of the property, four cars are slowly making their way down the dirt path. None of them have their lights on, and Ava can already see the men inside the car with the rolled down windows. "Six to a car?" Sara asks, leaning over into Ava's space as Ava nods her head and begins to stand, "Twenty four in total, likely more on foot."

That's Ava's guess as well. The bombs should take out at least two cars, but after that, it's on Sara and Ava. Releasing Sara's hand, Ava grabs her gun from the edge of the counter and tucks it into her holster. "You should get going," Ava nods to the door as Sara hums, "Just remember to listen for the two explosions and then I'll guide you from there."

Once Ava triggers the bombs, she'll make her way outside to her perch where she'll lead Sara through the woods using her rifle scope. Pressure forms in Ava's chest as she watches Sara slip knife after knife into the pockets of her vest. Moonlight comes in through the slotted blinds, casting stripes of contrast over Sara's face. Terrified that this might be the last time Ava gets to see Sara like this, she reaches out with her hand and latches onto Sara's wrist. "Be safe," Ava tells her, not even caring how much her tone sounds like a plea, "Don't be a hero."

A barely there laugh falls from Sara's lips as she steps closer. Warm fingers slide up the side of Ava's neck before settling along her jaw. Sara's smile is soft and tender as she brushes her thumb over Ava's cheek bone. Some of the tension in Ava's body melts away as Sara leans in and lips meet Ava's own in a soft kiss. "You be safe too," Sara murmurs as she backs up, a thumb sweeping over Ava's cheek once more, "Can't have my favorite spy dying on me."

Unable to stop her smile from sneaking over her face, Ava just nods her head shyly and backs away from Sara. Sara lets out a tiny sigh before giving Ava one more smile and heading to the door. Outside moonlight bathes everything in white light, chasing away the shadows inside the dark house. The door closes, leaving Ava standing alone in the middle of the house with her heart thundering in her chest.

Over at the table, another alert goes off, snapping Ava into action. The screen shows the cars approaching the main road, inching closer and closer to the bombs. Henry won't be in these cars and Ava knows it. He'll come from an alternative path through the woods but Ava's counting on that. On the screen, the first car approaches the spikes that are laid out before the two bombs

tucked in the ground. Pressing her ear piece inside her ear, Ava turns on the control and taps her finger against it. "Ready for this?" Ava questions.

"Let's do this," Sara replies on the other end. The sound of gentle rustling coming from Sara's side as she makes her way towards the location the second bomb will go off near. Humming quietly, Ava watches on as the car hits the spikes and instantly careens into the woods. The front of the car slams into a tree there, the sound audible not only through the video but from outside as well. Ava can't help but snort as she watches the men jump from the car, none of them knowing that if they continue into the woods, they'll come upon Sara.

The second car is taking the path slower, running over the spikes and continuing forwards. If Ava times this right, she'll be able to take out the second and fourth car along the bombs, leaving the third one trapped in the middle. Leaning against the table, Ava taps her foot along the floor as the second car crawls closer and closer to the second bomb. In her ear, Ava can't hear anything coming from Sara, a good sign that she hasn't encountered any troubles just yet.

"Come on," Ava murmurs quietly, her chest tight with anticipation as she frowns at the screen. She can't go to her perch until those cars advance to the bombs. This has to be set off from here. Several tense moments pass before the second car approaches the bomb just as the fourth one aligns with the location of the other bomb. "Ready?" Ava speaks, checking with Sara and getting a hum from the other end, "Here we go."

Pressing her finger to the button over the trigger box, Ava watches on the screen as flashes of light take over the camera. Thunderous noises come from outside, the sound of the two blasts echoing through the forest. Random gunfire goes off, the bullets popping through the clamor. However, Ava can't hear them from Sara's end so they're not being fired at her. On the screen, the picture is adjusting, letting Ava see the aftermath of the detonations.

Twisted metal covers the drive, the bombs leaving large craters in the ground. Each of the two cars have been launched somewhere else off to the side of the screen, but Ava would be surprised if anyone managed to survive that. Those who did live through it likely won't remain alive for long. *"Damn,"* Sara's impressed sounding voice comes from the other end, *"Well that certainly got rid of half of the problem here."*

Scanning the screen with a hum, Ava makes sure that the third car is in fact trapped in the middle of the debris. Already the men inside the car are getting out, their guns in hand, their movements panicked. "My job here is done," Ava announces, her stomach clenching slightly in nervous worry over the next part of the plan, "Now I'm coming out to join you, give me five to get up to the perch."

When Sara hums her affirmation over the line, Ava snags her rifle off the back of the couch before slinging the strap over her shoulder and heading to the door. Outside everything is quiet once more, the only source of light within the forest coming from the fire that has formed as a result of the bombs. Ava chose an area where there were no trees, and she and Sara spent a considerable amount of time making sure that the blast was controlled enough that the fires wouldn't spread.

Setting her hands on the rickety ladder, Ava begins climbing up the side of the tree that leads to the hovering platform. Everything below is quiet and calm, moonlight splashing light over the small gravel drive off to the side. At the top, Ava carefully sets her gun up and lays flat on her stomach to minimize the risk of being seen. A wooden barrier obscures her from view, the bottom hollowed out so she can nudge the barrel of the rifle through just enough to see.

"Check," Ava speaks quietly, ducking her head down and peering through the scope. They've talked this plan through over and over again, so it takes Ava seconds to find Sara right where she should

be. A smile rests on Sara's cheeks that Ava can only just see. "You've got two near you," Ava murmurs, flipping on the night vision switch and shifting the scope so the two men are right in her sights, "Two at your four o'clock and one coming from twelve."

Up here, Ava's primary objective is letting Sara know where everyone is. Ideally they won't need the rifle at all. However the odds of everything going perfectly to plan tonight is fairly slim. Already Ava can see two of the men coming far too close to Sara. The first man gets to Sara before the others, the pair of them locked in a fight. Lining up the rifle, Ava takes aim for the first man and fires off a shot that strikes him straight through the chest. His body falls to the ground as the second man goes after Sara.

From here it's too hard to tell which body is the man and which is Sara. In her ear Ava can hear Sara's grunts as she fights the man off. "Sara when I say get down, get down," Ava instructs, lining up the shot as best as she can. Nerves flutter low in her stomach, her heart beating rapidly in her chest. In her view, the two bodies fight one another, Sara's blonde hair able to be seen here and again. "Get down," Ava commands tersely, her finger already pulling the trigger as she says the words.

The bullet fires from the gun and Ava holds her breath as a body falls to the ground. Precious seconds pass before a figure stands again, one with a knife in hand and shining blonde hair. Relief floods Ava's chest as she lets out a stuttered exhale. Sara bends over the man and jerks something from his body, presumably a knife. "*I've said it before but you have a sexy radio voice,*" Sara teases as Ava lets out a strangled laugh, "*I'm thinking we could try this out one night; you in one room, me in—*" Instantly Ava clears her throat sharply, cutting Sara off.

But Sara's not dissuaded, "*I'm just saying, phone sex can be hot if you pull it off.*" Heat licks along the skin of Ava's cheeks, a blush spreading over her face. Deciding to push that thought to the side, Ava flicks the bullet casings from the gun. Some of the nerves in Ava's chest loosen a bit as she lets out another quiet laugh. "*You okay?*" Sara asks gently, her head turned in Ava's direction.

Not oblivious to the fact that Sara's joking was only meant to help her relax, Ava just rolls her eyes and swivels the gun to the side. "I'm okay," Ava replies, chiding Sara lightly when she speaks next, "You focus on yourself out there." Motion gets her attention and Ava drags her rifle to the side to see three men are coming down the pathway. They're getting too close to Sara, meaning that Ava is going to have no choice but to fire at some of them. Sara is skilled but not even she can take on six men at once. Over close to Sara, gunfire breaks out and Ava swivels her rifle just in time to watch Sara ducking down.

Timing her shot with the sound of clustered gunfire, Ava pulls the trigger once before firing again. Both of the two men approaching Sara from the side drop, the shot no longer sounding off in the clearing. The further figure is now on the ground as well, Sara hovering over him as she jerks a knife from his chest. "Was that necessary?" Ava asks, watching on as Sara removes two more knives from his body, "Don't waste your knives."

It's a useless reminder though, Ava already knows that Sara is going to do just as she pleases and nothing less. Down in the clearing, Ava hears a crunching sound. Her heart jumping, she peers over the edge of her perch as Sara replies with some unintelligible comment. Nothing is below but more gravel and the duffle Ava had put against the tree earlier that contains her rifle case. "*Where now?*" Sara's voice repeats in Ava's ear.

Her chest still tight, Ava drags her eyes back to the rifle and peers through the scope. More figures are tracking their way through the woods towards Sara. This time they're moving slow, clearly wary of the gunfire that had been rattling off. "Keep walking to your right and you'll hit them,"

Ava replies, tracing Sara's movements through the underbrush, "There's three first, then another two coming right behind them."

In her ear, Sara's hum of affirmation echoes back. Carefully watching through the lens, Ava traces their movements, anxiously waiting for their collision. There should be about seven or eight men left, potentially ten. In front of Sara, one of them is rapidly approaching. "Sara he sees you," Ava calls in warning, her heart rate picking up. Powerless to do anything when Sara's in the way of her shot, Ava stares through her scope. Sara strikes the man headfirst, the two of them toppling to the ground in the overgrowth.

For a moment, Ava loses sight of them, her breath caught in her chest as she waits for the pair to stop moving. More men approach from the sides, now nearly on top of Sara and the man. With quick and precise shots, Ava fires off three bullets that strike the men in the center of the chest. Casings clatter loudly to the deck beside Ava, the sound filling her ears as she waits. The final man approaches from behind, too obscured by trees for Ava to make the shot.

Grunting comes from her earpiece and Ava watches as a figure on top of the other slams what looks like a knife down. "Sara," Ava rushes out worriedly. There's no reply as Ava lines up her final shot and downs the final man. The figure staggers to their feet as Ava sucks in a deep breath. "Sara," Ava tries again, worrying clenching around her heart and snarling in her stomach, "Come in."

"*Yeah, I'm here,*" Sara pants as Ava heaves out a sigh of relief. Closing her eyes, Ava tips her forehead against the side of her gun. "*They were determined weren't they?*" Sara's voice crackles through Ava's earpiece, still sounding a little winded, "*Be careful if any come your way, they're wearing special vests.*"

Ava had counted on that. She expected that Henry would make sure his men were fully outfitted in protective gear. The bullets currently loaded into her gun could pierce through steel, so Ava's not worried about them not being able to penetrate a vest. Just as Ava is about to turn her attention to Sara's surroundings, something grabs her arm and jerks her to the side.

Ava's heart lurches in her chest as she comes face to face with a strange man standing half on the ladder. There's a gun leveled right at her face, the safety already flicked off. She never heard him coming. The barrel tips right against Ava's temple as the man leans closer. "Hand it over," the man says, pointing to his ear.

"Ava," Sara's worried sounding voice comes in Ava's ear.

"Remember London," Ava urges quickly in a murmur as she removes the device and hands it to the man in front of her. Already frowning, Ava watches as he crushes it under his palm on the deck. There's a gun right along Ava's side, just in reach, but she doesn't dare move for it now. When the man motions for her to follow, Ava just sucks in a breath before wiggling backwards on the platform.

Her feet strike the rungs of the ladder as she glances down below. Henry stands there with his glasses in place along his face, his cane in one hand. "Did you think we would only approach from the road?" Henry muses as Ava slowly follows the man backwards down the ladder. Another man stands near Henry's side, dressed in a bulletproof vest and grasping an assault rifle. "Come on Ava," Henry taunts with a laugh, "I trained you, I was really expecting better from you here. Gaining a tactical vantage point was the first lesson you learned."

It was, though Ava was counting on Henry assuming that they had only used her background to plan this. Still moving down, Ava carefully slips the knife from insider her sleeve and tucks it

along the inside of her palm. Sharp metal bites into her hand, but Ava pays it no mind as she descends towards the ground. Nerves thrum in her chest as she comes within the last few rungs of the ladder.

The man behind her is too busy looking at the ground to pay any attention to her. Kicking her leg out, Ava knocks the gun from his hand. It clatters to the ground, striking the gravel below. With a quick and hasty movement, Ava strikes him just in the side of the neck with the dagger and releases it. Instantly blood bubbles from the wound, the man's eyes widening as he fruitlessly clasps at his neck. It wasn't a deep wound, but he won't survive it. The man drops from the ladder, falling to the ground as he holds his neck.

But before Ava can even think about moving, the second man has his gun leveled her way. "That was just unnecessary," Henry drawls with an annoyed looking frown, "The killing has to stop."

Scoffing lightly, Ava jumps down to the ground and looks to the second man standing there. His gun is already raised, his eyes trained on her movements. The moment he takes a step forward Ava moves to the side. Shoving the gun away from her body, Ava strikes him right in the nose with her elbow. Bone makes contact with bone, the impact traveling up Ava's arm with a dull ache. He hasn't released the gun yet, his fingers still tightly clasped around the stock. Grasping the handguard and the grip, Ava jerks it away from him.

The gun tumbles to the ground just as something connects with the side of Ava's head. Disoriented, Ava loses her footing and stumbles over the body at her feet. It's the opening that the man needed to harshly shove her against the rungs of the ladder. Pain laces through Ava's ribs and forehead where her skull strikes the wooden steps. Hands shove Ava roughly against the side of the tree, the wood pressing into her chest and stomach.

In the distance, more gunfire breaks out. Ava's eyes instantly jump towards the woods, staring out to the trees and bushes that block her view of what's happening beyond. Pressure forms inside Ava's chest as she listens to another spurt of shots go off in the distance. Desperately wishing she was still up on her perch and could see what's happening, Ava struggles against the arm pinning her.

But it's no use. All the man does is press her against the ladder further as he begins throwing her weapons to the side. Both guns are taken, as well as the knife Ava had clasped in her hand and the three daggers laid along her vest. Once everything has been stripped away, then the man lets Ava turn back around again. Henry is leaning on his cane with both hands, his glasses tipped downwards so Ava can just barely see the whites of his eyes. "Well, best to get this over with," Henry motions to the house with his cane, "After you."

At this point fighting would be a mistake. Henry is armed and the man near her has since recovered his weapon. Shaking the spare man's hand off of her arm, Ava carefully steps over the body on the ground and makes her way to the house. Silence comes from the forest now, no gunfire and no sounds of distress. It's an unsettling quiet that has a hot ball of worry forming in Ava's stomach. Gravel crunches under her feet, the sound appearing that much louder now that everything else is so silent. "Nice house," Henry muses as they approach the porch.

Anger burns and curls in Ava's chest but she bites down on the inside of her cheek and says nothing. Shoving the door open, Ava steps inside the house and comes to a stop in the middle of the kitchen. Both the man and Henry are looking around the dark room. Shadows drape the corners in darkness, the only source of light coming from the cracked blinds that still allow moonlight to tumble over the table and counters. "Upstairs," Henry nods to the staircase.

Still not speaking, Ava purses her lips and sets up the stairs. Her fingers grip the banister tight as

Ava's heart thunders wildly inside her chest. At the top of the steps, Ava takes a sharp right and heads to the door that leads to Sara's room. They've not really been using this room at all, falling asleep in Ava's bed instead. The door is closed tight, the lights coming from the sliver of space under the door. Up here nearly everything is dark, including the tiny alcove that Ava had allowed Sara to hollow out in the wall five days ago.

With the man right behind her, Ava slowly approaches the door and rests her hand tentatively on the handle as her eyes cut to the alcove. "Go inside," Henry sighs, sounding almost bored as well as impatient.

Pain still echoes in Ava's skull as she takes a steadying breath. Ripping the door open, Ava jumps backwards and presses herself flat into the alcove and covers her ears. Her eyes closed, Ava listens as bullets rip through the air. Splinters of wood fly through the air, landing on Ava's shoulders and head. Round after round fires off, too many to count. Ava thinks she can almost feel the ripples in the air as bullets whiz by. They pass by her body, never once touching her at all. Inside her chest, Ava's heart is pounding dangerously fast as she presses herself further into the alcove.

After a moment, the gunfire stops, silence filling the hallway once more. Slowly, Ava opens her eyes and peeks over her shoulder. The man is on the ground, his chest, legs, and arms covered with bullet holes. Wincing at the sight and the way blood already pools near her shoes, Ava looks up in time to see Henry coming from where he had hidden behind the stair railing. "That is not something I taught you," he comments, his gun still in his hand as Ava stiffens.

"My new friend is well versed in pop culture—she has a particular love for 'Home Alone'," Ava remarks, glancing inside the room. A gun is haphazardly attached to the wall there. Long black string attaches to the trigger as well as to the door handle. The moment Ava ripped the door open, she had forced the gun to fire off. It had been Sara's idea, something that had taken quite a bit of planning to set up without shooting themselves.

"Go inside," Henry says curtly, waving his gun towards the open door. With a short sigh, Ava turns around and steps inside. The moment her back is turned, something sharp pierces through the skin of her shoulder and Ava cries out quietly. Fire dances along the nerves in her arm, igniting her shoulder and the tips of her fingers with white hot pain. Nausea flares in Ava's stomach when she turns over her shoulder to find a white crested dagger embedded in her shoulder. "Just in case you get any ideas," Henry shrugs, not looking even remotely apologetic.

Anger and disappointment settle heavily in Ava's stomach. Any questions she had about Henry and his morals have been properly answered tonight. She can't imagine turning on someone that looked up to her like this. She can't imagine what could possibly possess someone to betray those close to them. Cradling her arm close, Ava winces and bites down on the inside of her cheek as Henry pushes her in the center of her back. "Why Henry," Ava mutters, still holding her arm to her chest even as Henry continues nudging her towards the bed.

Sinking on the mattress with a pained exhale, Ava watches as her former mentor settles in the chair across the room from her. His cane rests to the side, his glasses obscuring his eyes as he levels the gun at her. Ava knows better than to chance anything right now, Henry always was an amazing shot, even more so after he lost his sight and had to rely on sound alone to target someone. "Because you're the best and we both know you won't just let this die quietly," Henry shrugs, his tone completely unbothered, "Your parents both looked the other way, but you couldn't do it could you?"

That was never something Ava considered, and she doubts that her parents had any plans of letting things go either. "You trained me to do a job," Ava states, staring down Henry as she hears her

voice rising, “You trained me to protect secrets and always do my best to protect the good people and take out the bad. Why would you think I would back down after everything you taught me?”

Ava’s shoulder twinges as she shifts on the bed, pain lacing through her body. The dagger isn’t deep, but it has to have hit a nerve. Tentatively Ava curls her fingers together to test out her mobility. Sharp pain shoots down her arm, pricking at her palm and setting her nerves on fire. It’s not a fatal wound, but it’s one that is likely to take a while to recover from. Henry doesn’t seem to care about any of this, still sitting in the chair with an unimpressed look on his face.

“Well you’ve really made a mess out of things here, I won’t lie—you’re efficient,” Henry lets out a bitter sounding laugh as he shakes his head, “The Operative is already breathing down my neck about Budapest.” Ava knows that. She saw the mentions on the transmissions just four days ago. It’s what had led her and Sara to shift an aspect of their plan. “But it really doesn’t matter once I leave here tonight,” Henry shrugs, tapping his cane along the ground, “I have all your electronic copies, and before I go, I’ll take all your hard copies.”

Shifting on the bed, Ava searches behind her back for the gun that Sara had hidden under the blanket earlier. Each room has a gun tucked along the bed or a dresser, that had been Sara’s idea and now Ava is nothing but thankful for it. “Killing you is unfortunate,” Henry nods slowly, his lips pursed, “But then again the Operative already assumes that you’re dead because I told them you were in Budapest with me the night the bombing happened. Death reports are remarkably easy to fake in this line of work.”

Fury burns in Ava’s stomach, her jaw working as Henry gives her a knowing smile. “Before I kill the real Sara Lance, I have every intention on figuring out how she managed to fake her death not only once, but twice,” Henry comments as Ava grips the gun in her hand, “If she’s not dead already out there.” Not allowing her anxieties to overcome her, Ava simply clears her throat. “The problem with you Ava is that you always were too predictable,” Henry shakes his head, sounding more than just disappointed, “I tried you to follow routines I know, but I’m a little disappointed you made things so easy tonight.”

Outside, Ava hears the sound of what might be a car door closing. Tipping her chin upwards, Ava tilts her head to the side. There’s a frown on Henry’s face as he looks past her to the window. “You’re not the only one I’ve learned from in my time spent on this job,” Ava shakes her head with a smile, letting out a quiet laugh, “As it turns out, you can learn how to overcome being predictable. At least I could.”

A chirping sound comes from just below the window, followed quickly by a car horn honking. The frown on Henry’s face only deepens as he stands abruptly from the chair. “What was that?” Henry asks as Ava slinks down on the mattress, shifting her body to the side.

“A warning,” Ava states. The moment the words are said, a blast rocks through the air outside. Roaring sounds overtake Ava’s ears as glass rains down on her back and around her head. The room lights up with a violently bright light as heat scorches through the air. The bomb blast ripples through Ava’s bones, the harsh impact outside jolting her from the position she had on the bed. Closing her eyes tightly, Ava turns her head downwards as more glass and debris sprinkles downwards.

Without much time to recover, Ava is slightly disoriented as she turns her gun on Henry. The blast had made him drop his own gun, the weapon fallen and discarded on the ground. Henry is sitting in the chair once more, his hands raised to his eyes as Ava stands from the bed. “Don’t move,” Ava threatens, kicking the gun under the dresser and away from his reach, “I won’t hesitate to shoot you if you do.”

This time Ava means it. Holding the gun steady, Ava brings her good hand up to her face and sweeps away speckled fragments of dust from her hair. Footsteps echo up the stairs, the door to the room slamming open seconds later. Sara stands there, her eyes wide and panicked, a knife gripped tightly in her hand. “Ava,” Sara exhales, her shoulder dropping as the tension melts from her body, “Thank god.”

Quickly, Ava sweeps her eyes over Sara’s body, taking in any visible injuries. There’s a cut along Sara’s cheek and a bruise forming along her jaw, but otherwise she looks okay. Both her hands are stained with blood and Ava’s willing to bet that’s also what splatters the front of Sara’s vest as well as her sleeves. “Well, this is touching,” Henry scoffs, tilting his head back so it falls against the chair backing, “I’m assuming this is where you call in the Operative and I get locked away?”

Something heavy and tight drops down in Ava’s stomach, her grip along the gun faltering for a moment. Glancing over to Sara, Ava finds understanding waiting for her in gentle blue eyes. With a little nod, Ava beckons for Sara to come over. Slowly, Sara approaches, her eyes never leaving Ava’s own as her fingers cover Ava’s along the gun. Turning over possession of the weapon to Sara, Ava takes a step back, hugging her injured arm to her chest. “You’re not even going to do it yourself?” Henry questions as Sara levels the gun his way, “I expected more from you—I made you what you are.”

Anger flaring low in her stomach, Ava shakes her head and looks to her former mentor. “You didn’t make me into anything,” Ava tells him quietly, “I’ll never be like you. I won’t kill others to keep my own secrets. Once you’re dead here tonight, I’m done with this job.” Henry lets out an amused sounding laugh as Ava glances over to Sara. “I couldn’t do this to someone I’ve known for so long.” Ava shakes her head as Sara looks over her shoulder, “But Sara here, well she’s pretty mad that you ordered her death.”

“Twice,” Sara cuts in, her voice clipped and angry sounding. With a final step backwards, Ava rests her hip against the doorframe and glances from Sara to Henry. Henry doesn’t even look worried, he just looks resigned, almost indignant. But Sara’s eyes are filled with concern as her gaze sweeps over Ava. “Go to the other room,” Sara instructs gently, “I’ll make it quick, better than he deserves.”

Maybe it is, but somehow Ava doesn’t want him to suffer even after everything that he’s done. Nodding her head tersely, Ava slips from the room and makes her way to her own bedroom across the hall. Her movements are slow and stiff, her heart beating irregularly in her chest as she braces for the gunshot. Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror, Ava takes in the sparkling glass in her hair and the blooded cut along the side of her face that had to have come from being shoved into the ladder.

The door to the room is riddled with bullets from the rigged gun. Chips of wood cover the ground inside the room and outside the hall—her childhood vacation home in ruins. Her breathing uneven, Ava makes her way into the room, shoving the door open just slightly. Just as Ava steps to the middle of the room, a sharp sound ricochets through the halls. The gunshot breaks through the silence that had otherwise settled over the house after the bomb blast, the sound already echoing in Ava’s ears.

Moving slowly, Ava makes her way to the mattress that’s still tangled with messy sheets and stacked pillows—Sara’s attempt at making the bed. Sinking into the bed in exhaustion, Ava closes her eyes and takes an unsteady breath. The backs of her eyelids prick with tears as a soft sob catches in her chest. Footsteps come from the hallway, the door squeaking quietly on its hinges as it’s pushed the rest of the way open. “He’s dead?” Ava asks in a whisper, not yet opening her eyes.

No response comes, but Ava can hear Sara moving closer. Opening her eyes, Ava comes face to face with Sara who's standing right in front of her. "Yeah," Sara nods her head as Ava releases her injured arm and lets Sara come to stand between her legs, "He's dead. It's over."

Relief and sorrow crash through Ava in overwhelming waves. Her breathing tangling in her chest, Ava just nods her head in a tight movement as Sara draws even closer. Tender hands brush along Ava's arms, pulling her into Sara's body. Powerless to do anything other than let Sara support her, Ava collapses into Sara and brings her good hand up to fist in the fabric of Sara's shirt. Sara smells like smoke and iron and sweat, the material along her shoulder damp with what has to be someone else's blood, but Ava doesn't care. "I'm proud of you Ava," Sara whispers near Ava's ear.

Closing her eyes once more, Ava takes in a shaking breath and clings to Sara. Fingers brush over Ava's hair and the tops of her shoulders, likely clearing away glass fragments. Letting out a trembling exhale, Ava tucks her nose against Sara's shoulder. Adrenaline still courses through Ava's veins, her body and mind on high alert. Trying to relax, Ava sinks further into Sara. "You remembered London," Ava murmurs quietly, her voice muffled by fabric as she taps her fingers along Sara's back.

"How could I forget London?" Sara lets out a quiet laugh, lips meeting top of Ava's head, "Hand cuffs and corrupt CEOs and car bombs, a good time all around." Ava's lips lift in a tiny smile, so glad that Sara knew to check the car parked outside for the extra explosives. Ava was counting on Sara not knowing how to detonate them properly. She was counting on the blast being big enough to catch Henry off guard.

The silence in Ava's ears is almost overwhelming as she turns her head and nuzzles her way into the crook of Sara's neck. "That's it," Ava exhales unsteadily as Sara hums, "Now it's all over. Now we're both free to go." It hardly feels real yet, and Ava wonders just how long this might take to sink in.

Along her back, one of Sara's hands skims up and down her spine. Pain twinges through Ava's arm as the knife is tapped. Suddenly the blade is jerked out. With a gasp, Ava grips at Sara's shirt and closes her eyes. Red hot agony burns from the stab wound down to Ava's fingertips once more as she grits her teeth and squeezes her eyes shut. "God—why did you do that?" Ava manages out as she hears the knife hit the bed with a quiet thump, "Medical professionals should have done that."

"You've had worse," Sara murmurs as Ava swats at her back, still leaning against Sara despite the fact that she ripped a knife from her body. Feeling is slowly returning to her stiff fingers, the pain already beginning to subside. Experimentally wiggling her fingertips, Ava pulls back from Sara's neck to glance at her hand. No longer are her nerves burning, the only pain coming from the dull throb at her shoulder. "Better right?" Sara tests, looking a little guilty when Ava turns her attention to her face, "It was right on a nerve, I bet that hurt."

It did hurt, and Ava doesn't exactly appreciate the lack of warning, but she's glad the knife is out. "You're the worst," Ava tips her head backwards, shifting her sore neck from side to side, "Next time a countdown would be nice."

"I'd prefer no next time at all," Sara fires back as Ava's lips lift upwards. Shaking her head, Ava reaches out with her good hand and gently thumbs at the spot of blood dappling Sara's chin. It's not her own, not that Ava is surprised. Somehow on her own Sara managed to take out the rest of the men. "We'd better get going," Sara says as Ava delicately tucks loose strands of hair behind her ear, "There's still one more thing to do before this is done."

Nodding her head, Ava lets Sara back away from her and accepts the hand offered her direction. They had counted on Henry coming here and they had counted on him isolating Ava. It had been

Sara's idea to tuck a recording device inside Ava's vest pocket. Fishing it out, Ava hands it over to Sara who presses the stop button on the device. Four days ago when they realized that the Operative was on to Henry, Ava had sent over just the bare bones of what they had on Henry so far. She had also included the address for the local farmer's market as a location for the Operative to arrive at.

One call from Ava's phone and they'll be here in a half hour, ready to survey the mess and take in everything Ava has on Henry and his collusion with the League. Not only does Henry go down, but it gives the Operative enough ammunition on the League to topple them if they ever try to go after assassins like Sara who have left the business. "You've got the numbers dialed up?" Sara asks as she slips her arm around Ava.

Leaning into Sara's side, Ava nods her head and lets Sara lead her from the room. "In my pocket," Ava replies. A hand skims Ava's waist before slipping just a little lower. With a fond eye roll, Ava reaches back and swats Sara's hand away. "My jacket pocket," Ava clarifies with a smile, turning her head and finding sparkling blue eyes and a wide grin leveled her way. Laughter bubbles from Sara's lips as Ava's smile just widens. When Sara releases her hold on Ava and slips from the room, Ava lets her walk ahead.

Standing there in the hallway, Ava glances to the spare bedroom and the debris spread all over the floor. The curtains are in tatters, ripped and shredded from the glass piercing through them. Spent bullet casings and pieces of chipped wood decorate the ground. Henry's can has clattered over the floorboards, coming to rest just by the open door. This isn't the way Ava wanted this to end, but it might have been the only way it ever could end. Her throat tight, Ava spares the room just one more look before turning around and heading down the steps—finally leaving her past behind her.

Gravel kicks up along the path as yet another car takes off with the bodies of Henry's team already safely wrapped up. Leaning against the side of the medical van, Ava lets out a quiet sigh and bundles the blanket further around her body. The Operative members arrived here roughly an hour ago and have been combing over the house and surrounding woods. They're clearing away the signs that something ever happened here, and yet Ava already knows it is going to take a while to bring the house back into order.

The side wall of the house has been blackened from the flames that jumped up from the car when the bomb blast went off. All the rocks in the driveway have been displaced from cars constantly driving over it. Score marks mar the earth where the explosives had carved craters in the ground. And the upstairs hallway is riddled with bullet holes and wood chips that scattered all over the floor. The house that Ava grew up in part time has become a battleground.

It's going to take time to repair the damage that has been done here. Ava's not sure when she'll be able to return, and she's not sure when she's going to want to return. A piece of her thinks that she's going to associate this cabin with tonight for forever.

Yet it's hard for Ava to bring herself to care about that when it's a moderately small price to pay for her freedom. All of Ava's documents have since been taken in by the Operative and soon they'll begin rooting out any other traitors that are tucked amongst the other spies. It's a process that Ava has already agreed to help with. She doesn't have to, but it feels as if this is the only right way to end things. After years of working with Henry, Ava still can't believe she never saw the signs sooner.

Across the clearing, Sara stands with an Operative member who is dutifully writing down everything she says. They're still searching the woods for bodies and Sara hadn't been allowed to

go back to the underbrush, so she had to direct them from here instead. Sara looks exhausted, the kind that Ava's sure is mirrored on her own face. Bright blue eyes cut over Ava's direction, a smile lifting at Sara's lips for a split second before she turns her attention back to the man in front of her.

Her own smile tugging at the corners of her mouth, Ava wraps the blanket around her and tucks her nose further beneath it. It's cold out now that the adrenaline has left Ava's body. The chill has set in and she would love to do nothing more than get out of here. Unfortunately that is going to have to wait until the Operative member waves her over and to the car. They're headed to the airport after this—straight back to London where Ava will spend a few months there to help sort through the destruction Henry left in his wake.

Shifting along the back of the car, Ava peeks up just as Sara starts walking her way. With her hands tucked in her back pockets, Sara comes to stand right in front of Ava. Ava's eyes fall to the black boots that line up with her own, the toes of their shoes touching. "So," Sara exhales as Ava looks up, finding a shy smile on Sara's face, "You're really going back to London then—for a month."

"Two months," Ava corrects quietly, watching the surprise register on Sara's face, "It could actually be longer than that. Two months is the shortest length of time it could be, but I have no idea how long this could take." Silence falls between them, the kind that feels tense and stifled. A few seconds pass as Ava scans Sara's face. A cut rests along the side of her cheek, already cleaned and patched. Yet still Ava feels a twinge of guilt form in her stomach because she had been injured. Sara's lips twitch downwards, her eyes falling to the ground for a moment. "But I'll be back," Ava clarifies as she clears her throat.

Instantly Sara's gaze drifts upwards again. A tiny smile passes over her face, her cheeks coloring with a soft pink shade. "Yeah?" Sara murmurs as Ava nods her head. With a little shrug, Sara looks over to the side, her smile still there, "Well you know where I'll be over here so—" Sara cuts off, lifting a single shoulder again as Ava tips her head back against the van. Shaking her head with a little laugh, Sara removes her hands from her pockets and takes a single step closer. Their chests now touching, Ava spreads her legs to the side and allows Sara to come between them.

Hands land along Ava's arms, slipping up towards her shoulders as Ava's breath catches slightly. Soft blue eyes lock onto Ava's own, Sara's gaze flickering over her face before falling once more. "We're still not good at talking about these things," Sara mumbles, her fingers tightening in Ava's blanket, "You'd think after our time here we would have gotten better."

"We only really had two weeks here," Ava points out as Sara raises her brows slightly and nods her head, "But I think at least now we can admit we're bad at it." Another stuttered laugh falls from Sara's lips as she tips her head forwards. Their foreheads bump together lightly and Ava removes her hands from the inside of her blanket to settle them along Sara's hips. "I won't be gone long," Ava promises as Sara hums quietly, "And besides, I heard there's a vigilante running around in Star City. Maybe you two can pair up to do some violence for good."

When Sara laughs, Ava finds herself doing the same. Warm breath washes over Ava's face as Sara shakes her head lightly, their foreheads rubbing together. "And you're going to retreat back into your shadow for a few months aren't you?" Sara questions. With a small ache forming in her chest, Ava gives a barely there nod of her head. They talked this through before, the possibility of Ava having to go dark for a while. However that doesn't make it any easier now.

"I'll be back before you know it," Ava tells her, bringing a hand up to gently thumb at Sara's chin. In front of her, Sara's features are blurred and hazy. They're too close for Ava to see her properly, but she almost prefers things this way. It would hurt too badly to really register the disappointment

she knows Sara is feeling. "When I'm back there's no more running," Ava murmurs, gently leaning forwards and kissing Sara swiftly, "No more shadows to hide in."

When the smile lifts up along Sara's lips, Ava tries to commit it to memory. Something heavy has settled in her stomach now that leaving Sara is what she has to do next. "I never had a problem finding you," Sara teases, her voice strained even as she smiles. Ava's own lips lift upwards because Sara is nothing but right about that. Fingers tug gently at the blanket as Sara draws Ava closer. "You better not get into any trouble while you're gone," Sara warns, her eyes finding Ava's own, soft and so blue, "I've come to really like my favourite spy."

Warmth crashes through Ava's chest as she takes in a shaky breath. Anxiety flickers over Sara's features, so clear to see that Ava wonders how she ever missed these signs in Sara before now. "Well then I guess it's a good thing I'm pretty attached to my favourite assassin," Ava reminds her, grinning as Sara lets out a quiet amused exhale. Around them the Operative members continue moving, but Ava just closes her eyes and lets herself remain in this bubble for a bit longer.

This isn't a goodbye. Ava reminds herself of that as her throat tightens and the urge wells up in her to draw Sara in as close as she possibly can. They're going to see each other again. Nothing could keep Ava from Sara once everything has been settled. Yet still Ava aches to stay here with her. Tears prick at the back of Ava's eyes as the air catches in her chest. Gripping onto Sara tightly, Ava forces her heartbeat to slow in her chest. She reminds herself again that they'll see each other in months, that this separation is not permanent.

Sara's breath mingles with her own as Ava hums quietly, her hand still laid along the side of Sara's neck. After everything, what Ava really wants is some time with Sara outside of a crisis. But like Sara didn't feel secure until she knew the League wasn't coming after her, Ava won't feel secure until she's sure that the Operative is free of any traitors. Ava would love to ask Sara to come with her. She would love to ask her to come help sort through the rest of this mess. Already Ava knows that there are going to be times that she needs Sara with her there. But Sara has a family to get back to.

Somewhere from the side, Ava's name is said after a man clears his throat. Lifting her head away from Sara's own, Ava looks up to find the new agent that has replaced Henry looking to her expectantly. His name is Thomas Burton, and from what Ava has seen of him tonight, he seems fairly competent. Holding her finger up to Thomas, Ava waits until he retreats back to the black car resting off to the side. "That's my cue," Ava tells Sara regretfully, that weight still pooling in her stomach.

A series of emotions flicker over Sara's face before she settles on sorrow. With her thumb, Ava gently smooths over the creases that form along Sara's brows. "You'll be back," Sara nods her head, her tone melancholic as she lets out a little sigh, "Two months isn't that long."

"It kind of is," Ava replies, her lips quirking slightly as Sara's brows raise before her head tips down. Ava's hand falls from the side of Sara's face and she reaches down to tangle their fingers together instead. "I'll find you," Ava promises her as Sara's eyes meet her own again, "When all of this is done, it'll be my turn to come and track you down this time around."

The smile on Sara's face doesn't quite reach her eyes, and Ava hates that. Her throat tight, Ava gives Sara's hand one more gentle squeeze before releasing her grip and stepping to the side. As Ava walks away, gravel crunches under her feet and tears prick at the backs of her eyes. Before she gets too far, a hand wraps around her wrist and turns her around. Sara is there, but Ava doesn't even have a chance to say anything before warm palms cup her face and lips descend on her own.

Signing into the kiss, Ava closes her eyes and leans into Sara. Everyone around them can see but

Ava doesn't care. The pressure in her chest loosens as she shifts her head to the side and captures Sara's bottom lip between her own. When Sara backs up, Ava blinks her eyes open and looks to her now ex-assassin in front of her. "Someone once told me that I should always leave others wanting more," Sara lifts her shoulder in a shrug, her eyes sparkling playfully, "That way they always want to come back."

With a tiny disbelieving laugh Ava purses her lips together as she smiles. "Well they must have been pretty smart," Ava jokes as Sara just shrugs and raises her brows teasingly. Humming quietly, Ava carefully reaches out to tuck a strand of loose hair behind Sara's ear. "I won't forget you over the course of a few months though," Ava tells her, thumbing gently at Sara's cheek before moving her hand away again, "I don't think I could ever forget you."

Sara's smile only widens as she shoves her hands back in her back pockets. With one more glance her way, Ava turns around and walks to the car. Her bags are already packed, her tablets and devices stored in the backseat of the car. The door has been left open so Ava slips inside before closing it behind her. Thomas says something to her but Ava just makes a noncommittal sound as he starts the car up. As he begins to drive away, Ava's eyes are glued on Sara. Bathed in moonlight and still sporting that smile, Sara is the last thing Ava sees before the house disappears from view.

Chapter End Notes

Now there's only the endings left! I think I've decided to post them one at a time rather than together seeing as they've already been outlined to be longer than I anticipated. But this is almost done, just two final chapters to go and then on to the next AU. As always thank you to those who have been reading along and I hope that you've enjoyed this chapter!

Ending 1

Chapter Summary

After wrapping up her work with the Operative, Ava says goodbye to an old friend. Once she's finished in Europe, Ava heads to the States again in the hopes that Sara has waited for her.

Chapter Notes

So here is Ending 1, and I said I was going to post them together but as it turns out, they're longer than I expected and are taking a while to finish. So instead of waiting two weeks to post them both together, I've done the first one here, and hopefully the second one will be finished soon as well.

But this is the first ending, and hopefully you like it! And a big thank you to [Crincher](#) who has been looking over this story for me!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Minsk, Belarus — 20:05

Raising the glass to her lips, Ava lets the vodka burn all the way down her throat. It settles heavily in her stomach as Ava sucks in a deep breath and sets her glass down on the counter near her. "So you are really done then?" Dmitriy asks from where he is sitting in the stool across from Ava. They're tucked down in the basement of his shop, the counters cluttered with weapons and vials of poison alike.

Ava's eyes catch on a rifle there identical to the kind she came here for years ago, before everything collapsed from under her. Letting out a disbelieving laugh, Ava nods her head and motions for Dmitriy to fill her glass again. "I'm really done," Ava confirms as Dmitriy makes a sound of surprise, "The Operative has cleared me to leave and wiped all of my records from their server. As of three days ago, Ava Sharpe was never a spy working for them. Instead I was a member of MI5."

That's the cover they had given her in order to explain the knowledge that Ava will carry with her from this job. They had provided her with documents backing up this claim, complete with a full resume filled with jobs and titles that Ava never actually gained herself. It had made her laugh as she had flipped through the pages and read the achievements the Operative believes that she could have feasibly attained.

With a small sigh, Ava leans back into her chair, bringing her glass with her and tucking it against her chest. "Every last spy that worked for Henry has been checked out," Ava continues as Dmitriy looks back to her, "We found some traitors in the ranks but, for the most part, he had been working on his own. It's all finished now, everything is sorted."

Three days ago is when Ava had wrapped everything up in London. After three grueling months

spent pouring over every document that the Operative had given her, Ava had finally finished looking everything over. Seeing as Henry trained her, they decided that she was the best to navigate through his files. Ava knew all of his secrets and all of his cipher keys, and that should have made it easier. Instead she found that she had underestimated just how much Henry had worked with the League. There were hundreds of files detailing communications that had to be picked over methodically.

During that time, Ava hardly left the office building to go home. She'd spent her nights there, pouring over the information and trying to dig out the important pieces of the puzzle. Day by day, they got a little closer to figuring out just how far Henry's betrayal had spread within the Operative. Eventually, Ava and the others found what they were looking for, and she had turned the appropriate files and logs over to the new handler that's taking over Henry's role. Now that everything is over, Ava should feel relieved, but instead she just feels lost. "So where are you going now?" Dmitriy asks as Ava's stomach sinks. Taking a long sip from the sharp vodka in her cup, Ava lifts her shoulder in a small shrug.

"I have tentative plans," Ava admits, thinking back to Star City and Sara who is waiting for her there. Originally, Ava had planned on going back as soon as everything was over. However she had looked at the tickets online and hadn't been able to order them. First Ava needed to come here, she needed to wrap things up once and for all with Dmitriy and put all of her past as a spy behind her.

A knowing smile lifts along Dmitriy's lips as he raises his glass in Ava's direction. "You're talking about the assassin who came to see me that day," he remarks as Ava feels her cheeks heat slightly, "The one that you said you were going to have sex with just the one time."

In hindsight, Ava should have known that she was somehow jinxing herself by saying something like that. Yet she can't bring herself to care because she doesn't know where she would be if she hadn't kept running into Sara. "Yeah," Ava nods her head quietly, her eyes caught on the liquor she gently swirls inside her glass, "She's back in the States, causing trouble as a vigilante now."

While Ava had been busy buried in work, she hadn't stopped checking in on Sara from time to time. About a month into her time here in London, Ava had discovered several mentions of a new vigilante that had popped up in Star City. The moment Ava heard the description of a leather clad blonde, she knew it was Sara. On the shelf in her bedroom, Ava had positioned a radio by her bed so she could listen into the Star City news feeds just to make sure Sara had been spotted by civilians from time to time.

"You miss her," Dmitriy states kindly, his eyes twinkling when Ava looks over to him. Already there's a smile forming along her lips as Ava ducks her head. "You were interested in her from the beginning," Dmitriy carries on proudly, "I can always tell these kinds of things you know?"

"Maybe you can," Ava lets out a little laugh as she sighs. The truth is she does miss Sara. Even now there's a soft ache in her chest, a barely there tug that has been constantly reminding her of what she left behind in the States. After three months of no contact, Ava is more than ready to reunite with Sara again. "I don't know how everything between her and I will go though," Ava confesses quietly, nerves flipping loose in her stomach, "We didn't really get the chance to name what we are to each other before I had to come back here."

That's a regret Ava has from that night she left Sara in the cabin driveway. If she could go back, she would have made more time that evening to talk to Sara about what comes next for them. Now, Ava has no idea if Sara's waited for her or not. As far as Ava knows, Sara might have already moved on. They're both a large piece of the other's past seeing as they've spent the past years tangling together either on the job or after. If it's a clear slate that Sara wanted once she settled back

into her old life, that might include being free now Ava.

But Ava misses Sara. She misses the playful teasing and the way Sara would hold her close at night. Ava misses the gentle kisses Sara would lay along her skin in the mornings, her lips mapping over Ava's shoulders and the back of her neck. What Ava wants is to get that back, whatever it might look like now that she and Sara are free from a state of crisis. Taking in a deep breath, Ava attempts to clear the weight that has settled in her stomach. "So then you find her now," Dmitriy points out as Ava hums to herself, "Why are you here when you could be with her?"

"Because this is goodbye," Ava explains quietly, watching the understanding pass over Dmitriy's face. A condition of Ava leaving the Operative was that she no longer have contact with the people she had met on the job. That means no reaching out to Dmitriy after this. They can still keep in touch, but Dmitriy hasn't ever been fond of technology so Ava knows that he won't. "It's been a good few years though hasn't it," Ava muses as Dmitriy laughs, "You were one of the constants in the chaos I was wrapped up in."

A look that almost seems fond passes over Dmitriy's face as he leans forwards and holds his glass out. Mirroring his action, Ava gently knocks their glasses together. Quiet clinking fills the air as Ava keeps her eyes on Dmitriy's smile and lifts her glass to her own lips. Taking a sip, Ava leans back once more and settles into her chair. She'll see him again, Ava knows that, it just will be a while, and under much different circumstances. "Well now that this is done, you should go to Sara," Dmitriy prompts, his smile still kind as Ava lifts her shoulder, "I'm sure she's waiting for you."

Ava's not sure how he has the confidence in that fact when she doesn't. "Maybe," Ava murmurs into her glass, her eyes fixed on her knees once more, "There's just a lot to sort out between us—especially seeing as neither of us have ever dated someone like this before." Pressure surges in Ava's throat as she shrugs again and brings a single leg up near her chest. "We both have to learn how to do things right," Ava continues on, tapping her fingers along her pant leg, "We both have healing to do on our own as well as together."

Ava's hope is that she and Sara don't accidentally hurt each other in the process of trying to come together again. She hopes that they can both figure out a way to actually communicate with their words instead of either getting angry or just running away from their problems. "I think that you'll find these things are easy to figure out with the right person beside you," Dmitriy's voice is gently as Ava glances up to him, "That's not to say it won't be difficult, but it sounds as if you understand each other, and that's what matters."

Maybe it is. Ava wouldn't know either way. "Yeah," Ava sighs quietly. The tightness in her chest hasn't subsided in full, but it is slowly loosening. Not wanting to make this last night a sad one, Ava shakes her head and unfolds her leg from the chair. "Well while I'm still here for the next few hours, let's catch up," Ava says as she gives Dmitriy a smile, "One final time." A laugh comes from Dmitriy as he nods his head with a smile. As he begins telling her about his family, Ava leans back in her chair and soaks everything in.

Star City, USA — 22:11

Ahead of Ava the park is bathed in moonlight, the pathways obscured from the soft white light, shrouded by trees. Everything in the city is quiet, the streets and alleyways empty at this time of night. Crossing the street swiftly, Ava steps up to the sidewalk and enters the park. Nerves grip her stomach and chest, flutters of worry pushing at her heart. So far, there is no other person in the

park, just the empty bench sitting off to the side that Ava had chosen as the meeting location.

It's been a week since Ava was in Minsk with Dmitriy. Everything in Europe has now been wrapped up. Her safe house was sold there, her clothing and belongings packed and sent here, her contacts notified that she wouldn't be working with them any longer, and her records all sent safely to the Operative. The part of Ava's life where she worked as a spy is now over. Now she doesn't just have a number assigned to her within an organization. Now Ava has to find a way to pave her own path in a new job, in a new city. No files or briefings will tell her how to get things done now.

Gravel crunches lightly under her feet as she strays from the path and heads up the hill towards the bench. The wood shines in the pale moonlight, a shadow cast on one half that Ava chooses to sit in. Removing the file that was tucked under her arm, Ava rests it on her lap and draws her coat around her body. In the distance everything is still and quiet. The surrounding buildings are lit up here and there and warm amber light pours from street lamps and spills over the sidewalks.

This is a cozy city, Sara hadn't been lying about that when she was telling Ava about everything one night in bed. It was Sara who told her about this park, how she used to come here when she was younger and sit against the trees further in the property to skip school and smoke weed. Somehow that hadn't surprised Ava at all, and at the time she had just laughed and kissed Sara softly.

Wrapping her arms around herself, Ava nervously taps her foot along the ground and surveils her surroundings. With any luck, Sara will have kept an eye on the email they used to use. Their departure at the cabin had been so abrupt that Ava hadn't even thought to ask Sara how she could contact her now. Somehow though, Ava gets the feeling that Sara has in fact seen the email. The question now remains to be answered if Sara is going to come here to meet Ava or not.

Wind blows through the park, the leaves rustling quietly as Ava folds one leg over another and leans back into the bench. "My favourite spy," a familiar voice lilts warmly, "How did I just know that I'd find you tucked somewhere in a shadow here." Smile already on her face, Ava turns around over her shoulder and finds Sara standing there. Dressed in all black, Sara hardly looks any different than she did when Ava left her last. The only change is that Sara cut her hair shorter. It falls near her shoulders now, tumbling only slightly below her collarbones.

"I'm still not used to being in the open," Ava teases back, taking Sara's wide grin and the sparkle in her bright blue eyes, "And I'm a former spy now, not a spy." Sara's smile only widens as she comes around the side of the bench and slips into the spot by Ava. In the course of three months, somehow everything seems to have changed about Sara. She looks more at peace now, almost settled in a way Ava wasn't expected. Ava's almost scared to ask what else has changed about Sara. She's worried that Sara might have moved on already.

Bright blue eyes pierce through Ava's own as Ava glances to the file in her lap. Nerves flood Ava's chest as she clears her throat quietly and shuffles in her seat. "I brought this for you," Ava explains, offering over the file that she put together just a few days ago, "It contains the rundown on everything happening in the League that the Operative knows about right now. It's proof that you're safe."

Sara takes the file, her eyes not leaving Ava's own as she does so. A slight frown forms on her lips as she lays the file in her lap and flips through the first few pages. Already Ava knows what that look of disappointment is for. "We didn't completely ruin them," Sara murmurs, brushing her fingers over the page that contains all known hits run by the League in the past month alone, "They somehow managed to get everything up and running again."

That information had surprised Ava too when she found it, though maybe it shouldn't have.

“They’re not as strong as they were before though,” Ava consoles gently, reaching out and turning the page over for Sara to see the next chart, “Their current operations are only being run in about a third of the countries they were in before. You did a lot of damage collecting that information—several suppliers and outside contracts are refusing to work with them again.”

It also helps that Henry isn’t actively giving over the list of contacts that the Operative used as well. When he was doing that before, he was empowering the League to take over some of the Operative’s business in the area. “Thank you,” Sara hums, shutting the file once more and laying it to the side, “For this and for everything before—for helping me.” A pensive look flickers over Sara’s face as she turns on the bench, her arm lying along the backing, “So what do former spies do when they’re free from duty?”

That’s a question Ava hasn’t figured out herself yet. Anxiety flickers in her stomach, spiking roughly in her chest as she lets out a quiet exhale. Before Ava can speak, shrill ringing interrupts them. Sara shoves her hand into her pocket and fishes out a phone before looking at the screen and clicking it off. “You have to go?” Ava checks as Sara purses her lips and then nods, “Well that’s maybe for the best—I’m headed to Virginia to settle everything with the safe house there.”

Technically Ava hadn’t planned on doing that for another two days. She had intended to spend a little time here in the city connecting with Sara, but it appears that’s not an option. “I bet there’s a lot of work to do there after the fight,” Sara comments as Ava lets out a little laugh and nods her head, “Well you know, after that’s done,” Sara pauses and Ava glances to her, watching Sara’s downcast eyes and the slight lift of her shoulders, “Star City is a pretty decent place to live. We’ve got a pretty cool vigilante running around here.”

“Right,” Ava muses with a little grin, “The Arrow,” A quiet snort falls from Sara’s lips as her knee moves over to nudge Ava’s own thigh. “I heard the other vigilante was getting into a lot of trouble,” Ava continues on, resting her elbow on the back of the bench as she tucks her chin in her hand, “Every time I turned on the radio, I was always hearing about some mess or another that she made of things.”

When Sara’s soft laugh fills the space between them, Ava only feels her smile widening as that familiar warmth crashes through her chest. “Then I guess it’s a good thing you never really minded the trouble,” Sara replies as Ava just shakes her head fondly. Sara’s brows crease slightly as she mirrors Ava’s position, her head cradled in her palm. “I never really asked you in the beginning,” Sara murmurs, “But why did you agree to help me when I showed up in your hotel room?”

They’ve only talked about this in brief terms right at the beginning of their work together, but Ava hadn’t ever explained the full truth. Her stomach twisting nervously, Ava lifts a shoulder in a shrug. “I was tired too. Living in new places, never settling down, constantly running from danger—all of that takes a toll eventually,” Ava mumbles quietly, staring out at the tiny pond on the other side of the gravel path, “But it was because of you too.” Pausing, Ava swallows thickly and looks back to Sara who’s already watching her with rapt attention, her eyes wide as Ava exhales, “I didn’t want to lose you again.”

Something flickers over Sara’s face as eyes sweep over Ava. A frown forms along Sara’s lips while Ava’s stomach falls slightly. She silently braces herself for the part of this conversation where Sara rejects her again. A hand lands on Ava’s leg and she jolts slightly before looking at Sara in surprise. “I’m not going anywhere,” Sara shakes her head, her eyes piercing through Ava’s own. Shaking her head with a little laugh, Sara removes her hand from Ava’s leg and stares out into the moon dappled park, “We did this all in the wrong order you know? We had sex in closets—”

“Safe rooms,” Ava counters pointedly, not willing to let Sara forget just how badly she had messed

up that evening when they got stuck together.

“Safe rooms that look like closets,” Sara fires back as Ava lets out a snort of amusement. It’s hard to regret that evening even if it had made the job more difficult. Every step they’ve taken set them here, so Ava can’t bring herself to wish any part of it away. “Then we kept sleeping together, then we worked together as friends,” Sara continues rattling off the backwards steps they took as Ava tilts her head further into her hand, “And then we came here and moved in together.”

With a little laugh, Ava shakes her head once more as warmth creeps through her chest and settles comfortably over her body. “We were on the run from people who were trying to kill us,” Ava reminds Sara pointedly as Sara only shrugs, “I don’t think that we can consider that to be moving in together.”

Sara’s eyebrows raise as she tilts her head to the side with that little smirk already pulling at her lips. “We played house in a cabin in the woods for over two weeks,” Sara points out as Ava purses her lips in an effort to keep the smile from her face, “We shared a bed, showered together, swapped off making meals, and spent all of our evenings together on the couch. How does that not fit the definition of moving in together?”

Her worries now gone, Ava feels her lips tugging upwards as Sara rests her hand over Ava’s leg once more. Their time apart changed Sara, even just slightly. Before she wouldn’t have joked about something like moving in together, but now she’s here doing it willingly and with a wide smile. “My point is, I’d like to start again, from the beginning,” Sara murmurs, her head dropping down as soft blonde waves tumble around her face and shroud her from Ava’s view, “When you’re back in the city, tell me. I want to take you on a date—I want to do this right.”

Bursts of elation rise up in Ava as she stares back at Sara, her lips parted in surprise. This wasn’t what she was expecting. Ava thought she would come here and be turned down—she thought Sara might have moved on. Ava’s cheeks nearly hurt from smiling so much, but she can’t bring herself to care. “A date?” Ava repeats, watching as Sara nods her head, “I think I could get on board with that.” When Sara laughs, heat rises up in Ava’s cheeks as she hums quietly to herself. “But for the record,” Ava reaches down and covers Sara’s hand with her own, “I liked the way we did things—it was fun.”

Another small chuckle tumbles from Sara’s lips, a reminder of the word Sara used to call of their meetings before everything became so muddled between them. As Sara begins to speak again, they’re once more interrupted by the sound of ringing coming from her pocket. “You’d better get going,” Ava motions to the path Sara came from as Sara clicks the phone off again, “Go off and be a reformed assassin turned vigilante again.”

“Your favorite one right?” Sara teases as she stands from the bench, the file in her hand.

Pushing off the back of the bench, Ava gets to her feet as well. “Yes,” Ava replies as Sara smiles and takes a step closer, “But only because you’re the only one I know.” An amused laugh comes from Sara as she takes a final step toward Ava. Now chest to chest with Sara, Ava’s breathing hitches slightly as Sara winds her arms around her neck. The edges of the file brush Ava’s back as Sara lets out a soft sigh.

“Don’t spend too long in Virginia,” Sara murmurs, her face moving even closer to Ava’s own. Not bothering to mumble out her promise to come back soon, Ava leans in and gently kisses Sara. Everything about this is familiar. Ava knows the feeling of Sara’s fingers threading through her hair and the delicate brush of Sara’s nose moving along her own as Sara captures Ava’s bottom lip. She knows the steady rhythm of Sara’s heart beating rapidly alongside her own.

Something tender forms just inside Ava's chest, chasing away the remaining doubts that she had as to what she might find here in Star City. Reaching up, Ava cups Sara's cheek with her hand and sweeps her thumb just over Sara's cheekbone before backing away. Soft blue eyes look back at her, Sara's freckles illuminated in the pale moonlight shining down on them. Shadows dapple the sidewalk, the bench, the grass, casting everything around them in shades of contrast. "I'll be back before you know it," Ava promises her, thumbing Sara's cheek once more.

Releasing her hands from Ava's neck, Sara takes a small step back. "I'm counting on that, Ava Sharpe," Sara lilts as she takes another step backwards. Ava's hand falls in the space between them and she tucks them both in her pockets before offering Sara a small smile. Not moving from her spot, Ava watches as Sara ducks her head with a little laugh before tucking the file under her arm and setting off up the hill she came from.

Ava watches her go, her hands remaining in her pockets as Sara disappears behind the curve at the top of the hill and vanishes into the shadows cloaking the tree line. With a quiet sigh, Ava turns on her heel and sets off back the way she came here—this time feeling much lighter. Scuffing her shoes over the sidewalk, Ava looks ahead to where her car is parked in the distance. Just as she's nearing the edge of the park, her name is called from behind her.

Turning around, Ava watches on in confusion as Sara jogs her way. The file is still in Sara's hand, her smile wide as she approaches. Without any time to brace herself for the impact, Ava finds herself instantly wrapped up in Sara's arms with lips descending on her own. Surprised, Ava hums into the kiss and then lets out a breathless laugh as Sara pulls away. "What was that for?" Ava asks as Sara just beams, her hands still framing Ava's face, "I thought you already we—"

"I think I've done enough walking away from you for a lifetime," Sara cuts Ava off. All of Ava's words die in her throat, her smile faltering as Sara stares back at her with that soft expression on her face. "Every time I left you somewhere in a city, all I wanted to do was stay," Sara confesses, her fingers delicately sweeping loose hair behind Ava's ear, "Maybe this time around, I do things differently."

Warmth flares wildly in Ava as her heart stutters slightly. "I think that could be a good idea," Ava nods her head, swallowing around the gentle ache in her throat, "Maybe we should make a plan to do things differently this time around—to do things right, like you said. No more walking away."

"No more hiding," Sara finishes off as Ava just presses her lips together as she smiles, "Neither of us trying to keep secrets from the other anymore." It sounds like a good plan, maybe one of the best they've created together. Nodding her head in agreement once more, Ava leans in and pulls Sara closer with the fingers she hooks under her chin. This time Ava can feel Sara's smile against her own, something that sets her stomach fluttering. "So," Sara murmurs when they pull back, her nose brushing Ava's own, "Got room for two up at the cabin?"

Laughing quietly, Ava just hums as she backs away and slips her hand into Sara's own. "I think that can be arranged," Ava replies as she gently tugs Sara with her along the path, "But we're taking my car, not your death trap of a motorbike." Laughter fills the air as Sara squeezes Ava's hand and wraps her free palm around Ava's upper arm. A head lands on Ava's shoulder as Sara leans into her while they walk.

"I'll humor you this once," Sara concedes teasingly as Ava raises her brows, "Only because I like you." Her smile never leaving her face, Ava just gently bumps her hip into Sara's own and earns another laugh from Sara. As they walk towards Ava's car under the cover of night, Ava lets herself just sink into the moment and the feeling of Sara's fingers tangled around her own. There's a lot to be done still, but this time around, Ava thinks that she might just know a good place to start.

Star City, US — 19:44

As Ava walks up to the familiar red door at the end of the hall, she unwinds the long green scarf from around her neck. Her keys jangle inside her pocket as she walks, the sound filling the air around her. With a quiet sigh, Ava approaches the door and slips her keys into the lock of the door before shoving it open. “Babe,” Ava calls inside as she slips in and tosses her keys into the ceramic bowl on the table, “You home?”

Sara’s shouted confirmation comes from somewhere within the apartment, her voice muffled. A smile sneaks across Ava’s lips as her chest warms and she shrugs her jacket from her shoulders. “You’re back late,” Sara calls out just as a crashing sound follows after her voice. Ava can’t help but wince, not sure if she wants to turn the corner to see what kind of a mess might await her in the kitchen or living room.

Kicking her shoes off, Ava rolls her shoulders back with a slight wince and cradles her arm to her chest. Slowly, she turns the corner and peeks into the kitchen where several pots and plates already clutter the counters. With raised brows, Ava leans against the door frame and takes in Sara’s rushed movements. Clearly unaware that she has an audience, Sara continues to flip what appear to be pancakes on the skillet in front of her. Her hair has been thrown up in a bun, stray pieces falling down around her temples and into her eyes.

Ava lets out a content hum, her eyes roaming her own shirt that hangs loosely from Sara’s frame. It’s the same one that Sara had insisted just days before that she couldn’t find when Ava had been looking for it. The shirt is one of the few things Ava has from before her time as a spy, and Sara seems to have kidnapped it. There’s holes along the shoulders and in the seams of the sleeves. Those holes get bigger each time Sara wears it and washes it, but Ava doesn’t really care if Sara ruins the shirt, not when Sara loves it as much as she does.

“You and I need to talk,” Ava clears her throat, giving Sara a pointed look when Sara turns over her shoulder, “We both know you didn’t have to tie up the suspect like that today.” A smile that looks all too proud carves along Sara’s lips as she lets out a happy sounding laugh. “I mean it,” Ava levels a finger Sara’s direction, doing her best to fight the grin that’s pulling at her own lips, “You did not have to bloody his nose and cuff him to the toilets downstairs.”

Another laugh tumbles from Sara’s lips as Ava pushes off the wall and comes into the kitchen. Fingers tug Ava closer, pulling at her belt-loops until her body is flush against Sara’s own. “You mean you didn’t like your present,” Sara teases as Ava snorts, watching as Sara’s smile widens, “He was a very bad man, Ava, I just wanted to make sure he wasn’t a flight risk either—I was helping you.”

Shaking her head fondly, Ava reaches up and tucks soft stray strands of hair behind Sara’s ears. The skin under her touch is warm as she brushes her thumb over Sara’s cheek. Already a blush is forming along Sara’s face, the light pink color only complimenting her freckles. A flood of warmth seeps into Ava’s chest as she lets out another small exhale. “You’re trouble,” Ava tells her quietly, her eyes flickering over Sara’s face as Sara’s lips quirk upwards, “Next time text me before the janitor comes across him—please.”

“I’ll consider it,” Sara replies cheekily. Rolling her eyes, Ava leans in and kisses Sara softly, her fingers slipping down and anchoring under Sara’s chin. The hands at Ava’s waist fan outwards, warm palms holding her sides firmly. When Sara pulls away, Ava gives her another small smile before delicately thumbing the dimple tucked in Sara’s chin. “Come sit,” Sara backs away, patting the only clear space on their crowded counters, “I made your favourite.”

Pancakes are not Ava's favorite food, she just likes when Sara makes them because she enjoys watching Sara work in a flurry of motion. But Ava keeps quiet and carefully sweeps some spare flour to the side before pushing up and taking a seat on the island counter. Her back already to Ava, Sara continues pouring batter onto the griddle as the sweet smell fills the air. Content to watch, Ava leans back on her palms and takes in the sight that has become her version of normal for the past months.

After the renovations were finished with the cabin, Ava came back here to be with Sara in the city. It had taken Ava a while to adjust to live outside of the Operative, and while Sara had been willing to do what she could to help, Ava knew she needed to find her own way. About a month into Ava's time back, she had been contacted by the local FBI office. Sara insists that it wasn't her doing, but Ava knows better than that.

Either way, Ava's glad that Sara meddled. She loves her job now, working as a field agent for the local office. A desk job was never going to suit Ava, and now she gets to work in a job that is relatively similar to what she had been doing before. The primary difference is that there are formal rules in place now and rather than killing her targets or ruining their business, Ava is apprehending them.

It's not always as exciting as her life as a spy was, but Ava doesn't mind the lack of constant danger. A stable job means more time to have a life outside of work, something that Ava had been sorely lacking the last time around. Now she has friends in the city, a group of people that she and Sara both see routinely. And Ava gets to see Sara on her job, that much never changed. This time, instead of fighting each other in subways or sneaking off to offices and safe rooms, Ava only sees Sara when the Canary helps the FBI.

Usually this help comes in the form of Sara dropping off a beaten up subject on the front steps of the FBI building. They've discussed Sara's methods in length, but Ava gets the feeling that some things are never going to change. Ava doesn't really want them to—she likes Sara just the way she is. This is month five of their time dating after Ava came back from Europe, and month two of living together in this apartment.

"I'm surprised that they let you leave the office this early," Sara comments, tossing the final pancakes on a large plate, "Usually it's later than this before you're home." Another flicker of warmth curls along the inside of Ava's chest. She doesn't think she'll ever get tired of Sara calling their apartment home. Sara turns, her eyes locked right on Ava's own as a soft smile tugs at her lips. "I'm glad your back though," Sara speaks, coming to stand before Ava, "I always like it when our evenings overlap."

"You mean the evenings where you're not out with your merry band of idiots?" Ava teases as she tugs Sara closer, bringing her between her legs. When Sara laughs, Ava reaches out and cups her face, tucking her fingers behind her ears. "I'm still angry with them for keeping you out that night I planned a nice dinner here," Ava remarks as Sara smiles sheepishly, "And to then send you back to me all bruised and exhausted."

"But for a good cause," Sara points out as Ava raises a single brow, "You benefitted from that night too if I remember correctly—a serial bank robber caught before he went after another bank." Sara is right of course, but that doesn't mean Ava has to enjoy the state Sara was in that night when she came home. It's the one thing about Sara's job as a vigilante that Ava hates. She knows that Sara can hold her own, but Ava doesn't love surrendering Sara to the dangers that her night-job holds.

Pursing her lips, Ava just hums as Sara lets out a quiet sigh and closes her eyes. There's dark

circles under Sara's eyes, her hands resting along the tops of Ava's thighs. "You look tired," Ava murmurs, gently scratching her nails along the nape of Sara's neck. A barely there nod comes as a reply as Sara makes a quiet sound. "Why make dinner instead of just going to bed?" Ava asks, drawing Sara in closer and gently hugging her, "You know I never expect you to still be up when I get back."

More often than not, Ava will come home to find Sara curled up asleep either on the couch or in their bed. The one thing that has never changed is that Sara cannot sit still and will move around until she just crashes. Ava never minds though, she usually wakes Sara up and walks her back to their bedroom before Sara groggily pulls her down on their bed. "Just wanted to be up when you came home," Sara mumbles with a shrug, tucking her head under Ava's chin as her hands tangle in the back of Ava's shirt, "We had two days being out of sync—I missed you."

Instantly Ava finds herself smiling as she dips her head down and tugs Sara just a little bit closer. "I missed you too," Ava confesses, her heart rate picking up as she feels Sara's content exhale against her neck. It took a while for Ava to get used to this, to the constant feeling of being safe. There are still some nights where either she or Sara jolt up in bed, searching for a danger that isn't there anymore. But as time passes, those nights become less common. Ava thought that she wouldn't know how to settle down like this, but as it turned out, she just needed the right person to try to learn with.

"You got the guy, right?" Sara asks abruptly, tugging away from Ava and accidentally jostling the arm that Ava had injured earlier in the day. Seconds pass before Sara's face clouds over and her lips fall downwards. "What did he do to you?" Sara questions, her fingers already flying to the buttons of Ava's work shirt.

"Sara," Ava tries to interrupt her task, reaching for Sara's hands only to be shaken off. Sara continues to undo buttons, her movements rapid and insistent. Blue eyes are locked on Ava's shirt, her mouth still set in a firm frown. "Sara," Ava attempts again, this time capturing Sara's wrists and carefully lifting them from her shirt. "Hey," Ava murmurs, releasing one of Sara's hands so she can tilt Sara's chin up, "Just a strained muscle in my shoulder, nothing bad happened."

Sara doesn't appear convinced, her brows drawn over her eyes, her fingers flexing in Ava's hold. With a small nod, Ava releases her hands and then begins to finish undoing the remaining buttons. Carefully removing her shirt from her arms, Ava tosses the garment to the side before Sara is in her space again. Gentle fingers map over Ava's skin, pressing into the contours of the muscle along her arm. Ava winces slightly as Sara reaches the tender spot just along the joint. "I'll go back and kill him," Sara mutters as Ava lets out a quiet laugh.

"No, you won't," Ava reminds her fondly as Sara's eyes cut to her own for a moment, "We both left that part of our past behind us—no more killing."

"I could make an exception," Sara grumbles under her breath. Again Ava just laughs as she shakes her head, that same warmth flaring and tumbling through her body. Wrapping her arms around Sara, Ava draws her in once more. A warm palm comes up and settles over Ava's shoulder, resting protectively over the injured muscle. "Tell me you at least locked him up," Sara requests as Ava hums.

She understands Sara's anger, Ava's been in her position before on the nights Sara comes home injured and battered. It was easier before where they really could go out and track down whoever hurt the other. This time around they have to just be there for each other and help sort out the aftermath of injuries. Instead of murder and revenge, there's warm baths and strategically taped ice packs. "He's in custody now and will be transferred to the jailhouse in the morning," Ava replies

and Sara lets out a pleased sounding hum, “Him coming after me was the final nail in the coffin.”

Sara mutters something that Ava can’t hear, something mumbled against the skin of her collarbone. Seconds pass before lips meet that same spot, Sara’s mouth shifting up the side of her neck. When a gentle bite is laid at Ava’s pulse point, Ava jolts backwards. “No,” Ava backs away with a laugh, “I’m too sore and you’re too tired for that tonight.” Already Sara is rolling her eyes, but moments later she smiles up at Ava. “Pancakes and then we sleep,” Ava reminds her as Sara nods her head.

Sara sighs before pushing herself away from the counter, untangling herself from Ava. Now able to move away, Ava shifts back down to the ground and reaches for her shirt before pulling it back on her body. Fumbling with her buttons, Ava watches on as Sara pours two more dollops of batter onto the steaming griddle. An ache rises up in Ava’s chest and settles right behind her heart.

At this point it’s a familiar ache. In all of this time Ava’s spent together with Sara, there’s still one thing they haven’t done. Words are caught in Ava’s throat, tangled near her vocal cords and refusing to spill from her lips. They’re words she’s wanted to say countless times before. Ava wanted to tell them to Sara this morning when she woke to the feeling of Sara kissing her way down Ava’s chest. They were words Ava wanted to say as Sara was talking as she brushed her teeth, getting toothpaste all over the counter that Ava had just cleaned.

And they’re words that she wants to say now, just watching Sara exist in the little home they’ve tried to create together. Clearing her throat, Ava leans her back against the counter and nervously tucks her hands into her pockets. But before she can say something, Sara is interrupting her. “There’s a thing I have to go settle in the morning,” Sara says in that noncommittal tone that lets Ava know she’s not going to like what the definition of ‘a thing’ is this time.

Nerves flicker in Ava’s chest as Sara turns around for a moment to look at her before going back to the stove. Once more Ava braces herself to speak, needing to say the words and needing to tell Sara what she means to her. “I’ll probably have to leave early,” Sara cuts Ava off again as Ava lets out a quiet little exhale and purses her lips, “I know you hate when I leave in the mornings without telling you I’ve gone.” Ava doesn’t hate that but she doesn’t like it either. Shifting from one foot to another, Ava watches as Sara turns around with the spatula in hand, “But I’ll be back in the eve—”

“I love you,” Ava blurts out, not able to keep it in any longer. Her heart pounds in her chest as Sara’s words die out. Silence fills the room, the only sound coming from the sizzling griddle. Sara’s eyes are wide, her lips parted as she stands there, frozen with the spatula in her hand. Ava’s body is buzzing with nervous energy as she shifts again on her feet and clears her throat. “I just wanted to let you know that,” Ava says quietly, looking to the side with a small shrug before turning back to Sara, “Because I love you.”

No reply comes and something heavy settles in Ava’s stomach. Sara hasn’t moved, she hasn’t even blinked more than a few times. Ava’s breath hitches as she waits for some kind of a reaction from Sara, any kind of reaction from her. “You don’t have to say it back,” Ava clarifies quickly as she swallows and looks to the side, “I just wanted to tell you even if yo—”

Hands land on either side of Ava’s face, tugging her in for a kiss as something clatters noisily to the ground. Startled, Ava lets out a quiet laugh into the kiss and she brings her arms around Sara. Raising up a single hand, Ava carefully cups Sara’s chin before leaning backwards and breaking their lips apart. Blue eyes fly all over her face as Ava stares back at Sara. “You love me?” Sara whispers, her eyes locked onto Ava’s own, wide and filled with something Ava can’t read.

“Of course I do,” Ava exhales with a smile and a small shake of her head, “I have for a while now.” Sara’s hands fall to Ava’s shoulders, her arms linking around Ava’s neck. Gently Ava pulls Sara closer, bringing them chest to chest. With another little sigh, Ava leans her forehead against

Sara's own and brushes her nose along Sara's cheek while closing her eyes, "I just didn't know how to tell you before."

Ava didn't know how to say it to someone else and mean it before Sara. She did when she was younger, but somewhere along the way, love lost meaning. It was easy to throw those words around in her line of work, using them to get something that she wanted or needed. Now everything is different again. Those words aren't a manipulation, they're a declaration. "I knew a while ago," Ava continues, lifting her head up and gently placing a kiss along Sara's forehead, "Before we moved in here together."

Ava realized one night that Sara stayed over two evenings in a row. She wasn't supposed to have stayed that second night, but it was late by the time they finished watching their movie and Ava hadn't wanted Sara driving home alone. All it took for Ava to realize she loved Sara was coming back into the bedroom and noticing that Sara had set out everything Ava needed to get ready for bed. It was a routine they had gotten into in their time working together, laying out gear and weapons, vests and sheaths. But now it's different. Now Sara lays out Ava's slippers and robe, her pajama shorts and one of Sara's old t-shirts.

Fingers thread into Ava's hair at the nape of her neck, blunted nails scratching lightly at her scalp. Sara's eyes are still closed even as she lets out a long exhale that washes over Ava's chin and lips. Nerves pulse inside of Ava's chest, her throat already tight as her heartbeat speeds up noisily. "Ava," Sara murmurs, her eyes opening now, out of focus when they're this close, but so incredibly blue, "I love you too."

With a stuttered inhale, Ava feels the smile carving along her lips. Her heart falters in her chest as she lets out a breathless laugh. Smiling widely, Ava just leans her forehead back against Sara's own. Ava can't help but feel like she did when she was younger, when she learned that someone in her classes liked her back. That feeling of euphoria and nervousness and blinding joy that takes over. Warmth settles in Ava's chest and blankets the anxiety that had been there before, melting it's hold on her. "Glad that's settled," Ava remarks teasingly as Sara snorts, "I was nervous about that for weeks."

"Me too," Sara confesses, her words surprising Ava. With a small sound, Ava backs up, her brows creasing as she looks back at Sara. "Ava, you're not the only one who gets nervous about doing new things," Sara laughs as Ava considers this, "I didn't want to mess things up and say it too quickly. But I was ready to tell you I love you the moment you finished repairing the cabin."

That was months ago. With a small disbelieving exhale, Ava shakes her head and draws Sara back into her once more. Her hands cradling Sara's face, Ava kisses her as fingers fist in the back of her shirt. Sara tastes like chocolate chips, as if she'd been sneaking some from the bag the way Ava knows she sometimes does. Sliding a single hand down, Ava finds the hem of Sara's shirt and dips her hand under it. "Ava," Sara mumbles against her lips as Ava just hums and slides her hand up further.

Her fingers find the soft elastic band of Sara's bra and she slips just her fingertips underneath it. "Aves," Sara sighs again. Before Ava can slide her hand under the fabric, Sara pulls away slightly and Ava's hand falls away. "I thought you were too sore for this," Sara teases as Ava just lifts her uninjured shoulder up, "We could continue but, I should make sure that I take that pancake off the griddle."

Looking over Sara's shoulder, Ava spots the blackened pancake sitting on the top of the burner there. With a laugh, Sara untangles herself and walks over where she flips the burner off and tosses the pancake off to the side where several other maimed pancakes rest on a towel. "I had a bit of

trouble in the beginning,” Sara murmurs sheepishly when Ava raises a single brow and glances at the discard pile, “As it turns out, making pancakes without burning anything is harder than setting up a bomb correctly.”

“Maybe for you,” Ava tells her as Sara rolls her eyes, “Some of us are good at both cooking and arming bombs to a manual trigger not a timer.” A quiet grumble comes from Sara as Ava pushes off the counter and comes over to wrap Sara in her arms from behind. As Sara sorts pancakes to their respective plates, Ava buries her nose in Sara’s shoulder and closes her eyes. Years of running and now Ava has something to keep her rooted in one place. Pressing her lips to the back of Sara’s neck, Ava does her best to convey through her actions just how thankful she is that Sara tumbled into her life.

“Wanna go watch a show on the couch?” Sara asks, her hand settling over Ava’s own that rest on her stomach, “I saved a few new things on the queue so we could pick something to watch together.” Normally Ava would insist that they eat at the counter or table—that is why they have those things after all. But tonight she likes the idea of Sara curling in her lap as they watch whatever show Sara’s found for them.

“Yeah,” Ava sighs out, not moving from her space just yet as she keeps her eyes closed, “That sounds nice.” Sara doesn’t move yet, she just hums as she lays her other hand over Ava’s own. From time to time Ava needs a moment to just slow down and reflect, and Sara never once denies her that. With a steady breath, Ava opens her eyes once more and gently leans around to kiss Sara’s cheek. “Alright,” Ava tells her with a smile as she backs away, “Let’s go see what shows you’ve chosen for us—I’m guessing they have to do with spies.”

A laugh tumbles from Sara’s lips as she heads to the couch, a cheeky grin thrown over her shoulder in Ava’s direction. “You’ll just have to wait and see,” Sara tells her as Ava raises her brows and follows after her, “I think you’ll find that it’s worth trying.” With a little snort, Ava settles into the corner of the couch, lifting her arm up as Sara already leans into her side and burrows into Ava’s space. Now content and finally peaceful, Ava doesn’t really care what they watch. She just turns her head to the side and kisses Sara’s temple before settling in for another evening in their home together.

Virginia, US — 20:33

Upstairs, something hits the ground with a solid-sounding thunk. Instantly Sara calls out an apology that floats down the stairs as Ava just shakes her head and lets out a little laugh. When the same thumping sound comes again seconds later, Sara doesn’t even bother saying sorry for it. Ava carefully moves around the kitchen, trying to get everything set up before Sara can come downstairs and catch her in the middle of crafting the surprise.

Setting out the glasses along the counter edge, Ava arranges the bottles in the middle of the island and moves around to swipe her hand over the barstool covers. Everything has to be perfect. Everything has to resemble the night that Ava’s trying to recreate here. Nerves flutter in her chest as she hears Sara moving around upstairs, but when Ava pauses and looks up, nobody has come downstairs.

The stair landing is still empty, no sign of Sara just yet. Ava lets out a quiet exhale before moving back to the stove and adjusting the pots and pans there. She and Sara made the dinner together, but Ava had not told Sara about the additional surprise. Sara thinks that they’re recreating their first date here in the cabin from nearly a year ago, but Ava has other plans.

Coming to the cabin isn't something they get a chance to do often, given how busy they are. But this had been a weekend that Ava and Sara both decided was worth taking off of work for. Now that the cabin has been fully restored, they will sometimes sneak away for a few days and leave all technology behind. Ava always loves their time spent here. She loves the way that they put everything else on hold and just exist here in these walls together. Nothing is rushed here, and there's no pressure to be anything other than themselves.

Now the upstairs bedroom has just become their shared one, already cluttered with the things Sara leaves in her wake. Sara's encroached on the space here, dropping muddied boots by the door, bringing new vinyl records to stash under the player, even carrying along new blankets to toss over beds and couches. In their renovations, they had to replace the porch swing that Ava had painted with her family when she was little.

It had been destroyed by the bomb blast, knocked right off where it hung and broken to pieces. Sara had managed to salvage the portion that had Ava's hand print on it from when she was younger, and she had hung that in a small box frame that now sits on the walls inside. A new swing hangs in place of the old one, a soft robin's egg blue that Sara had helped Ava paint. This time there's a smudge along the bottom of the seat from where Sara had pushed Ava backwards so she was sitting in the wet paint. Ava could have fixed it, but the original paint job wasn't perfect, so she didn't care that this one wasn't either.

Looking around, Ava takes in the cozy room around her. Instead of being a reminder of everything that sat in the past, the shelves are crowded with new memories. There's photos of her and Sara together, photos of her with their friends. Ava's not sure how Sara did it, but she managed to find a photo of the first time they interacted with each other. It's just a blurry image from a street camera in Moscow where they were walking back to Sara's hotel together, but still Ava can't help but love it.

Their apartment in Star City is home, but this little cabin is something of an escape. It was from the moment they used this cabin as a hideout as they waited for the dangers to come to them over a year ago. With a quiet hum, Ava smooths her hands over the soft silky black dress she has on, one that's similar to the dress she wore on their first date. The surface of the microwave door is reflective, so Ava uses that to check her hair. Earlier she had braided a few sections of it away from her face, and the braids still look neat and orderly.

Another stream of nerves courses through Ava as she hears the door to the bedroom upstairs opening and then closing again. Soft clicking sounds come from the upstairs hallway as Ava walks to the bottom of the steps and peers up. Sara stands at the top of the landing, already in the same red dress that Ava had dug out of their closet back in the city. It was an intentional choice, one that Ava will reveal to Sara once she's downstairs. "You clean up nicely," Ava teases gently, walking up the stairs and offering her arm to Sara, "Close your eyes for me, I have something to show you."

"A surprise?" Sara asks, her lips already lifting in a smile as she closes her eyes, "Here I thought this was just a dinner we were going to have together." With a little laugh, Ava leans in and presses a chaste kiss to the corner of Sara's mouth, not wanting to smudge her dark red lipstick—yet.

"Keep your eyes closed," Ava reminds Sara as she tucks Sara's hand into the crook of her arm and leads her down the stairs. Sara only laughs, her other hand coming up to rest over her eyes as Ava just snorts. Soft waves of honey blonde hair fall around Sara's face, brushing at the tops of her bare shoulders. Ava leans down and presses another kiss along the warm, freckled skin there before bringing them to the very bottom of the steps.

Now back on the ground floor, Ava removes Sara's hand from her arm and carefully steps behind

her. "I know that we said we'd do a remake of our first date here," Ava murmurs, slipping both her hands around Sara's body as she rests her chin on her shoulder, "But I thought we could do one better—recreate our very first date ever." Gently, Ava reaches up and removes Sara's hand from her own eyes, letting her take in the room.

The lights are still dimmed down low, pointed at the island bar that Ava has set up with the glasses and the bottles of vodka in the very center. The seat covers match the color of the ones from Moscow years ago, and Ava had even gotten flowers from the market earlier in the day to resemble the flowers that decorated the bar that evening. "Now I understand the need for a red dress," Sara lets out a little laugh as Ava hums near her ear, "How long have you been planning this?"

"Not too long," Ava replies, nuzzling her nose against the side of Sara's jaw before resting her lips there instead, "I just wanted to do something special—today is five years since we met in the bar that evening." Another hum comes from Sara as Ava holds her tight, her arms wrapped around Sara as Sara's hands rest over Ava's forearms along her stomach. "I love you, Sara," Ava murmurs quietly, tucking her nose against Sara's ear and gently kissing the soft skin near her lips.

In her periphery, Ava can see Sara's eyes flutter shut as a smile crosses her lips. Sara takes in a stuttered inhale as Ava kisses behind her ear once more, never tiring of the way her words gain that kind of a reaction from Sara. Warmth surges through Ava as Sara leans back into her, her head falling against Ava's collarbone. "All the way back to Moscow then," Sara muses as Ava nods her head, "Five years." Again Ava dips her head as Sara makes a quiet sound, "I always forget it's been so long, sometimes I swear it's all felt like a month."

All Ava can do is make a sound of agreement. In her arms, Sara is turning around, so Ava loosens her hold on Sara's waist. Arms slip around Ava's neck and fingers slide into her hair where it's down near the nape of her neck. "Happy two day late anniversary," Sara murmurs seconds before her lips meet Ava's own. Warm currents of contentment and joy ripple through Ava as she gently holds Sara close by the jaw and kisses her as well. Already Sara tastes of the cherries she had been eating whole earlier as Ava was cooking. The taste is almost sickly sweet, but Ava doesn't mind.

When Sara pulls back, she tucks her face away in the crook of Ava's neck, soft puffs of warm air striking the side of Ava's throat. Humming quietly, Ava wraps Sara up in her arms once more and gently moves them from side to side. There's no music, but they don't need any. "Happy two day late anniversary," Ava echoes back as she kisses the top of Sara's head before resting her cheek there, "I'll forgive you for the car chase that kept you from our actual anniversary."

A quiet chuckle comes from Sara, her shoulders shaking as lips press against Ava's collarbone. "The same car chase you were waiting to apprehend on the other side of the city?" Sara fires back as Ava's lips curve upwards in a smile, "I'll forgive you for getting to him first when I said that he was mine to catch." This time Ava laughs as she tips her head further against the top of Sara's head with a smile.

The man in question was a wanted suspect of the FBI and apparently of Sara and her crew as well. From time to time they find themselves with common suspects and from there they usually operate as if the chase is a kind of competition. Ava doesn't mind doing things that way, it's always fun to get a taste of the same kind of rivalry that she and Sara had in their jobs before. Things are different now of course, now they always come home to the other after a long day, and the loser has more grace than they did before.

In Ava's arms, Sara nuzzles closer, letting out a stuttered exhale. "We'd better eat before everything gets cold," Ava unwinds her arms from around Sara before gently nudging her to the bar. While Sara remains where she's standing, Ava heads over to the stove where the plates still

rest, the food under the domed covers Ava had placed on top. “I was going to say we could do drinks first, but I think eating before would be a better idea,” Ava muses as she uncovers one of the plates. No reply comes from Sara, so Ava turns to look at her.

Instantly Ava freezes, her breath catching in her chest as she looks over at her girlfriend. Sara’s standing near the counter, her elbows leaning along the top with a small smile on her face as she tilts her head. A ring box sits in front of her on the counter, a very familiar ring box. “What is that?” Ava rushes out in a single breath, her stomach swirling nervously as she stares back at Sara with wide eyes. Sara’s fingers tap at the countertop, as she clears her throat.

“A proposal,” Sara motions to the box, the same way she did back in Spain, “If you want it to be.” There on the counter is the very same soft grey ring box that Sara had used to present Ava with the idea of them working together. Only this time, it’s nearly four years later and Sara’s not asking Ava to stop fighting with her on the job. “Want to take a look?” Sara asks, echoing her statement from the past once more. Sara’s fingers are shaking where they’re gesturing to the box, her hand hovering in midair near the counter-edge.

Her breath caught in her throat, Ava moves towards the counter. Never once taking her eyes off Sara, Ava reaches for the box and takes it in her hand. The satin outside of the box is just as soft as it was years ago, the slippery material familiar under her fingertips. Ava’s heart rate picks up as she carefully cracks the box open and glances up to Sara. There’s a soft smile on Sara’s face as she nods to the box once more, her eyes cast down near Ava’s hands.

Looking down, Ava finishes opening the box and finds a very simple silver band sitting inside. There’s a delicate blue stone set in the middle, a barely noticeable one. Ava’s never been someone who likes flashy things, so this is more than perfect. She doesn’t have to hold the ring up to know that the blue of the stone mirrors the color of Sara’s eyes. “Sara,” Ava exhales quietly, her eyes already pricking with tears that cloud her vision, “I—” But Ava’s voice cuts off, the words dying in her throat as she swallows to attempt to clear the tears away.

“Proposing that plan in Spain brought me one of the best partnerships I’ve ever had,” Sara’s soft voice speaks as Ava looks up to her. Tears still remain along Ava’s lashes, a single one spilling over as Sara murmurs sympathetically and carefully reaches out. Fingers brush along Ava’s cheek, clearing away the tear. The tenderness of the action only causes another few to fall as Ava’s chest tightens. “I figured this time, I’d see what else a proposal could bring me,” Sara murmurs, her hand now along Ava’s cheek, “I want a life with you Ava, a real life outside of everything we had before.”

Her chest tight, Ava sucks in a deep breath as another tear tumbles down her cheek. Needing to be closer, Ava steps towards Sara and delicately frames the sides of Sara’s face with her hands. Soft blue eyes look back at Ava as Ava exhales slowly. Along Sara’s cheeks, Ava’s own fingers are trembling as her gaze sweeps over Sara’s face. The words Ava wants to speak are still stuck in her throat, so instead, Ava gently kisses Sara. She can taste the remnants of salt from her own tears as she cradles Sara’s face in her hands.

Everything around Ava fades away until all she can feel is Sara. Gentle fingers press into Ava’s sides, as Sara draws her in closer. The soft scent of vanilla and coconut fills Ava’s nose as she tilts her head to the side and captures Sara’s bottom lip. A quiet sound bubbles up from the back of Sara’s throat just as Ava sighs into the kiss. Her heart beating rapidly in her chest, Ava backs up and takes in the soft flush along Sara’s cheeks and her dark blue eyes. Still needing to be close to Sara, Ava winds her arms around Sara’s neck.

Soft breath brushes over Ava’s face as Sara lets out a shaking exhale. Their foreheads tip together

and Ava looks up to see there are tears gathering in Sara's own lashes. Everything else around Ava melts away as she brings a hand around to gently feather her fingertips over Sara's cheek. "You're really proposing?" Ava breathes out, needing to make sure Sara is sure about this.

"I'm really proposing," Sara lets out a quiet little laugh, her lips lifting upwards as her fingers press into Ava's sides. The silk of Ava's dress slides over her skin as Sara's thumbs draw circles along her hip bones. "I kept that box, for memories," Sara nods to the box that Ava's since set on the counter, "I never thought I would be using it for the real thing one day—but I'm glad I kept it." Sara then laughs and shakes her head as her hands squeeze Ava's own, "Never did find the real ring that went with it."

"You might not have lost it in the first place if you hadn't killed my target in his office," Ava counters as Sara just snorts, "But I'm glad that you kept the box too, and that you proposed your plan that evening."

"Even though I broke into your apartment?" Sara fires back as Ava just rolls her eyes and draws Sara in close. With one hand on Sara's waist and the other on her cheek, Ava guides Sara's face towards her own and kisses her slowly. A quiet sound comes from Sara's lips, her fingers tightening in the back of Ava's slip dress and pressing Ava in closer.

Pulling back, Ava brushes her thumb over Sara's cheekbone and lightly kisses her nose. Instantly Sara's cheeks flush a soft pink color as a soft smile takes over her lips. "Even though you broke into my apartment," Ava tells her as Sara's smile widens, "If you never did that, we might not be here today." When Sara opens her mouth to speak, Ava swiftly cuts her off with a kiss before backing up again, "That does not mean I condone breaking and entering, before you ask."

At least once a week they discuss Sara's habits and methods when she is working on a case. Most of those methods are not entirely legal, and while Ava does turn a blind eye, she's not going to actively encourage it. "So are you going to give me an answer now?" Sara prompts as Ava's stomach flutters with that gentle anticipation, "Or am I going to have to wait three whole months to get an answer from you like last time?"

With a quiet laugh, Ava just shakes her head before reaching over to the counter and picking up the ring box. Sara's hands remain on Ava's waist as Ava tucks her elbows in against Sara's chest and looks to the velvet that encases the ring. Quietly, Ava clears her throat before backing up and passing the ring box to Sara. Sara's eyes sparkle as she laughs, already slipping the ring from the box and holding it in her hand. "You want me on one knee?" Sara asks, her smile already in place.

"Always," Ava replies, offering Sara a smile of her own as Sara laughs quietly. Still in her silky red dress, Sara bends down and places a single knee on the tiled kitchen floor as Ava stands in front of her. Even though she knew Sara was going to kneel, Ava's breath still catches at the sight of Sara before her.

Soft blonde waves tumble over Sara's shoulders, her eyes bright and blue as she grins up at Ava. "Ava Sharpe," Sara speaks softly, always using that lilt to her voice when saying Ava's name. Sara pauses here, letting out a quiet exhale as Ava watches on. Once more, tears gather at the corners of Sara's eyes. With a quiet murmur, Ava reaches her hand out to Sara to help her up, but Sara holds up a finger and shakes her head. "Ava," Sara says again, this time taking in a deep breath, "Will you marry me?"

A smile breaks out along Ava's face as she nods her head and reaches down to Sara again. This time Sara lets Ava pull her up from the ground. Her arms around Sara's neck, Ava holds Sara close as warmth and elation ripple through her body. "Yes," Ava whispers quietly, pressing her lips to the side of Sara's neck, "Of course I'll marry you."

A bright sounding laugh bubbles from Sara's lips as she backs up. The ring is in Sara's hand, outstretched in a silent question. Wordlessly, Ava offers Sara her hand, her throat tight as Sara slips the ring over her finger. It slides on without a single issue, settling at the base of Ava's knuckle. Ava stares down at the band with the blue stone set in the middle, stuck in a state of disbelief. Not too long ago, Ava thought that she wouldn't ever be able to date someone in the field, let alone get married to someone one day.

Yet here she is with Sara, breaking old rules she had set for herself and smashing through every expectation she ever had for her future. With a small shake of her head, Ava reaches out and draws Sara to her once more. A small smile spreads over Sara's face seconds before her lips meet Ava's own. With a smile of her own, Ava laughs into the kiss and holds Sara close with a hand along the back of her neck. Silky soft hair slips through Ava's fingers as she threads them up into Sara's hairline. By the time Ava backs away again, there are tears gathering in her lashes once more, and she can spot some forming in Sara's as well. "I love you," Ava murmurs, bringing her knuckles to Sara's cheek and clearing away the tears there.

"I love you too," Sara exhales, her lips still curved up in a smile. Ava lets out a quiet sigh, still framing Sara's face with her hand. "Care to postpone our dinner?" Sara suggests as Ava raises a single brow. Fingers tug at the side of Ava's dress as Sara tips her chin down, "You still a lace kind of girl?"

Laughing, Ava just smiles at Sara and slides her hands down Sara's arms to her hands. With a little tug, Ava leans against the counter and draws Sara into her again. "I don't know," Ava murmurs, linking her arms around Sara's neck once more and leaning in so their lips brush when she speaks, "Why don't you find out?"

A quiet chuckle tumbles from Sara's lips as Ava leans in and kisses her. Fingers slide along the sides of Ava's dress, bunching the fabric upwards as Sara's hands move. Ava cradles Sara's face in her hands as she backs up from the kiss to look at her now-fiancé. Five years ago she had no idea just what a change she was in for when she met Sara in that bar in Moscow. Five years ago Ava's life started changing for the better day by day, and she can't bring herself to regret a single moment of it.

Five years ago Ava was alone in her job, surrounded by constant turmoil and chaos. She had been longing for something back then, she just didn't even know what it was that she wanted. Not until Sara came along and that first meeting set everything in motion. Now Ava has everything she wants and more. With a little smile, Ava leans in and kisses Sara again. There's no more running, no more hiding, just the life they're building together.

Hands slip under the edges of Ava's dress, already tracing the seam of her underwear as she laughs and kisses Sara. Five years ago, Ava broke her number one rule and slept with the enemy. Breaking just a single rule brought her a life with someone that she truly and genuinely loves. Because of that, because of the freedom that has come from loving Sara, Ava can't regret a single part of their journey together. As Sara's hands hold Ava close to her, the warmth of their bodies mingling together, Ava just sighs contentedly. If she could go back in time, Ava knows she would break her old rule over and over again, just to be right where she is now—finally home.

As always, thank you to everyone who has been reading along this entire time. This has been the longest AU of the collection and it was never meant to turn into a 19 chapter fic, yet it did. I hope that everyone has enjoyed reading along, and a massive thank you to everyone and the kind comments and support that has been offered as I've been writing. Hopefully you liked this ending, and there's a second alternative one coming next!

Ending 2 Pt. 1

Chapter Summary

When Ava comes back to the city to reunite with Sara once more, she's confronted by someone who has an interesting new job offer for her.

Chapter Notes

Well this ending was not supposed to be two parts, but then I wrote it and it wound up being close to 20,000 words long so it needed to be broken up. This chapter is part one of the second ending, and the first section is identical to the first while the changes come at the end of the second section as well as the new third section at the end. This is largely similar to the previous ending with the exception of the final scene, but it only made sense to break the chapters along this line here. Once I finish going over the final part and editing it in the next few days, I'll get that up.

A big thank you to [Crincher](#) who has been looking over this story for me, and who let me bounce plot ideas off them for this ending!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Minsk, Belarus — 20:05

Raising the glass to her lips, Ava lets the vodka burn all the way down her throat. It settles heavily in her stomach as Ava sucks in a deep breath and sets her glass down on the counter near her. "So you are really done then?" Dmitriy asks from where he is sitting in the stool across from Ava. They're tucked down in the basement of his shop, the counters cluttered with weapons and vials of poison alike.

Ava's eyes catch on a rifle there identical to the kind she came here for years ago, before everything collapsed from under her. Letting out a disbelieving laugh, Ava nods her head and motions for Dmitriy to fill her glass again. "I'm really done," Ava confirms as Dmitriy makes a sound of surprise, "The Operative has cleared me to leave and wiped all of my records from their server. As of three days ago, Ava Sharpe was never a spy working for them. Instead I was a member of MI5."

That's the cover they had given her in order to explain the knowledge that Ava will carry with her from this job. They had provided her with documents backing up this claim, complete with a full resume filled with jobs and titles that Ava never actually gained herself. It had made her laugh as she had flipped through the pages and read the achievements the Operative believes that she could have feasibly attained.

With a small sigh, Ava leans back into her chair, bringing her glass with her and tucking it against her chest. "Every last spy that worked for Henry has been checked out," Ava continues as Dmitriy looks back to her, "We found some traitors in the ranks but, for the most part, he had been working on his own. It's all finished now, everything is sorted."

Three days ago is when Ava had wrapped everything up in London. After three grueling months spent pouring over every document that the Operative had given her, Ava had finally finished looking everything over. Seeing as Henry trained her, they decided that she was the best to navigate through his files. Ava knew all of his secrets and all of his cipher keys, and that should have made it easier. Instead she found that she had underestimated just how much Henry had worked with the League. There were hundreds of files detailing communications that had to be picked over methodically.

During that time, Ava hardly left the office building to go home. She'd spent her nights there, pouring over the information and trying to dig out the important pieces of the puzzle. Day by day, they got a little closer to figuring out just how far Henry's betrayal had spread within the Operative. Eventually, Ava and the others found what they were looking for, and she had turned the appropriate files and logs over to the new handler that's taking over Henry's role. Now that everything is over, Ava should feel relieved, but instead she just feels lost. "So where are you going now?" Dmitriy asks as Ava's stomach sinks. Taking a long sip from the sharp vodka in her cup, Ava lifts her shoulder in a small shrug.

"I have tentative plans," Ava admits, thinking back to Star City and Sara who is waiting for her there. Originally, Ava had planned on going back as soon as everything was over. However she had looked at the tickets online and hadn't been able to order them. First Ava needed to come here, she needed to wrap things up once and for all with Dmitriy and put all of her past as a spy behind her.

A knowing smile lifts along Dmitriy's lips as he raises his glass in Ava's direction. "You're talking about the assassin who came to see me that day," he remarks as Ava feels her cheeks heat slightly, "The one that you said you were going to have sex with just the one time."

In hindsight, Ava should have known that she was somehow jinxing herself by saying something like that. Yet she can't bring herself to care because she doesn't know where she would be if she hadn't kept running into Sara. "Yeah," Ava nods her head quietly, her eyes caught on the liquor she gently swirls inside her glass, "She's back in the States, causing trouble as a vigilante now."

While Ava had been busy buried in work, she hadn't stopped checking in on Sara from time to time. About a month into her time here in London, Ava had discovered several mentions of a new vigilante that had popped up in Star City. The moment Ava heard the description of a leather clad blonde, she knew it was Sara. On the shelf in her bedroom, Ava had positioned a radio by her bed so she could listen into the Star City news feeds just to make sure Sara had been spotted by civilians from time to time.

"You miss her," Dmitriy states kindly, his eyes twinkling when Ava looks over to him. Already there's a smile forming along her lips as Ava ducks her head. "You were interested in her from the beginning," Dmitriy carries on proudly, "I can always tell these kinds of things you know?"

"Maybe you can," Ava lets out a little laugh as she sighs. The truth is she does miss Sara. Even now there's a soft ache in her chest, a barely there tug that has been constantly reminding her of what she left behind in the States. After three months of no contact, Ava is more than ready to reunite with Sara again. "I don't know how everything between her and I will go though," Ava confesses quietly, nerves flipping loose in her stomach, "We didn't really get the chance to name what we are to each other before I had to come back here."

That's a regret Ava has from that night she left Sara in the cabin driveway. If she could go back, she would have made more time that evening to talk to Sara about what comes next for them. Now, Ava has no idea if Sara's waited for her or not. As far as Ava knows, Sara might have already moved on. They're both a large piece of the other's past seeing as they've spent the past years

tangling together either on the job or after. If it's a clear slate that Sara wanted once she settled back into her old life, that might include being free now Ava.

But Ava misses Sara. She misses the playful teasing and the way Sara would hold her close at night. Ava misses the gentle kisses Sara would lay along her skin in the mornings, her lips mapping over Ava's shoulders and the back of her neck. What Ava wants is to get that back, whatever it might look like now that she and Sara are free from a state of crisis. Taking in a deep breath, Ava attempts to clear the weight that has settled in her stomach. "So then you find her now," Dmitriy points out as Ava hums to herself, "Why are you here when you could be with her?"

"Because this is goodbye," Ava explains quietly, watching the understanding pass over Dmitriy's face. A condition of Ava leaving the Operative was that she no longer have contact with the people she had met on the job. That means no reaching out to Dmitriy after this. They can still keep in touch, but Dmitriy hasn't ever been fond of technology so Ava knows that he won't. "It's been a good few years though hasn't it," Ava muses as Dmitriy laughs, "You were one of the constants in the chaos I was wrapped up in."

A look that almost seems fond passes over Dmitriy's face as he leans forwards and holds his glass out. Mirroring his action, Ava gently knocks their glasses together. Quiet clinking fills the air as Ava keeps her eyes on Dmitriy's smile and lifts her glass to her own lips. Taking a sip, Ava leans back once more and settles into her chair. She'll see him again, Ava knows that, it just will be a while, and under much different circumstances. "Well now that this is done, you should go to Sara," Dmitriy prompts, his smile still kind as Ava lifts her shoulder, "I'm sure she's waiting for you."

Ava's not sure how he has the confidence in that fact when she doesn't. "Maybe," Ava murmurs into her glass, her eyes fixed on her knees once more, "There's just a lot to sort out between us—especially seeing as neither of us have ever dated someone like this before." Pressure surges in Ava's throat as she shrugs again and brings a single leg up near her chest. "We both have to learn how to do things right," Ava continues on, tapping her fingers along her pant leg, "We both have healing to do on our own as well as together."

Ava's hope is that she and Sara don't accidentally hurt each other in the process of trying to come together again. She hopes that they can both figure out a way to actually communicate with their words instead of either getting angry or just running away from their problems. "I think that you'll find these things are easy to figure out with the right person beside you," Dmitriy's voice is gently as Ava glances up to him, "That's not to say it won't be difficult, but it sounds as if you understand each other, and that's what matters."

Maybe it is. Ava wouldn't know either way. "Yeah," Ava sighs quietly. The tightness in her chest hasn't subsided in full, but it is slowly loosening. Not wanting to make this last night a sad one, Ava shakes her head and unfolds her leg from the chair. "Well while I'm still here for the next few hours, let's catch up," Ava says as she gives Dmitriy a smile, "One final time." A laugh comes from Dmitriy as he nods his head with a smile. As he begins telling her about his family, Ava leans back in her chair and soaks everything in.

Star City, USA — 22:11

Ahead of Ava the park is bathed in moonlight, the pathways obscured from the soft white light, shrouded by trees. Everything in the city is quiet, the streets and alleyways empty at this time of night. Crossing the street swiftly, Ava steps up to the sidewalk and enters the park. Nerves grip her

stomach and chest, flutters of worry pushing at her heart. So far, there is no other person in the park, just the empty bench sitting off to the side that Ava had chosen as the meeting location.

It's been a week since Ava was in Minsk with Dmitriy. Everything in Europe has now been wrapped up. Her safe house was sold there, her clothing and belongings packed and sent here, her contacts notified that she wouldn't be working with them any longer, and her records all sent safely to the Operative. The part of Ava's life where she worked as a spy is now over. Now she doesn't just have a number assigned to her within an organization. Now Ava has to find a way to pave her own path in a new job, in a new city. No files or briefings will tell her how to get things done now.

Gravel crunches lightly under her feet as she strays from the path and heads up the hill towards the bench. The wood shines in the pale moonlight, a shadow cast on one half that Ava chooses to sit in. Removing the file that was tucked under her arm, Ava rests it on her lap and draws her coat around her body. In the distance everything is still and quiet. The surrounding buildings are lit up here and there and warm amber light pours from street lamps and spills over the sidewalks.

This is a cozy city, Sara hadn't been lying about that when she was telling Ava about everything one night in bed. It was Sara who told her about this park, how she used to come here when she was younger and sit against the trees further in the property to skip school and smoke weed. Somehow that hadn't surprised Ava at all, and at the time she had just laughed and kissed Sara softly.

Wrapping her arms around herself, Ava nervously taps her foot along the ground and surveils her surroundings. With any luck, Sara will have kept an eye on the email they used to use. Their departure at the cabin had been so abrupt that Ava hadn't even thought to ask Sara how she could contact her now. Somehow though, Ava gets the feeling that Sara has in fact seen the email. The question now remains to be answered if Sara is going to come here to meet Ava or not.

Wind blows through the park, the leaves rustling quietly as Ava folds one leg over another and leans back into the bench. "My favourite spy," a familiar voice lilts warmly, "How did I just know that I'd find you tucked somewhere in a shadow here." Smile already on her face, Ava turns around over her shoulder and finds Sara standing there. Dressed in all black, Sara hardly looks any different than she did when Ava left her last. The only change is that Sara cut her hair shorter. It falls near her shoulders now, tumbling only slightly below her collarbones.

"I'm still not used to being in the open," Ava teases back, taking Sara's wide grin and the sparkle in her bright blue eyes, "And I'm a former spy now, not a spy." Sara's smile only widens as she comes around the side of the bench and slips into the spot by Ava. In the course of three months, somehow everything seems to have changed about Sara. She looks more at peace now, almost settled in a way Ava wasn't expected. Ava's almost scared to ask what else has changed about Sara. She's worried that Sara might have moved on already.

Bright blue eyes pierce through Ava's own as Ava glances to the file in her lap. Nerves flood Ava's chest as she clears her throat quietly and shuffles in her seat. "I brought this for you," Ava explains, offering over the file that she put together just a few days ago, "It contains the rundown on everything happening in the League that the Operative knows about right now. It's proof that you're safe."

Sara takes the file, her eyes not leaving Ava's own as she does so. A slight frown forms on her lips as she lays the file in her lap and flips through the first few pages. Already Ava knows what that look of disappointment is for. "We didn't completely ruin them," Sara murmurs, brushing her fingers over the page that contains all known hits run by the League in the past month alone, "They somehow managed to get everything up and running again."

That information had surprised Ava too when she found it, though maybe it shouldn't have.

"They're not as strong as they were before though," Ava consoles gently, reaching out and turning the page over for Sara to see the next chart, "Their current operations are only being run in about a third of the countries they were in before. You did a lot of damage collecting that information—several suppliers and outside contracts are refusing to work with them again."

It also helps that Henry isn't actively giving over the list of contacts that the Operative used as well. When he was doing that before, he was empowering the League to take over some of the Operative's business in the area. "Thank you," Sara hums, shutting the file once more and laying it to the side, "For this and for everything before—for helping me." A pensive look flickers over Sara's face as she turns on the bench, her arm lying along the backing, "So what do former spies do when they're free from duty?"

That's a question Ava hasn't figured out herself yet. Anxiety flickers in her stomach, spiking roughly in her chest as she lets out a quiet exhale. Before Ava can speak, shrill ringing interrupts them. Sara shoves her hand into her pocket and fishes out a phone before looking at the screen and clicking it off. "You have to go?" Ava checks as Sara purses her lips and then nods, "Well that's maybe for the best—I'm headed to Virginia to settle everything with the safe house there."

Technically Ava hadn't planned on doing that for another two days. She had intended to spend a little time here in the city connecting with Sara, but it appears that's not an option. "I bet there's a lot of work to do there after the fight," Sara comments as Ava lets out a little laugh and nods her head, "Well you know, after that's done," Sara pauses and Ava glances to her, watching Sara's downcast eyes and the slight lift of her shoulders, "Star City is a pretty decent place to live. We've got a pretty cool vigilante running around here."

"Right," Ava muses with a little grin, "The Arrow," A quiet snort falls from Sara's lips as her knee moves over to nudge Ava's own thigh. "I heard the other vigilante was getting into a lot of trouble," Ava continues on, resting her elbow on the back of the bench as she tucks her chin in her hand, "Every time I turned on the radio, I was always hearing about some mess or another that she made of things."

When Sara's soft laugh fills the space between them, Ava only feels her smile widening as that familiar warmth crashes through her chest. "Then I guess it's a good thing you never really minded the trouble," Sara replies as Ava just shakes her head fondly. Sara's brows crease slightly as she mirrors Ava's position, her head cradled in her palm. "I never really asked you in the beginning," Sara murmurs, "But why did you agree to help me when I showed up in your hotel room?"

They've only talked about this in brief terms right at the beginning of their work together, but Ava hadn't ever explained the full truth. Her stomach twisting nervously, Ava lifts a shoulder in a shrug. "I was tired too. Living in new places, never settling down, constantly running from danger—all of that takes a toll eventually," Ava mumbles quietly, staring out at the tiny pond on the other side of the gravel path, "But it was because of you too." Pausing, Ava swallows thickly and looks back to Sara who's already watching her with rapt attention, her eyes wide as Ava exhales, "I didn't want to lose you again."

Something flickers over Sara's face as eyes sweep over Ava. A frown forms along Sara's lips while Ava's stomach falls slightly. She silently braces herself for the part of this conversation where Sara rejects her again. A hand lands on Ava's leg and she jolts slightly before looking at Sara in surprise. "I'm not going anywhere," Sara shakes her head, her eyes piercing through Ava's own. Shaking her head with a little laugh, Sara removes her hand from Ava's leg and stares out into the moon dappled park, "We did this all in the wrong order you know? We had sex in closets—"

“Safe rooms,” Ava counters pointedly, not willing to let Sara forget just how badly she had messed up that evening when they got stuck together.

“Safe rooms that look like closets,” Sara fires back as Ava lets out a snort of amusement. It’s hard to regret that evening even if it had made the job more difficult. Every step they’ve taken set them here, so Ava can’t bring herself to wish any part of it away. “Then we kept sleeping together, then we worked together as friends,” Sara continues rattling off the backwards steps they took as Ava tilts her head further into her hand, “And then we came here and moved in together.”

With a little laugh, Ava shakes her head once more as warmth creeps through her chest and settles comfortably over her body. “We were on the run from people who were trying to kill us,” Ava reminds Sara pointedly as Sara only shrugs, “I don’t think that we can consider that to be moving in together.”

Sara’s eyebrows raise as she tilts her head to the side with that little smirk already pulling at her lips. “We played house in a cabin in the woods for over two weeks,” Sara points out as Ava purses her lips in an effort to keep the smile from her face, “We shared a bed, showered together, swapped off making meals, and spent all of our evenings together on the couch. How does that not fit the definition of moving in together?”

Her worries now gone, Ava feels her lips tugging upwards as Sara rests her hand over Ava’s leg once more. Their time apart changed Sara, even just slightly. Before she wouldn’t have joked about something like moving in together, but now she’s here doing it willingly and with a wide smile. “My point is, I’d like to start again, from the beginning,” Sara murmurs, her head dropping down as soft blonde waves tumble around her face and shroud her from Ava’s view, “When you’re back in the city, tell me. I want to take you on a date—I want to do this right.”

Bursts of elation rise up in Ava as she stares back at Sara, her lips parted in surprise. This wasn’t what she was expecting. Ava thought she would come here and be turned down—she thought Sara might have moved on. Ava’s cheeks nearly hurt from smiling so much, but she can’t bring herself to care. “A date?” Ava repeats, watching as Sara nods her head, “I think I could get on board with that.” When Sara laughs, heat rises up in Ava’s cheeks as she hums quietly to herself. “But for the record,” Ava reaches down and covers Sara’s hand with her own, “I liked the way we did things—it was fun.”

Another small chuckle tumbles from Sara’s lips, a reminder of the word Sara used to call of their meetings before everything became so muddled between them. As Sara begins to speak again, they’re once more interrupted by the sound of ringing coming from her pocket. “You’d better get going,” Ava motions to the path Sara came from as Sara clicks the phone off again, “Go off and be a reformed assassin turned vigilante again.”

“Your favorite one right?” Sara teases as she stands from the bench, the file in her hand.

Pushing off the back of the bench, Ava gets to her feet as well. “Yes,” Ava replies as Sara smiles and takes a step closer, “But only because you’re the only one I know.” An amused laugh comes from Sara as she takes a final step toward Ava. Now chest to chest with Sara, Ava’s breathing hitches slightly as Sara winds her arms around her neck. The edges of the file brush Ava’s back as Sara lets out a soft sigh.

“Don’t spend too long in Virginia,” Sara murmurs, her face moving even closer to Ava’s own. Not bothering to mumble out her promise to come back soon, Ava leans in and gently kisses Sara. Everything about this is familiar. Ava knows the feeling of Sara’s fingers threading through her hair and the delicate brush of Sara’s nose moving along her own as Sara captures Ava’s bottom lip. She knows the steady rhythm of Sara’s heart beating rapidly alongside her own.

Something tender forms just inside Ava's chest, chasing away the remaining doubts that she had as to what she might find here in Star City. Reaching up, Ava cups Sara's cheek with her hand and sweeps her thumb just over Sara's cheekbone before backing away. Soft blue eyes look back at her, Sara's freckles illuminated in the pale moonlight shining down on them. Shadows dapple the sidewalk, the bench, the grass, casting everything around them in shades of contrast. "I'll be back before you know it," Ava promises her, thumbing Sara's cheek once more.

Releasing her hands from Ava's neck, Sara takes a small step back. "I'm counting on that, Ava Sharpe," Sara lilts as she takes another step backwards. Ava's hand falls in the space between them and she tucks them both in her pockets before offering Sara a small smile. Not moving from her spot, Ava watches as Sara ducks her head with a little laugh before tucking the file under her arm and setting off up the hill she came from.

Ava watches her go, her hands remaining in her pockets as Sara disappears behind the curve at the top of the hill and vanishes into the shadows cloaking the tree line. With a quiet sigh, Ava turns on her heel and sets off back the way she came here—this time feeling much lighter. Scuffing her shoes over the sidewalk, Ava looks ahead to where her car is parked in the distance. Just as she's nearing the edge of the park, someone up the street calls her name.

A figure stands there, bathed in the amber hued pool of light streaming down from the streetlamp above. "Ava Sharpe," the man asks again, stepping from the light and into the shadows as he comes closer. Instantly Ava tenses and reaches for her gun that's tucked on the inside of her coat. "No need for that," the man continues, a gentle lilt to his voice as he speaks, "I've come to talk to you regarding a job."

Ava's gaze flickers over the man in front of her. He doesn't look like a threat, far from it, so Ava feels herself relax slightly. His thin frame is wrapped in a simple beige trench-coat and Ava can't spot any weapons hidden away on his person. The man shuffles awkwardly along the pavement, his hands still stuffed in his pockets. "What kind of a job?" Ava asks suspiciously, scanning her surroundings for any signs of danger. When the man takes another step towards her, Ava raises her gun up and swiftly clicks the safety off.

He stops again, his hands slightly up this time. "A job that won't be anything like the work you've done before," the man promises. It's now that Ava places the soft accent in his speech cadence. Lowering her gun slightly, Ava lets the man finally walk towards her. "Come with me?" he proposes, waving his arm towards the pathway along the park, "We can talk as we walk, I promise you're going to want to hear what I have to say."

Hesitating slightly, Ava looks over her shoulder towards the park where she had just left Sara. She is interested in the offer, or at the very least she's interested in hearing what the man has to say. Letting out a small sigh, Ava tucks her gun away inside her coat once more before falling into step with the strange man. He's clearly not dangerous given his lack of weapons and puny form, so there's no risk to Ava hearing him out. "Alright," Ava nods her head as they begin walking, "But first, who are you and what agency do you represent?"

This time around the man just laughs, something that has Ava looking at him in confusion. "I don't work for an agency you would know," he states in a pompous tone that has Ava raising a single brow as she walks slowly beside him, "My name is Rip Hunter, and I've come to collect a number of operatives for a vital task force." Ava comes to a stop and looks at the man, still not understanding. "Miss Sharpe," Rip bows his head and shoves his hands back into his pockets, "What do you know about time travel?"

For a moment, Ava is silent as she stares back at Rip. Then laughter bubbles up from her chest and

spills from her lips. Puffs of hot air cloud the space in front of her as she laughs and stares incredulously at the man in front of her. “Time travel?” Ava repeats as the man just looks to the side with a scowl, “Okay, I have to go to another state now, so thank you for the joke—but I think I’m going to turn down your task force.”

Ava goes to turn around, shaking her head with a smile as she tucks both of her hands away in the confines of her jacket pockets. “I’m afraid that wasn’t the answer I was looking for,” the man says. Stopping in her tracks, Ava turns around and finds the man holding something up in front of her. It’s not a gun, instead what he has in his palm looks remarkably like a camera flash. “This won’t hurt a bit,” Rip states. It’s the last thing he says before everything around Ava flashes white and fades to black.

Star City — 23:08

Leaning against the building that houses the stairs that lead below, Ava carefully watches on the group of people gathered together on the rooftop. Of the eight people Ava’s staring at, only one is familiar. Sparkling blue eyes turn her way and Ava fights off the smile that is forming along her lips as she folds her arms over her chest and leans further against the wall.

Three hours ago Ava was in the park in the city where she had met Sara. Then she was approached by a strange man with a British accent and a camera stick that somehow took her memory of how she arrived here. When Ava woke up, she was on this rooftop with eight other people, all from different backgrounds. The man from the park, Rip Hunter, says that they’re needed to save the world, a task that had seemed laughable until he had shown them what he meant. He provided a glimpse to the future that had revealed Star City 2166. The city was nothing but a series of swirling flames and skeletal remains of buildings arching up towards the sky.

This isn’t Ava’s city, but even she had been able to see that he wasn’t making that view up. It was from the future—a fact that Ava has yet to digest. In the span of just a few hours, she has learned that time travel exists, that the world is ending, and that she has to work with a team of people she doesn’t know if they want to set it all right again. Her eyes sweeping over the others, Ava watches on as the group has a conversation that she refused to be a part of.

The moment Rip had left with his trench coat wrapped around him once more, everyone had broken out into overlapping arguments. Ava hadn’t wanted to be a part of those squabbles, so she had made her way to the side. Being in the center of attention never has been her first choice. Now the group is still talking, with the two immortal hawk individuals currently leading the conversation. Ava can’t help but snort quietly at the costumes that they have on. Though they’re not the only costumed people up here.

In the distance, Ava spots motion and looks up in time to see Sara heading her way. Still dressed in her all black outfit from before, Sara has her hands tucked in her pockets and her eyes downcast as she walks over. “So,” Sara muses as she comes to stand in front of Ava, her shoulders raised slightly as she looks back over to the group, “What do you think of everything this evening.”

With a quiet laugh, Ava just shakes her head and looks over to where the others seem to be bickering over something. “He wants us to save the world with immortal birds, a scientist and a college kid that make a human fireball, a nervous man in a shrinking suit, and two criminals,” Ava remarks, nodding her head at each of the respective people on the roof as Sara scoffs, “Then there’s you and I, a former spy and former assassin—who in their right mind would make a team of heroes out of this group of people.”

“Maybe he’s desperate,” Sara teases, but Ava just nods because she’s sure that Rip would have to be in order to gather this team of people. “But I actually meant what you thought of everything else,” Sara continues on, tilting her head to the side and taking a step closer, “About the time travel, and the fact that he wants us to save the world.”

That’s going to take a bit longer than just a few minutes to sink in for Ava. In her line of work she’s seen quite a few unexpected and unimaginable things, however this is currently at the top of both of those lists. Ava can’t believe some of the things she’s learned this evening, and she has more than just a few questions. “I think that I don’t trust everything he’s saying,” Ava replies with a small shrug as Sara hums, “I’ve developed a pretty healthy mistrust in British men who come from nowhere and tell me that it’s in my best interest to join their crusade for greatness.”

Sara lets out a quiet little laugh, her eyes sparkling when they come up to meet Ava’s own. “Smart of you not to jump in feet first this time around,” Sara comments as Ava just raises her brows and nods with a smile, “I don’t trust him either, but something has clearly happened to the world in our future.” Sara pauses, a frown forming as she looks over her shoulder where the display of the world burning had been projected out for them to see. “I don’t know,” Sara sighs, shaking her head as she turns around once more, “I’m supposed to be one of the good guys now, so maybe I’ll join him.”

“You were always one of the good guys,” Ava murmurs, unfolding her arm and reaching out towards Sara. With her fingers splayed on either side of Sara’s wrists, Ava plucks them from Sara’s pockets and tangles their hands together. In the background, the others have already dispersed, but Ava looks up just in time to see the hawks jumping off the side of the roof and taking flight. “That is going to take some getting used to,” Ava mutters as Sara just laughs. With a smile, Ava turns back to Sara and sweeps her thumbs over her palms, “So, we’re joining the other miscreants to save the world?”

Warmth flutters in Ava’s chest when Sara drops her hands and comes into Ava’s space, effectively trapping Ava against the side of the stairwell wall. A gentle breeze blows through the area, sending the edges of both their coats fluttering. Ava reaches out and catches a loose strand of Sara’s hair, delicately tucking it behind her ear and leaving her palm against Sara’s cheek. “We can’t seem to catch a break can we,” Sara murmurs as Ava scoffs and shakes her head, “At least this time around, we know exactly what kind of danger the future holds.”

Humming quietly, Ava nods her head and looks back over Sara’s shoulder to where the projection sat. It had been more than jarring, seeing the world burning like that. There’s still something heavy resting low in Ava’s stomach, her mind flickering back to the orange haze that had settled over the broken city in the future. “It would be really irresponsible of us to ignore that kind of danger,” Ava muses as she turns her attention back to Sara. Ava doesn’t even have to ask to know that Sara’s already on board for this rescue mission. There’s no amount of danger that might keep Sara away from something as exciting as this and Ava knows it.

“Time travel exists,” Sara exhales incredulously as Ava feels the corners of her lips lifting up. Sara’s smile is wide as she looks over to the roof where the others were standing before. There’s limited light against the wall they’re standing against, but some moonlight shines down on Sara’s face, lighting up her eyes and accentuating the freckles dappling her cheeks. “I know that’s not the take away from tonight,” Sara turns back to Ava once more, her fingers now bunching in the front of Ava’s shirt, “But you have to admit, that’s insane.”

It is, and it’s going to take Ava quite some time to adjust to this new reality. Hours ago she was just trying to come back to Star City to reunite with Sara, and now they’ve found themselves tangled up in a new task that involves traveling through the timeline. “So,” Sara mumbles, her head tipped down as she taps her fingers against Ava’s chest, “Now that you and I are together again, do you

think you'd be open to moving up that date to tonight?"

When Sara looks up again, her expression is guarded. Nerves flutter in Ava's chest as she nods her head slowly and watches Sara's smile spread over her face. "I guess we'd better make the most of the time we have before the world ends," Ava teases gently as Sara just rolls her eyes and lets out an amused exhale, "But I'd like that—going on the date tonight." The skin around Sara's eyes creases as she grins while Ava lifts her shoulder in a small shrug, "Only if we can go somewhere that has pineapple pizza."

A groan falls from Sara's lips as she leans forwards, her forehead coming to rest on Ava's shoulder as she laughs. With a smile of her own, Ava threads her fingers through Sara's silky soft hair, staring at the blonde strands that slip through her grasp. Sara nuzzles in closer, her nose brushing the column of Ava's neck and her hands slipping around Ava's back. Quietly, Ava lets out a contented sigh as she tips her cheek against the top of Sara's head.

Another gentle breeze blows across the roof, sending Ava's hair fluttering around her face. In the distance, city life goes on. Everyone is likely in for the evening, completely unaware that in a century's time, nothing in this city will be left standing. Shivering slightly, Ava winds her arms tighter around Sara and buries her nose into coconut scented hair. She breathes in the familiar smell, letting her eyes slip shut for a moment as she holds Sara close.

"So we're going to be legends," Sara mumbles, her voice muffled by the fabric of Ava's coat. Her tone is cheery, almost teasing. Ava lets out a quiet laugh before weaving her fingers through Sara's soft hair and nodding her head. "I guess we've found a new shadow for you to hide out in," Sara comments while Ava snorts, drawing back from Sara to see her face.

"I don't know if we can call the timeline a shadow," Ava corrects her as Sara just lifts a single shoulder upwards, "And this time I'm not going to be hiding on my own." There's something thrilling about doing this with Sara this time around. Now they are a team. They know that they work well together and Ava doesn't doubt their ability to at least have each other to rely on if things go wrong. "Are you sure about this?" Ava questions, smoothing her fingers nervously over the sides of Sara's vest, "You have a family here, it's not as easy for you to just leave an—"

Warm lips cut Ava's sentence off as a hand cradles her jaw. Humming quietly, Ava melts into Sara and kisses her back, letting her eyes flutter shut. All too soon, Sara pulls back, but she remains close, her breath ghosting over Ava's face. "If you go, so do I," Sara states. The simplicity of her words cut through Ava. With a stuttered inhale Ava looks up into Sara's earnest blue eyes. "I'm tired of leaving you behind in cities and parks and driveways and—"

"We'll be here all night if you finish that list," Ava interjects teasingly as Sara's lips curl upwards in a smile, "You've built up a habit of leaving me behind in the years past, we can leave it at that."

Sara's smile only grows as she shakes her head while warmth swirls in Ava's chest. "Well I'm done leaving you behind," Sara affirms once more as Ava sucks in a quiet breath in anticipation, "From now on we do these kinds of things together, no more walking away from each other." It's a deal that Ava would make with Sara over and over. Nodding her head, Ava feels herself smiling as she reaches out and draws Sara in by the straps of her gear vest. A quiet exhale leaves Sara's lips as they collide again, Ava's back striking the hard concrete wall behind her.

Now completely enveloped in shadows, Ava leans in and kisses Sara softly. Sara tastes of the peppermint candies Ava is willing to bet rest in her vest pockets. It's a familiar taste, one that Ava found along Sara's lips countless times during the weeks they spent in the cabin. With a smile and a quiet breathless laugh, Ava backs up again and frames Sara's face with her hands. "I'm tired of leaving you too," Ava sighs contentedly, watching as Sara's eyes light up and her smile slowly

widens, “We make a good team, there’s no need for us to separate again.”

A stuttered laugh falls from Sara’s lips as she dips her head down. But Ava tucks her fingers under Sara’s jaw to lift her face up once more. They’ve skirted around this kind of a conversation for so long, but there’s something Ava needs Sara to understand. “I want to be with you Sara. I don’t think I could handle another separation like the last time,” Ava confesses as Sara’s eyes flicker over her face, “When I thought you died—” Ava’s voice breaks despite her efforts to keep it level. Clearing her throat, she takes a deep breath and tries again, “When I thought you died, I barely kept everything together—ask Dmitriy.”

“I’m sorry for that,” Sara mumbles, her fingers tangling in the front of Ava’s shirt and tugging lightly. All Ava can do is shake her head. It was a long time ago. Back then Ava was destroyed, but Sara’s back now. Everything that happened in that time period gave Ava the nudge she needed to grow. If Sara hadn’t faked her death, Ava’s not sure that she would have received the wake up call she needed.

Thumbing at Sara’s cheeks, Ava gives her head a small shake again. “Don’t be,” Ava leans in, nudging her nose gently against Sara’s own, “We’re here now. I just need you to understand that you’re what I want, even in all the chaos.” A small hum comes from Sara before silence falls between them as Ava holds Sara close, still stroking her fingers over the soft skin of Sara’s cheeks.

Sara’s hands press against Ava’s back, tucked between the fabric of Ava’s shirt and her thick coat that she still has on. As always, Sara’s hands are cold, the chill of her skin able to be felt through Ava’s thin shirt. “So,” Ava lets out a little laugh as she backs up, “We’re really doing this—saving the world?”

With a laugh Sara lifts her shoulder in a shrug as she steps away from Ava. “Someone has to,” Sara comments, not letting go of Ava’s hand still, “And who better to save the world than an ex-assassin and an ex-spy.”

“We do work well together,” Ava muses as they walk towards the stairwell, “Though you’re going to have to learn to reign in your impulses. I get the feeling that murder is a more sensitive topic in the timeline—we can’t have you killing historical figures before they can go on to do their jobs.”

Another laugh tumbles from Sara’s lips, the sound light and happy as it shifts through the cold air. Ava revels in the sound and the way Sara’s eyes light up, her dimples set in her cheeks and her smile wide. “I’ll do my very best to have some self-control,” Sara replies as Ava raises a single brow, “Ex-assassins honor.” When Sara mimics slitting her fingers across her throat before crossing them over her heart, Ava just rolls her eyes. Sara’s gentle laughter fills the air as Ava squeezes Sara’s hand and pulls her in close.

Wrapping her arm around Sara’s waist, Ava leans into her as they enter the stairwell. “So we’ll save the world,” Ava concludes while Sara hums quietly, “But first we should go get that pizza.”

“I agree, our date is more important than an immortal maniac hellbent on world-domination,” Sara nods her head with pursed lips as Ava just snorts and nudges her in the side. A bright smile is thrown Ava’s way as Sara lifts her shoulder in a shrug, “But really, the world will be there for us to save tomorrow—we’ve waited long enough to finally have this time together.” They really have; it’s been nearly four years of waiting. There’s moments where all of this hardly feels real to Ava.

She still remembers seeing Sara in the bar in Moscow in that red dress, looking so out of place in a dingy little bar. Sometimes that evening feels like it happened only just months ago. They were different people then, far more guarded, far more secretive. Ever encounter they had in the past, Ava knows now that Sara was slowly getting closer and closer—and Ava was letting her. As much

as they fought, Ava never really hated Sara, she couldn't ever hate her.

Every step of this journey has been a hard one, but Ava can't find any desire to change a single part of it, not even the stumbling blocks they hit along the way. She wouldn't trade the hookups in saferooms or fights on busy subways. Ava wouldn't give up stakeouts in little cars and wounds patched up in hotel rooms. She's learned that sometimes events are going to unfold the way they want, no matter what kind of plans Ava puts in place. And when it comes to Sara, Ava's come to see that throwing away the plan is the best plan to have.

With a little smile, Ava just hums quietly and squeezes Sara's hand in her own. She doesn't really know what's going to come next, but Ava thinks she can live with that so long as she has Sara by her side. Tomorrow they'll go on to save the world, but tonight, Ava finally gets to go on what she hopes is going to be the first of many dates with her favourite ex-assassin.

Chapter End Notes

So, this ending is the way everything was meant to end. The Assassins AU was meant to bleed into canon, but then along the way I realized that maybe that didn't fit as well as I thought it might. That's why the two endings came about, but I didn't want to scrap this one, though it has been massively reworked. But yes, as always thank you to everyone who has been reading along, there's just a final section left and then this story is finished! Happy holidays to anyone who is celebrating today! I plan to get those final edits done soon and get the last chapter up in the upcoming days, then that's a wrap on this AU.

Ending 2 Part 2

Chapter Summary

Now a part of the Legends team, Sara and Ava find ways to fit into their new lives on the Waverider.

Chapter Notes

So this is the end of this AU, which is actually a bit more bittersweet than I expected it might be. This is the second part of the second ending, and I hope that everyone has enjoyed this AU, I've really enjoyed writing it and interacting with everyone who has been reading along. Normally I would jump right into another AU, but this time around I'm taking a short break before moving to the next one. There is a possibility I might come back to this and do some scenes from Sara's POV. I know that some people had mentioned wanting to see those, and they are planned out, it's just a matter of getting to them when I have time, so we'll see!

A big thank you to [Crincher](#) who has been looking over this story for me, and who let me bounce plot ideas off them for this ending!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Waverider, Temporal Zone — 23:11

Sighing quietly, Ava walks into her and Sara's shared room, more than ready to call it a night. "Ray is finally finished tweaking his suit and setting off Gideon's alarms," Ava announces as the doors swish shut behind her, the light in the room automatically brightening upon her arrival, "With any luck, we won't be interrupted by him again tonight." Ava sits down on the bed with a quiet sigh, already closing her eyes as she does so.

There's no reply from Sara yet as Ava flops backwards onto the bed, her spine aching in protest at finally being extended on a flat surface after a day of standing. Ava turns her head to the side with a small frown, expecting Sara to have replied by now. But the small brown chair to the side of their room is empty, no longer occupied by Sara who had been there only an hour and a half ago when Ava left. "Gideon," Ava groans quietly, closing her eyes and bringing her hands to cover her face, "Is Sara back on the Bridge again?"

"She is Miss Sharpe," Gideon replies, the AI sounding almost sheepish. Ava lets out another exasperated sigh as she brings her feet up to the bed and bends her knees at her chest. It took Ava at least a half hour to drag Sara from the Parlour where she had been pouring over plans, and now she'll have to go and get Sara again. The plan was for Ava to make sure that Ray wasn't accidentally setting something on fire again, and then they were going to go to bed. "I attempted to dissuade her," Gideon chimes in again as Ava rolls her eyes, "However I believe she is bothered by the prospect of tomorrow's upcoming events."

Everyone on the ship is bothered by the plans set for tomorrow. Going after Vandal Savage in

2166 is not an ideal plan, but it's the only one that they have left. It's not Ava's first choice either, but they've already spent hours this evening making plans that will have to be reviewed again in the morning. Sara's not going to get any work done tonight; she's just going to stress over things. Removing her hands from her eyes, Ava sits up on the bed and props herself there on her elbows. Sara's chair sits to the side, her book abandoned on the table and her shoes missing from beside the door. Ava's willing to bet that Sara took off the moment Ava left to settle Ray's troubles in the Lab, not that she should have expected anything different.

Pushing up off the bed, Ava takes to the hallways once more, the metal of the ship cool to the touch under her bare feet. The halls are quiet, the sign of everyone finally quieting down for the evening. Not a single bunk door is open with the exception of Rip's door that Ava passes shortly before turning the corner. Inside, all of his things are spread around, but there's no sign of Rip in the room. However, Ava doesn't stop to look for him. She simply continues walking, no longer caring where Rip is or what he might be up to.

Rip and his actions are part of what has upset Sara so much this evening. Residual anger curls in Ava's stomach as she passes his room and continues to the Bridge. Ava too was upset by the decision they were forced to make as a team today regarding Rip's captaincy, but she also had seen it coming. It's taken nearly five months for the others to see what Ava observed in her first few weeks with this team—that Rip is unfit to be a leader. Originally, he presented himself as a Time Master, someone well equipped to protect the timeline and keep the history of humanity safe. Ava hadn't been as inclined to believe that as the others had.

Hardly anybody had trusted the others in the beginning, but there seemed to be more faith placed in Rip than anyone else. Ava wasn't the only one who refrained from trusting him, but she did regard him with more skepticism than any of the others. Ava didn't like Rip or his popped-collar trench coat, or the superior attitude he has always walked around with. Even in the beginning, Ava saw qualities in Rip that she didn't like. His attitude reminds her of the mentality Ava was taught by the Operative, the perspective that one should only watch their own back and no one else's. Rip is used to being a loner, that much is clear. His plans typically only reflected his own wants and desires, and Ava hadn't cared for that. Sara hadn't either, but they had kept their concerns from the others.

However, during the past few missions, Rip's leadership has been crumbling. In Salvation, flaw after flaw was exposed; the same thing happening again as they spent the past few days tracking down their younger selves before a futuristic assassin could kill them. When the time came to plot their course for 2166 a few hours ago, not a single member of the team had wanted Rip to continue as their captain. It was Ava who brought up the idea of a vote—a vote that Rip lost unanimously.

Ava can't help but feel a bit pleased that everyone had been on the same page. Rip had needed to go for a while now. Nobody as arrogant and narcissistic as he is could maintain the charade of being a kind and caring leader for long. Already Ava's impressed he managed to fool the others for as long as he did.

The doors to the Bridge sit just in front of Ava, closed off and sealed for the night. Crossing the length of the shortened hallway, she steps inside the room as the doors hiss open on either side of her. Inside, Sara is not crowded around the central console as Ava thought she might be. But a quick glance into the Parlour reveals Sara inside, standing in front of the desk where several stacks of unorganized papers are laid out along the curved table.

Sara's back is to Ava, her hair tumbling down her shoulder blades. It's clear Sara dressed in a hurry. Her shirt is not the one she had on when Ava saw her last, and it's inside out. The pants that Sara is wearing are Ava's own, a pair of ratty grey sweatpants that Ava's had since she was in college. From here she can even see the hole along the back of the left thigh, Sara's pale skin

peeking through the gap. And finally, Sara's boots are undone, the laces tangling together at her feet. Ava can't help but smile as she comes to lean in the doorway, smiling at her girlfriend and those damned boots.

When they joined the team, neither of them brought much with them in terms of belongings. They had started in separate rooms on the ship, both of them committed to taking things slow. That all changed after the first mission when Sara was injured and Ava hadn't left her side even though Gideon said she was fine. From that point on, they've slept in the same room, making the move only about two weeks into their time on the team. But one of the things that Sara has had with her this entire time are those boots, the same pair she's had as long as Ava has known her. Ava won't ever forget how many times she had helped Sara take off those boots as they exchanged fumbling kisses on a hotel bed. She looks at them and remembers how she used to trip over them in the mornings while they were at the cabin together.

"Sara," Ava murmurs, watching as the muscles along Sara's shoulders and spine go rigid, "Babe, I thought it was my job to overthink missions—now you're taking my role." There's no verbal response, just a short little hum that falls from Sara's lips. It's clear that Sara's more upset than Ava thought she might be, likely the result of Sara remaining in here for too long on her own. Pushing off the doorway, Ava crosses the space between her and Sara and delicately winds her arms around Sara's body.

Every single one of Sara's muscles is still stiff, her body taut in Ava's hold. This is what Ava had expected though. There are times where Sara gets stuck in her head, and she needs a moment to find her words before she's ready to speak. Always content to share a quiet moment with Sara, Ava lifts her hand to Sara's collarbone and shifts her shirt to the side before pressing her lips to now bare skin. Ava kisses her way up the side of Sara's neck, making her way to the dark bruising along Sara's jaw.

Sara's eyes are closed, her hand grabbing tight to the edges of the table as Ava ghosts her lips over the bruising there. Ava places feather light kisses along the mark, careful not to hurt Sara as she does so. Second by second, Ava feels Sara beginning to relax back against Ava's chest. "The Pilgrim got you good didn't she?" Ava murmurs, laying her hand over Sara's ribs where she knows more colorful marks mar Sara's soft skin.

"Nothing more than I could take," Sara comments, her voice sounding slightly hoarse. Ava tilts her head against Sara's shoulder, staring up at her in silence. Dark lashes flutter against Sara's cheeks as Ava feels her take in a deep breath. "That wasn't nearly as good a fight as the one you and I had on the metro in Bucharest," Sara continues on, her eyes finally opening as the corners of her mouth twitch upwards.

Scoffing quietly, Ava lifts her head from Sara's shoulder and wraps both her arms around Sara's abdomen again. Ava remembers that fight, and she remembers the trouble that she got into because of it. It's only amusing in hindsight, but that particular day and the days that followed, Ava had been nothing but livid that Sara had come to ruin another one of her jobs. "You mean the one where you decided that killing my target in broad daylight was a good idea?" Ava asks playfully as Sara lifts a single shoulder in a shrug, "The fight where you bruised three of my ribs and nearly broke my jaw?"

Sara's brows lift upwards as she lets out a small chuckle, one that has Ava rolling her eyes. "I seem to remember you shoving me through the doors when the train stopped," Sara fires back as Ava hides her smile against Sara's shoulder because she did do that. Of course, Sara had deserved it for coming after Ava's target like that. Sara's eyes flicker to Ava's own as she raises her brows again, "I could have fallen down onto the tracks you know—what would you have done then?"

With a small laugh, Ava kisses Sara's shoulder before turning her head to the side and pressing her lips to Sara's cheek. Under her lips, she can feel Sara's growing smile. Warmth curls through Ava's chest as she lays three gentle kisses against Sara's blush warmed skin. "Good thing you survived," Ava muses, her mouth still brushing against Sara's cheek.

Turning her attention to the table once more, Ava scans everything that Sara has laid out. Countless maps and diagrams litter the rounded surface. To the side, there are schematics of the different kinds of futuristic weapons that will be in play tomorrow. Nerves flutter in Ava's stomach as she looks to the diagrams that contain the building layout. Everything here is a part of the plan they have in place for tomorrow, but it appears that Sara has broken everything down from the board and was going over individual steps. Seeing everything laying here is not helping Ava's anxieties surrounding tomorrow's plans, so she's sure they're not helping Sara either.

Sidestepping away from Sara, Ava carefully gathers the closest papers and stacks them together in her hands. To her right, Sara is silent, not saying anything as Ava clears the table off and sets all of the maps and schematics to the side. "We'll have time in the morning to finalize everything, but the plan is already in place," Ava reminds Sara, turning around and leaning against the table, "Tonight, the best thing you can do is get a decent amount of rest before the upcoming fight."

Sara's eyes are cast downwards, her posture uncertain as she shoves her hands in her pockets. Something in Ava's chest tightens at the sight of Sara looking so defeated. "Come here," Ava holds her hand out Sara's way, beckoning for Sara to come closer. There's no protest from Sara, only a hand that slips into Ava's own as Ava tugs Sara into her.

Threading her fingers through Sara's hair, Ava cradles her close. A cold nose brushes against the column of Ava's neck as she feels fingers slipping under her shirt and smoothing along the length of her spine. "I'm worried I'm doing this all wrong," Sara mumbles, her breath hot against Ava's skin, "I know that this is the only move we have left to make, but I'm worried that everything is going to blow up in our faces."

"Any worse than it already has?" Ava tries to joke as Sara just snorts quietly and shakes her head. With a quiet sigh, Ava rests her other hand along Sara's shoulder blades and moves her palm around in comforting circles. Sara lets out an appreciative hum, her body curling further into Ava's own. "Going after Savage before he takes over the world is the only choice we have left," Ava reminds Sara quietly, her lips placed near Sara's ear, "Nobody here likes that option, but we're all going to have to do our very best—that's all we can do."

Ava's nervous as well, it would be impossible to avoid that. However, Ava knows that tonight, half of Sara's worries stem from her new responsibilities. "I don't think the others were right to name me as the captain," Sara mutters, her fingers pressing against Ava's spine as her body stiffens slightly, "I'm not a leader Ava, I can't inspire others the way they want me to."

An incredulous laugh tumbles from Ava's lips before she can stop herself. In her arms, Sara goes rigid before Ava gently scratches her nails over the nape of Sara's neck. Ava doesn't understand how Sara can't see the truth here, that Sara is the only one on this ship equipped to be a leader. "Of course you're the right person to lead us," Ava counters, drawing back slightly so she can look Sara in the eyes, "As for inspiring others, tell me, when we were choosing a new captain, was anyone else's name mentioned other than your own?"

Blue eyes dart off to the side as Sara slowly shakes her head, her lips pulling downwards in a frown. "Exactly," Ava smiles, carefully tucking her fingers under Sara's chin to draw Sara's attention back to her again. Once Sara is looking at her, Ava sighs quietly and thumbs at Sara's cheekbone. "If anyone was meant to have this job, it is you Sara," Ava pauses for a moment, her

smile widening as she playfully squeezes Sara's hip, "You inspire me all the time."

A tiny laugh breaks loose from Sara's lips, a smile already forming there as she looks up, her eyes sparkling. When Sara leans forwards, Ava meets her in the middle, gently kissing Sara as she cups the side of her face. Sara's nose brushes against Ava's own when they pull back, their foreheads touching as they remain close. Once more Sara's eyes slip shut, her breath ghosting over Ava's face when she lets out a short sigh. Ava remains silent as she cradles Sara's jaw, her eyes sweeping around Sara's face.

In all of their time together, Ava has never once grown tired or just looking at Sara and quietly admiring her. It's a venture that's easier to do when Sara's eyes are closed, when she can't blush and nudge Ava away with a shy demand that Ava stop staring. But now Ava can take her time, already smiling as she delicately moves her thumb up and down Sara's jawbone. Freckles dapple every inch of skin on Sara's face, clustering near her cheeks, nose, and forehead. With a single finger, Ava traces along the edges of a slender scar tucked in Sara's hairline near her temple. Shifting her head to the side, Ava lays her lips over that same mark, her chest flooding with warmth as Sara hums quietly.

There's a soft smile on Sara's face when Ava moves back to lean their foreheads together once more, the kind of smile that Ava gets to see more of now that Sara completely trusts her. Bright blue eyes flicker open, looking right into Ava's own eyes. "Do it with me," Sara murmurs as Ava blinks in confusion, "Be my co-captain."

Something in Ava's chest tightens as she backs away, her lip caught between her teeth. Earlier, Ava's name hadn't been brought up and there was a reason for that, she's not a leader in the way that Sara is. Ava knows that the others don't see her as the same kind of natural force they see Sara as. While Sara knows how to lead and how to rally others, Ava is lost in those areas—completely hopeless at times. "Sara," Ava begins, already shaking her head as she lets her hand fall from Sara's face, "The others didn't wa—"

"I don't care about what the others want," Sara interrupts Ava's train of thought. Taking in a deep breath, Ava lets Sara tangle their fingers together as she takes a step forwards again. "I'm only here because of you—because we worked together as a team to get away from our organizations and join this group," Sara continues as Ava's eyes flicker over her face, still uncertain, "I don't want to do this without you—I could, but I don't want to."

Again Ava shakes her head and gently squeezes Sara's hands. Ava looks down at their joined hands, her fingers nervously fiddling with Sara's own as she attempts to piece together her words. "This is different from us escaping the League and the Operative," Ava points out, her throat still tight, "You know that I don't always work well with other people—I can't even get along with Mick half of the time."

"Nobody really gets along with Mick," Sara counters as Ava rolls her eyes and squeezes Sara's hands.

"This is your job Sara," Ava continues on, pursing her lips as she looks to the side, "I will always be here to give you the help and support that you need, but I don't think I should be a co-captain." Ava reaches out and lays her hand along Sara's cheek, rubbing her thumb over freckled skin as she offers Sara a small smile, "You were born to do something like this—you're a natural when it comes to leading."

Nothing has been more clear to Ava as she's watched Sara grow during their time here. Ava has been nothing but proud to see the changes that have come to Sara's approaches over time. No longer does Sara discount everything that isn't her own opinion, but she instead listens to others

and takes their suggestions to heart. “This is all you,” Ava murmurs, leaning in and pressing her lips to Sara’s forehead, “I’m just here to support you.”

“I don’t want that,” Sara shakes her head, her fingers closing around Ava’s wrists where Ava is still framing Sara’s face. Quietly Ava lets out a small exhale, her chest feeling heavy. Sara is unlikely to drop this and Ava knows it. “I want you as my co-captain because we’re different, because you see things in ways that I don’t,” Sara leans in, Ava’s hands falling from her face as Sara’s fingers grasp the front of her shirt, “We balance each other out, we always have—don’t turn me down now Sharpe.”

With a small laugh, Ava just rolls her eyes fondly as she looks back to Sara in front of her. Even though time has passed, Ava still shies away from the spotlight. She doesn’t like the attention being on her, and giving Sara what she’s asking for certainly means that everyone is going to be watching what they’re doing. Yet, Ava doesn’t want to turn down Sara’s request because they do work well together. Their time on this team has only proven that time and time again. They enter the field together and they leave it together, always watching the other’s back.

Ava closes her eyes as she takes in a slow breath, the room fading from around her as she tries to push down the building worries in her mind. Sara’s hand comes to rest just over her chest, a touch that grounds Ava, settling her rapidly beating heart. Working with Sara has only ever brought good things Ava’s way, so maybe if she’s lucky that will continue through their new roles. Opening her eyes once more, Ava finds Sara already watching her with a small smile. “Okay,” Ava exhales shakily as Sara’s smile widens, “We can be co-captains.”

Sara’s laugh is happy-sounding and bright as she nods her head, “We’re going to be the raddest co-captains ever.” Ava hopes they will be, she wants that to be true. Mirroring Sara’s smile, Ava leans in and kisses her once more, letting out a little laugh when she can feel Sara’s curved lips against her own. “This is better than having just one captain,” Sara comments as she pulls back, stepping away from Ava as she walks to the chair in the corner where her abandoned hoodie sits, “We’ve always worked well together.”

“With the exception of today,” Ava points out as Sara snorts, “I don’t think I want to be tasked with handling your teenage self for at least another five years minimum.” It’s Ava’s own fault really. Sara clearly hadn’t wanted to interact with her younger self so Ava had volunteered to handle everything with the younger Sara once she was back on the Waverider. It was a decision Ava swiftly regretted when she was met with an obnoxious amount of sarcasm and rude questions. “You said I was robotic,” Ava mutters as Sara smiles her way, “And insinuated that I have a very large stick up my ass.”

Again Sara just laughs, her eyes sparkling as she comes back over and slips her hand into Ava’s own. “Well, you weren’t exactly a dream to babysit either,” Sara teases as they walk from the room together. Ava winces slightly as they leave the Bridge, not wanting to think about Sara’s interactions with her nine-year-old self. “You spent the entire time correcting my grammar and word choice,” Sara continues on as Ava lets out a quiet groan, her cheeks flushing.

“That sounds about right,” Ava mumbles, still mortified that her girlfriend spent two hours with her younger self today. Sara hadn’t even said everything that Ava had done because Ava hadn’t wanted to know.

“And you said I was pretty,” Sara teases, leaning her head on Ava’s shoulder as Ava closes her eyes and curses her younger self for being such an embarrassment. Already Ava’s cheeks are hot, likely a very bright shade of pink. “It was sweet though,” Sara remarks while Ava hums, still not convinced, “And now I understand how you managed to win a regional spelling bee at such a

young age.”

“Alright,” Ava elbows Sara in the side as a gentle reprimand, “I think I can probably imagine the rest of the things I said and did as a nine-year-old—I don’t need the full recap, thank you.”

The doors to their room swish open as they step inside. Sara’s hand falls away from Ava’s own as she walks to the bed, already digging under her pillow where she keeps her pajamas. Not wanting to disturb Sara, Ava leans against the dresser to the side and watches on as Sara slips her shirt from her head. Silvered scars cover Sara’s skin, each one of them just as familiar to Ava as her own by now. Scattered bruises rest along her ribs, courtesy of her fight with the Pilgrim today back in Star City. Gideon had determined that none of Sara’s injuries needed medical attention, but still Ava doesn’t like seeing Sara hurt.

Sara’s bra hits the ground as she takes up the shirt on the bed, her head turning over her shoulder. Bright blue eyes meet Ava’s own, a single one of Sara’s brows raising as her lips curl in a suggestive smile. “No,” Ava shakes her head with a laugh when Sara takes a step towards her, “You’re bruised and battered, we are not doing anything tonight.”

“But Aves,” Sara pouts as Ava already rolls her eyes in anticipation of whatever leaves her mouth next, “The world could end tomorrow—you really want to pass up what could be your final opportunity to sleep with me.”

It’s said in a light tone, a teasing tone, but the joke falls flat. The words strike Ava hard, settling low in her chest. A heavy ache begins in her stomach, rattling through Ava’s body and pushing the oxygen from her lungs. Thoughts of all the potential danger that comes with tomorrow rise up in Ava’s mind. The file from Gdańsk flashes through Ava’s memory, the staged photos of Sara’s bruised body splayed across the photos. Sucking in a strangled breath, Ava closes her eyes and presses her fingertips into the dresser behind her. “That’s not funny, Sara,” Ava exhales quietly, feeling the pressure forming in her body as her legs feel unsteady.

Across the room, Ava hears Sara’s mumbled swearing before footsteps sound along the flooring. The pressure is only building, threatening to take over and send Ava into a panic. Sara is right, tomorrow could be the end for them, or for one of them. Ava knows that she can’t lose Sara again. She can’t go through what she did after she thought Sara died. An almost sob breaks free from Ava’s lungs, turning into a choked gasp as she squeezes her eyes shut.

A hand lands over her chest, pressing down hard just over her heart. Ava startles slightly before caving against Sara’s touch. “I’m sorry,” Sara murmurs, her voice close, her breath ghosting over Ava’s face, “I shouldn’t have joked about that—I didn’t mean it like that, Ava.” A few more murmured reassurances fall from Sara’s lips as Ava fists her fingers in Sara’s shirt, tugging at the soft material. She needs Sara closer. Sara complies, stepping further into Ava’s space as arms encircle Ava in a tight hug.

The pressure of the embrace is working. Ava can feel her heart rate slowing, her breathing evening out. She presses her nose into the crook of Sara’s neck and breathes in the familiar scent of Sara’s rose oil body lotion. As Sara’s hands stroke up and down Ava’s spine in soothing motions, Ava shoves the rest of her thoughts from her mind.

Inside, Ava’s chest is still tight, her stomach still forming knots as she backs away from Sara and forces her eyes open. “I know you didn’t mean it like that,” Ava replies, voice strained as she takes in Sara’s worried expression, “I know that—I just can’t think about you—” Ava’s voice trails off, unable to even consider finishing that sentence. Sara’s expression morphs into one of understanding as she nods her head, her hand slipping from where it had resettled over Ava’s chest and sliding up to the back of her neck instead.

When Sara tugs on Ava lightly, Ava sinks into Sara's embrace again, wrapping her arms tightly around her. The press of their bodies is nothing but familiar, yet Ava soaks it in and attempts to burn this feeling into her memory. If something happens to Sara tomorrow, Ava doesn't want to forget the way that Sara always pushes up on her toes to hug Ava even though Ava's only two inches taller. Ava can't ever forget the way that Sara squeezes Ava tight even in the moments where Ava feels like she might break apart.

She has to remember the soft coconut scent of Sara's hair and the way she can feel Sara's lashes fluttering against her neck. She has to tuck away the fact that Sara's nose is sometimes cold when she hides it in Ava's shoulder or against her throat, and the fact that Sara prefers to slip her hands under Ava's shirt when they hug. But most importantly, Ava can't forget the way that everything somehow feels okay when she's wrapped in the safe haven of Sara's arms.

Ava's heart is slowing down now, the pressure receding away once more as Ava takes in a steady breath. "I'm sorry," Sara mumbles once more, her lips meeting the side of Ava's neck once, and then twice more.

All Ava does is shake her head as she pulls back from Sara's embrace. "It's okay," Ava reassures her, thumbing at the corner of Sara's mouth where her lips pull down in a frown, "I'm okay now—let's just go to bed." When Sara nods and walks to the bed, Ava follows after her. However, instead of crawling over to her side, Sara settles right in the center of the bed and leans against the headboard.

Raising her brows, Ava looks to Sara who jerks down the side of the light blue bedding. "Come here," Sara beckons, patting the space in front of her that she's created between her legs. Ava really is tired, and she'd like to get some sleep before they have to get up in the morning and go over everything once more, but she's powerless to say no to Sara.

The mattress dips down as Ava clammers over Sara's leg, her movements ungraceful as she settles into Sara's lap. A hand along her waist guides her into place as Ava leans back against Sara's chest. Strong arms wrap around Ava's body, the lights already dimming in the room around them. Behind Ava, Sara hums and a nose nuzzles against the back of Ava's neck.

Content to just sit in silence, Ava draws the covers up around her waist and rests her palms over Sara's arms. Along Sara's elbow there's a cut there, a jagged line that came from the time they fought each other in an elevator. Ava hadn't meant to slam Sara into the railing as hard as she did, though it had been the only thing that allowed Ava to escape from Sara's hold that day. Now Ava trails her fingers along that same scar, tenderly mapping over the raised mark.

Sara is silent behind Ava, her breathing evening out against the side of Ava's neck. The hands along Ava's abdomen are beginning to slacken so Ava carefully takes them in her own hands and rests them in her lap instead. "Are you falling asleep back there?" Ava teases when Sara startles at the touch, her head jolting away from Ava's neck.

"No," Sara mumbles before Ava hears a quiet yawn escape from Sara's lips, "I was just resting my eyes." A smile tugs at the corners of Ava's lips while she exhales in amusement. "I'm not tired," Sara continues on, her words slurring slightly as she tucks her face back in the crook of Ava's neck, "Just comfortable."

Choosing to say nothing, Ava just raises Sara's hand up to her lips and delicately lays kisses along each of Sara's knuckles. Behind her she can hear Sara's stuttered inhale that always comes after Ava does something like this. Ava loves that she can draw these kinds of reactions from Sara just from doing something as simple as kissing her hand. Tucking Sara's palm between both of her own, Ava rests their hands under her chin.

The nerves in her stomach haven't gone away, and neither has the looming sense of dread. This moment reminds Ava all too much of that night in the cabin before Henry and the others arrived. There's a fight tomorrow, one that they might not survive. Last time the fight was in the woods and the stakes were high, but not as high as they will be tomorrow. Ava suppresses a small shudder, not wanting to think about what might happen if their plan fails.

Turning her attention back to Sara's arm, Ava finds a silvered scar at the base of Sara's palm, one that she knows came from Sara's time on the Gambit. While Ava doesn't know the story behind all of Sara's scars, she's learned most of them. If Ava ever lingers over one, always pressing her lips to the raised marks, Sara will sometimes open up about its origin. This particular scar Ava knows came as a result of Sara falling from the boat the night the Gambit sunk. Her hand caught on a stray piece of broken wood as she slipped below cold waves.

Ava holds Sara's hand a bit tighter, her stomach clenching at the thought of how many times Sara nearly died before they met. Something dawns on Ava as she brings Sara's hand up to her lips once more. "Sara," Ava murmurs, turning her head to the side as Sara blinks open sleepy-looking blue eyes, "Can I ask you something?" A quiet hum comes from Sara as she lifts her head up, yawning once more as Ava nervously pieces together her words. "Today we had a run in with our younger selves," Ava begins timidly as Sara just raises her brows and nods, "I just—you could have set everything right. You could have warned yourself about the boat—but you didn't."

Ava rubs at Sara's thumb with her own, glancing down at their joined hands rather than looking at Sara's face, "Why not rewrite your past if it was so painful?" A strangled sound comes from Sara, one that has Ava instantly regretting her decision to try and ask that question. "Sorry," Ava winces as she shakes her head and turns around, "Forget I asked that—you were trying to go to sleep." Ava shakes her head once more before reclining back in Sara's arms and tapping Sara's hand, "Ignore me."

A chin settles along Ava's shoulder as Sara lets out a quiet and raspy sounding laugh. "I'm not going to ignore you, Aves," Sara replies as Ava hums nervously, her foot tapping at nothing under the covers, "You just surprised me with that question."

It's one that Ava had earlier, but she hadn't mentioned it. "When you went to the Cargo Bay to sort out the fight between younger you and younger Mick, I thought you might have told yourself about the boat then," Ava shrugs, flicking her thumb over Sara's fingers as she sighs, "I would have understood if you wanted to rewrite it all. You've been through more than enough in this life—nobody could blame you for taking a chance to change things for the better."

Sara's breath is warm against Ava's neck when she exhales quietly before taking in a shaky sounding breath. "Who says that I would be changing it for the better?" Sara asks.

Not understanding, Ava turns around once more, shuffling away from Sara so she can look at her. "If you had told your younger self about the boat, you never would have nearly drowned that night," Ava points out, talking slowly as Sara just stares back at her with raised brows, "If you don't nearly drown, then you're never found by the Amazo and you never go through that year from hell. If that never happens, then you'd never join the League and endure everything you did there." Ava shakes her head and gives Sara a sad smile, "Why wouldn't changing all of those things be better than living through them?"

Again Sara lets out a quiet sigh, her lips morphing into a smile as she does so. Confused, Ava shuffles backwards again so she's able to fully face Sara. "You're only listing the bad things that came from my time on that boat," Sara says, her tone gentle as she smiles at Ava, "If I never sunk on the Gambit, then I never would have gained all the things I have in this life. I'd never get to

travel the world, I'd never get to learn real independence, I'd never get a chance to have deeper family connections when I return, and I'd never get this team." Slowly, Ava nods her head, but Sara reaches out and grabs Ava's hand. "And, I wouldn't get the chance to find you," Sara mumbles, still looking at her lap, "You're the best thing I've gained in all of this."

Ava's heart picks up inside her chest as she lets out a stuttered exhale. Still staring back at Sara, Ava watches as Sara's head lifts up once more, her eyes soft and shining in the dim lighting. "Yeah, there was a lot about my life I wish I could change, but not if it meant losing the good," Sara explains, waving her free hand in the air, "I loved seeing everything I did in the League, and I love my family and you—"

The moment those words are spoken, Ava feels the oxygen leave her lungs. Sara continues talking but Ava can't hear what she's saying. Inside Ava's chest, her heart stutters slightly, the beats asynchronous and discordant as she stares back at Sara in shock and surprise. Her throat has gone tight, not responding to her commands to speak up, to say something. "Sara," Ava attempts to interrupt Sara's speech about the team now, "Sara."

Finally Sara stops talking, her lips still parted as her brows draw over eyes and she frowns slightly. Ava stares at her, still stuck in some kind of suspended animation as her heart goes wild in her chest. "Did you just say you love me?" Ava breathes out, her hands pressing into her thighs as she waits for Sara's response.

Instantly Sara's expression shifts, her eyes widening in realization before she looks to the side. Sara's lips form a tight line, her gaze not returning to Ava's own. Disappointment slips through Ava's chest, chasing away the nervous excitement and shock that had taken over. Ava's shoulders fall slightly, her throat restricting as her eyes begin to sting. Just as Ava is about to tell Sara it's fine—that she's fine; she'll be fine—Sara interrupts her.

"Yeah," Sara's voice is a mere whisper, "I did." Ava's eyes fly to Sara's own, her lungs not taking in enough oxygen when she sucks in a deep breath.

Sara hasn't moved from her position, her eyes still soft, her lips lifted in a nervous looking smile. Seconds pass as Ava stares back at her, shocked into complete silence. "Really?" Ava manages out incredulously, not even able to properly form a response, "Are you sure?" In front of her, Sara is laughing, her cheeks pink and her eyes that same familiar blue color that Ava has always loved.

"Yes, Ava, of course I'm sure," Sara shakes her head in amusement as Ava feels the warmth in her chest bubbling over. The smile on Ava's face nearly hurts as she pushes up on her knees and leans into Sara's space. Ava has to tuck her fingers under Sara's chin to tilt her head up so she can kiss her over and over. Joy and elation carve through Ava, chasing away everything else as she smiles against Sara's mouth.

Backing up once more, Ava settles back down on the bed and holds Sara's face in her hands. Sara's cheeks are still flushed and warm to the touch, her eyes shining gently in the low light. Fingers wrap around Ava's wrists, holding her in place as Ava leans in once more and swiftly pecks Sara's nose. "I love you too," Ava tells her quietly, keeping their faces close together. Ava's heartbeat is still far too rapid, the pressure and warmth in her body taking over everything else as she swallows around the restrictive feeling in her throat.

The stinging in Ava's eyes hasn't gone away, and when she blinks, she can feel a single tear rolling down her cheek. Sara hums quietly, her hand coming up to wipe it away as she looks to Ava with a worried expression. "Sorry," Ava tells her, backing away and shaking her head. A few more tears fall as she does so, tears that Ava quickly swipes away with her fingers. "They're good tears," she reassures Sara as Sara follows after her, now leaning in Ava's space, "I just—" Ava lifts her

shoulder in a small shrug, letting out a sigh and not knowing what to say, “You love me.”

A smile takes over Sara’s face, a little laugh falling between them as Ava joins in with Sara’s laughter. “I do,” Sara murmurs, her hand coming to rest on Ava’s face, her fingers sweeping under Ava’s eyes with so much tenderness it makes Ava ache, “God I do, Ava, and I have for a while.”

Somehow, Ava thinks that she knew that. There are times where Sara has looked at Ava with that delicate smile and those shining eyes, and Ava has felt loved. She has felt adored whenever Sara slips from their bed in the mornings but always draws the covers over Ava first and kisses her on the cheek or forehead. Ava has felt cherished when she comes back from the shower after a long day and finds that Sara has laid a towel over their bed so she can massage out the worst of Ava’s muscle aches. They always were better with actions than words, but now Sara has said the words.

Ava used to think that it took them saying the words to make things real, but now she’s learned that actions can be based in just as much reality as words are. Still, Ava thinks that hearing the words doesn’t hurt. “You love me,” Ava exhales again, still trying to absorb the words.

Again Sara laughs quietly, her head dipping down as Ava smiles. “Yes, Ava,” Sara replies, her smile bright, “I love you.” Once more warmth radiates out from Ava’s chest, spreading all throughout her stomach and her limbs. Her cheeks heat as fingers slip along her jawbone, threading into her hair. “I loved you even before I was ready to love someone again,” Sara’s voice grows softer now, her lips twitching downwards, “The full truth of why I couldn’t stay away from you after Gdansk.”

Typically, Ava does her best not to remember that night Sara came back. She tries not to think about the way that the blood had soaked through to her undershirt and into her socks before she stumbled into the hotel room. Ava usually doesn’t reflect on how she thought Sara was a ghost, just some figment of her imagination that had come back to haunt her. But now all she can think about is the way Sara was looking at her that night, with soft worried eyes. All Ava can think about is the panic in Sara’s expression and the tenderness in her touch.

Not able to say anything to that, Ava just wraps Sara up in her arms and holds her close. Sara’s head tucks over her shoulder, her palms pressing into Ava’s shoulder blades. Closing her eyes, Ava tilts her head to the side and buries her nose in Sara’s hair, inhaling the coconut scent coming from the soft strands. Wrapped in the new silence that’s settled in the room, Ava focuses on the feeling of Sara’s steady heartbeat against her chest. The pressure in Ava’s body has receded, the calm returning once more. In her arms, Ava can feel Sara’s limbs getting heavy, her head tilting against Ava’s own.

Shifting on the bed, Ava nudges Sara away from her so she can move to lay down. Finally resting against the pillows, Ava reaches up and draws Sara down into her. Sara collides with Ava’s chest with dramatic flourish as Ava just smiles and wraps Sara up in her arms. “I loved you back then too,” Ava confesses, sighing as Sara tucks her nose in the crook of her neck. Mirroring Sara’s words from before, Ava whispers, “The full truth of why I fell apart after I thought you died.”

Sara’s hand slips up to cover Ava’s heart, her palm pressing down with gentle pressure. Ava can feel the warmth of Sara’s skin radiating through her thin shirt. Closing her eyes, Ava rests her own hand over Sara’s own and leaves it there. “I can’t lose you again,” Ava tells Sara, squeezing her fingers between her own, “Tomorrow you can’t play the hero. I know you’re the captain now, but don’t take risks—please.”

“I promise,” Sara replies, her lips meeting the column of Ava’s neck before she brushes her nose over that same patch of skin, “We’re co-captains now, I couldn’t ever leave you.” Ava can hear the way that Sara’s voice is quieting down, her words slurring once more. With a small smile, Ava

raises her hand up and carefully holds Sara's head against her chest. "Aves," Sara mumbles with a quiet yawn. Humming softly, Ava turns her head to the side and kisses Sara's forehead. Sara makes a quiet contented sound before sighing out, "You're the only co-captain I'd want in this life."

The smile that takes over Ava's face nearly hurts as she kisses Sara's forehead one more time before drawing the covers around them. "Me too," Ava hums, settling into her pillow as Sara snuggles closer, "I love you, Sara." Something in Ava's chest flutters free now that she can say those words. Now Ava doesn't have to hold them in anytime Sara does something endearing or sweet. When Sara stumbles over her own feet in the early mornings or insists on eating just plain oatmeal for every breakfast, Ava can say those three words as much as she wants.

Sara mumbles out a reply, one that's far too muffled for Ava to hear, but that's okay. The lights in the room dim completely after Ava reaches over her head and taps the switch mounted just above the bed. Darkness settles over the room as Ava holds Sara close. Tomorrow brings a danger unlike one they've ever faced before. There's no certainty regarding the plan, and no guarantee that they're going to win this. Ava has no idea what 2166 might have in store for them. The only thing she knows is that she and Sara are going to face it together—the way things always should be.

Waverider, Temporal Zone — 08:15

Gentle mechanical humming sounds blanket the room around Ava as she slowly blinks her eyes open. With a quiet groan, Ava buries her face back into her pillow, annoyed that she has somehow woken before her alarms have gone off. Every bone and muscle in her body aches in protest as she stretches out, her arms raised over her head and her legs extending under the covers. Something warm brushes against Ava's thigh as she moves, a hand pushing into her space and connecting solidly with her chest.

An elbow follows after the hand, knocking Ava right in the ribcage as Ava lets out a quiet grunt. Sara's never careful about where she flings her limbs in the morning—forever waking Ava on accident as a hand or knee catches Ava along her sides. Shifting over to her side, Ava faces Sara and captures the stray hand between her own. In Ava's grasp, Sara's fingers are cold, her limb limp as she sleeps on. With a small smile, Ava raises Sara's hand to her lips and lays gentle kisses over each of Sara's knuckles as she gazes at Sara who is still sound asleep.

The covers tangled around Ava and Sara are warmed with their shared body heat, the blankets soft where they fall around Ava's chest. Ava inhales slowly, her smile widening as she looks to Sara's sleep-flushed cheeks and all the soft bare skin on display.

This is the most peace they've had in months. Unlike the mornings before this one, there is no reason to get out of bed immediately after waking. And hopefully there will be no reason for one of Ava and Sara's shipmates to interrupt their time together. In the two years that have passed since Ava and Sara set foot on the Waverider, Ava thinks that she could count on two hands how many mornings she and Sara have had a chance to sleep in.

In a way, life on a timeship is similar to Ava's life as a spy before. They're usually working in a different city at a different time each mission they run. And as before, the goal is typically to get in and out of a location without being noticed, or without being blamed. Ava still is on the run, but this time she's also running through time as well as running through different cities and countries. But that is where the similarities begin and end.

Unlike before, the stakes are a lot higher. Mistakes made in the timeline don't just result in a single consequence, they result in a domino effect of consequences that ripple through the timeline. One

wrong move could erase billions of people from existence, and Ava has come to learn that there's not a single person in the timeline who is insignificant. Remove one individual from their time stream, and the future crumbles. Everything in time is connected, and everything requires very precise movements and actions in order to guarantee the preservation of the future.

Yet, despite all of the troubles that come with this new job, Ava prefers this kind of danger over the kinds she faced as a spy. This time around, Ava's not alone. In the beginning, it was just her and Sara forming a team over their own. But over time, barriers and walls broke down, the group forging from a collection of individuals into a family of sorts. Some have come and gone, but Ava doesn't see herself or Sara leaving anytime soon. This is their job now. Living on a timeship isn't always easy, but this ship has turned into a home for Ava—the first one that she has had in a long time.

A quiet sigh falls from Sara's lips, a sound that gains Ava's attention as she shuffles her cheek along the pillow. Sara's splayed on her stomach, one leg hitched up in Ava's space, her arm still tucked against Ava's chest. Thousands of freckles adorn the pale skin along Sara's back, intermixed with scars that Ava now knows all the stories behind. Warmth ripples through Ava's chest, her breath leaving her lungs in a quiet exhale of awe. There are times where Ava is convinced that loving Sara has been encoded into the cells in her body, her physiology altered and rewired to reflect this change. Certainly this moment is one of those times where Ava is sure that has to be true.

With a single hand, Ava reaches out and traces her fingers along Sara's spine, drawing a quiet grumble from her girlfriend. Under Ava's hand Sara stirs, her movements slow and sluggish as her nose wrinkles up. "Babe," Sara mumbles, her voice raspy and thick with sleep, "It's not time yet—go back to sleep." Unable to fight the smile off her face, Ava ignores the aching in her muscles as she rolls further to her side and moves so she's face to face with Sara. Blonde hair spills messily over the pillow, strands tangling around Sara's temples and shoulders. Several pieces fall into her eyes, each strand silky soft as Ava brushes them away from Sara's face and tucks them behind her ears. "Ava," Sara mutters in protest again.

This time she tucks her face away, petulantly burying it into the pillow with a quiet groan. Ava's smile only widens as she watches on, her fingers feathering through Sara's hair at the nape of her neck. Again Sara grumbles something out that sounds a lot like an insult, but Ava ignores her, instead reaching out and tugging Sara into her. Abandoning her pillow, Sara nuzzles her face into Ava's neck instead, her nose cold as she runs it along the side of Ava's jaw. "Good morning to you too," Ava teases lightly as she wraps Sara in her arms.

A sleepy grunt comes from Sara, her breath striking the side of Ava's neck in warm puffs of air. Ava marvels silently at the feeling of Sara's body pressed against her own, all soft curves and hard lines of muscle. Legs tangle with Ava's own under the covers, one hitched over her thigh so Sara is further encroaching on Ava's space. Everything the past few weeks has been so chaotic, Ava hadn't realized how badly she needed a morning like this until this moment. Quietly, Ava lets out a breathy exhale, her chest tight with so much relief that it nearly hurts.

Undoubtedly, Sara will fall asleep again soon if Ava lets her stay like this for too long. Yet Ava can't bring herself to move. After the past week and a half they've had, sleeping in is something they deserve. "Is something wrong?" Sara questions, her lashes fluttering along Ava's throat, the sensation vaguely ticklish.

"No, everything is okay," Ava reassures her, checking the monitor off to the side of the room just to make sure that she's not wrong in making that statement. But the screen is black, no sign of an impending anachronism that requires their attention. Everything in the room is still dimmed and

quiet, a sign that Gideon hasn't chosen to wake them yet this morning. "I think I'm still just acclimating to slow mornings," Ava confesses as Sara lets out a quiet snort before Ava can feel her yawning.

"It's probably going to take us both a while," Sara complains, her arm tightening around Ava's bare waist. Against Ava's side, she can feel the soft warmth of Sara's body pressed against her own. Their clothing still litters the floor from the night before, each article shed with the intent of tangling together in the sheets, but instead they were both far too tired after the battle. Ava's shoulder still twinges from where she's sure she pulled a muscle while fighting a demon possessed Roman soldier.

Sara's not in any better shape. Last night Ava had surveyed the worst of her injuries after Sara refused to go to the Med Bay where Gideon would have been able to heal her. She insisted that she was too tired to do anything but fall into bed, and Ava had agreed so they came back here. Even now, Ava traces her fingers over the bruises that line Sara's ribcage, the dark marks blossoming over bone and muscle. Under her touch, Sara doesn't even so much as flinch, but Ava does hear her breathing catching. "Sorry, love," Ava murmurs, turning her head so she can gently kiss Sara's forehead.

Sara isn't in as bad of shape as she could be, but Ava hates that she was hurt in the first place. Yesterday, it took every ounce of self-control Ava had to remain where she was in the fight instead of constantly keeping her eye on Sara. With a small frown, Ava runs just her fingertips over the worst of the bruising right at Sara's collarbone. "Hey," Sara murmurs, her voice low and soft as Ava's eyes flicker upwards. Shining blue eyes gaze back at Ava, a small smile resting along Sara's lips.

When Sara's hand slips up to rest along Ava's jaw, Ava's eyes flutter shut. She can feel Sara shuffling upwards, the mattress dipping before Sara settles near Ava's face. "I'm okay," Sara reassures as Ava does her best to nod her head, her heart momentarily stuttering with the remembrance that Sara almost wasn't okay. Sara's forehead comes to rest along Ava's own as Sara speaks soothingly, "It's you and me until the end remember?"

Again the best Ava can offer at this moment is a small nod, not wanting to think about all the times in the past few months that the end nearly came sooner than Ava ever wanted it to. Ideally, now that the timeline is safe from Mallus once more, that won't be a worry that Ava needs to have any longer. The mattress dips again just before Ava feels Sara drawing closer. Soft lips meet Ava's skin, kissing her chin, then her lips, then her nose. Ava feels heat creep up into her cheeks just as Sara kisses her nose once more. "You're stuck with me Sharpe," Sara teases in a hushed tone, already smiling when Ava slowly opens her eyes, "You'd really have to work to get rid of me at this point."

"Good thing I don't want to," Ava remarks, watching as Sara's smile only widens. Ava rolls to her side once more, angling her body so she's aligned with Sara's own under the covers. Now facing each other again, Ava reaches out and takes Sara's hand, tucking it against her chest.

"I always knew you liked the adventure I bring to your life," Sara teases, her eyes sparkling as Ava just scoffs quietly, fighting off her smile. Sara repositions, resting her head on the arm that she lays under her head, her hand reaching over Ava's own head and tangling in Ava's hair. Warmth bubbles up in Ava's chest as Sara takes in a slow breath before letting it out again, her smile soft and her eyes bright.

With a smile of her own, Ava tilts her head further into the pillow before resting her lips along Sara's knuckles. "I always knew you were going to be trouble," Ava corrects Sara, watching as

Sara's brows raise, her smile widening, "The moment I saw you in that bar, and then again when you decided to get in my way in that apartment complex in Austria."

"That night was fun," Sara laughs, the bright and free sound of her laughter making Ava's lips curl upwards.

"You just have a thing for being shoved against walls," Ava taunts as Sara snorts, "That and you never have been able to avoid provoking unwarranted fights when you feel slighted."

More laughter tumbles from Sara's lips, Ava joining in as she presses a series of light kisses along Sara's knuckles and the back of her hand. When Sara exhales quietly, Ava tips her head to the side, resting her cheek against their joined hands. "It was more that I had a thing for you," Sara confesses, her smile shy as Ava raises her brows. "And of course I liked it when you pinned me against walls," Sara shrugs as Ava tips her head back with a chuckle, "I still love making you angry so start off on one of those lectures and make m—"

"That's good," Ava cuts Sara off, resting a single finger along Sara's smiling lips to prevent her from finishing that sentence, "I am well aware of the fact that you enjoyed pissing me off—you certainly told me enough times."

Once more Sara shrugs, not looking apologetic in the slightest. "It was hot," Sara continues on as Ava rolls her eyes. While Ava had fun back then in those moments too, she much prefers what she and Sara have now. In front of her, Sara has gone quiet once more, her gaze caught on the thumb Ava's drawing over her hand, her fingers stilled in Ava's hair. "Do you still think that I'm trouble?" Sara asks, her voice quiet, her expression almost shy when she looks upwards once more.

Warmth chases through Ava's chest, pushing up the back of her throat as she laughs quietly. "Oh, absolutely," Ava confesses as Sara's smile lifts further. Reaching out, Ava lays her free hand along Sara's cheek and smooths her thumb over the scar resting just at Sara's temple. "You will always be trouble," Ava murmurs as Sara rolls her eyes, "But you're mine."

All that comes in reply is Sara's cheeks flushing a soft pink color. As Sara shifts on the bed, she lets out a quiet little exhale and moves her hand so it's now resting near Ava's collarbone. "Your shoulder?" Sara asks, her fingertips gently pressing into the sore muscle along Ava's bone. With a non-committal sound, Ava does her best to lift the aching joint before rolling to her back once more. "You should've brought the guns," Sara comments as Ava snorts and rolls her eyes fondly, "You always were better with those as compared to a staff or a sword."

"Maybe I'm just trying to keep up with you," Ava teases, trailing her fingers up Sara's side as Sara lets out a little laugh, "Not all of us can master every weapon we pick up." Instead of answering Ava, Sara just grunts again before snuggling in even closer. With a smile, Ava lifts her arm up and lets Sara burrow into her side before she tugs the covers around both of their bodies. Warmth billows around them both, encompassing them in their own little bubble. Aside from the constant whirring that comes from the Waverider, the only other sound Ava can hear is Sara's quiet breathing.

In her arms, Sara stirs slightly, letting out a sleepy-sounding grumble as her hand slips down to rest over Ava's heart. Under her touch, Ava can feel her own heart rate pick up the same way it always does when Sara does that. Two years hasn't changed a single thing about the way Ava reacts to Sara. "Can you believe we're here?" Ava muses, staring up at the ceiling as Sara shuffles against her side, "Over the course of two years, we've saved the world three times. Once from a power hungry immortal, then from a Legion of assholes—" Sara snorts into her neck as Ava smiles and continues, "And now from an actual demon."

“This wasn’t what you imagined when we said we’d go save the world?” Sara teases, her voice muffled as she presses her lips against Ava’s neck. With a small shake of her head, Ava skims her hand up and down Sara’s back as she continues to stare up at the ceiling. After the events that transpired yesterday with a horde of Vikings, a whole pirate crew, a Roman army, and an oversized blue toy brought to life, it’s hard for Ava to not reel from the new realization that this is their normal now.

“Did you think this is what we were getting into?” Ava counters, scooting backwards along the bed so she can curl on her side and face Sara. Sleepy blue eyes stare back at her, Sara’s lips forming a pout even as Ava reaches out and gently thumbs at the pillow creases along her cheeks. Warmth flutters softly in Ava’s chest, her smile only growing as Sara sighs contentedly when Ava settles her palm along Sara’s jaw.

For a moment Sara’s eyes close and Ava’s convinced she’s going to ignore the question in favor of going to sleep again. But then they open once more and Sara sighs. “Did I think that we were going to join a fanatical Time Master who led us on a wild goose chase after some immortal he had a grudge match with over his wife and kid,” Sara mutters as Ava snorts quietly, “No. And I didn’t see the rest of it coming either, not the alternative timelines, not the biblical Spear of Destiny, not the anachronisms—”

“Well, you did break time,” Ava points out teasingly as Sara levels her with a look. It’s not an argument Ava is going to get into with her again this morning, but that particular decision to interact with their past selves is something that she and Sara had argued over. While they did decide to go back together, it was Sara’s original idea and Ava’s not going to let her live that down.

“Do you ever miss it?” Sara asks, the question coming suddenly. Not needing to ask what Sara means by that, Ava lets out a quiet sigh before glancing up at the ceiling and thinking of her time as a spy. Two years ago Ava might have said that she missed the life they had before where the dangers were more known, where their running was based in more linear time.

But now, Ava just shakes her head before looking back to Sara once more. “No,” Ava replies with more certainty than she’s ever felt before, “Somehow, I think that this is where I was meant to end up.” In her time here, Ava has come to see that there is constantly so much outside her control. Time is fragile, almost delicate, and when working with the timeline, even the best laid plans quickly go to hell. Everything is constantly in a state of flux, and Ava has learned that there are moments where it is best to sit back and let the universe take over. While something like that might have made Ava balk in the past, it’s simply something she embraces now.

Missing the past would mean admitting that there’s something missing here in Ava’s present, and that’s not the case. “Like fate?” Sara teases, her lips lifting up even as Ava’s thumb remains tucked in her dimple.

“Something like that,” Ava murmurs, letting her hand fall away from Sara’s face as she returns to her back again. This time Sara follows after her, settling back over Ava’s chest. A leg is thrown over Ava’s own under the covers, Sara’s head settling along Ava’s breastbone. “Or you know—” Ava lifts her shoulder in a shrug as she traces her fingers along Sara’s upper arm, “It could have just been some meddling assassin getting in my way and screwing my life up for the better.”

Ava can feel Sara’s laughter against her own chest, the vibrations traveling through her skin. “Lucky you,” Sara remarks, her head turning to the side as she lays a soft kiss to Ava’s skin. Already smiling, Ava cradles Sara’s head against her, weaving her fingers through silky soft hair.

She’ll have to agree with that assessment. As angry as Ava was with Sara in the beginning for following her around everywhere, Ava is nothing but thankful that Sara persisted in her annoying

habits. Silence settles in the room once more, Sara's breathing evening out again as Ava rhythmically combs her fingers through Sara's hair, a trick that has never once failed to put Sara back to sleep. Beneath the covers, Sara's legs twitch, a tell-tale sign that she's seconds from slipping under once more. She deserves some rest, and Ava is more than happy to just hold Sara for a bit longer this morning, even if they really should get up eventually.

Just as Ava's eyes are closing as well, their rest is interrupted. Outside their room, a crashing sound comes from the hallway, disturbing the peaceful bubble inside their room. Muttering under her breath in annoyance, Ava sits up in the bed. The bed covers fall near her waist as the lights rise up in the room, illuminating the mess of clothing Sara left spread all over their floor the night before. "Leave it," Sara complains, her fingers wrapping around Ava's wrist and tugging lightly. The motion pulls Ava's hand out from under her, leading to her collapsing back on the pillow again. "They'll be fine," Sara mutters, curling into Ava once more, "The kids are old enough to take care of themselves for once."

With a fond laugh, Ava raises her hand up and threads her fingers through Sara's hair. Lips press lazy kisses against the side of her neck as Ava hums quietly. "I'd like to remind you that Zari broke the Galley fabricator twice in one week," Ava comments as Sara grumbles, "And Ray is currently working on creating a new chemical compound that even Gideon called dangerous the other day."

This time Sara just lets out a quiet sigh of what has to be resignation as she tucks her face into Ava's shoulder. "We could just let Gideon handle it," Sara suggests as Ava laughs quietly, turning her head to the side so she can lay a delicate kiss along Sara's forehead, "Gideon has been slacking on her babysitting duties recently."

It's not that Gideon has been slacking, it's that the others have been finding increasingly clever ways to break the rules. "We would be irresponsible co-captains if we did that," Ava chides as Sara just lifts her shoulder in a small shrug, "We should get up soon to go see what that was." Ava knows that Sara's just as curious to see what caused the crashing sound as she is, and it won't be long before that curiosity wins out over the desire to have a lazy morning.

"I think we're allowed to be irresponsible every once in a while," Sara hums, propping up on her elbow. Blonde hair tumbles down her shoulders and chest, her head tilted to the side as sparkling blue eyes look down at Ava. With a smile of her own, Ava reaches up and draws Sara into her, kissing her gently before Sara collapses back down onto her again. This time Sara is all but on top of Ava, her limbs thrown over Ava's own, her head tucked under Ava's chin. Against her chest, Ava can feel the rhythmic beating of Sara's heart against her own.

That warmth is back in Ava's chest, spreading to her stomach and throughout the rest of her body as she smiles and rests one palm along Sara's spine, the other cradling Sara's head to her chest. In her arms, Sara shuffles, letting out an impatient little sigh that lets Ava know there's not much longer left until Sara decides to go hunt down the source of the crashing sound. With a single hand, Ava brings her knuckles up to Sara's face and delicately trails them along the bruised skin of Sara's cheek. "I love you," Ava murmurs, her chest flooding with unbridled affection when she watches Sara's lips twitch upwards.

A happy sounding hum falls from Sara's lips, her head turning to the side just as a kiss is pressed against Ava's breastbone. "I love you too Aves," Sara mumbles, tucking her face back down along Ava's chest, "Did you ever see us ending up here?"

Unequivocally no. Ava can't help the little laugh that breaks loose from her throat as she smiles. "Certainly not," Ava replies as Sara lifts her head up, "I did not think that saying yes to a British man with an ego bigger than the timeline would lead to us fighting demons and formerly dead

villains.” Sara raises her brows and nods her head, clicking her tongue quietly as Ava reaches up and tucks loose hair behind Sara’s ears. “Nor did I think that teaming up with you was going to lead me to turning my back on everything I was taught,” Ava comments as Sara just snorts, “You’re a bit of a handful, Sara Lance.”

“You wouldn’t have me any other way,” Sara remarks, that knowing smile on her face as Ava grins back. Shaking her head in amusement, Ava guides Sara’s face down to her own and kisses her softly. Before backing up, Ava kisses her once, twice, three more times, just because she can. That shy smile rests along Sara’s lips when Ava withdraws, a soft blush coloring her cheeks.

Elation and adoration bubble in little bursts inside Ava’s chest, the sensation nearly overwhelming as she smiles up at Sara. “But I did have a feeling pretty early into our time together that you were going to be hard to get rid of,” Ava teases as Sara lets out a happy-sounding laugh, “I guess it’s a good thing I turned out to be right.”

When Sara looks down again, her eyes are bright and soft, reflecting the love that Ava’s sure Sara can see in her own expression. “You’re right,” Sara remarks evenly, nodding her head as Ava looks to her with raised brows, “It’s a very good thing you still have me around.”

A quiet laugh tumbles free from Ava’s lips as she nudges Sara’s side. Shaking her head in amusement, Ava tucks a loose strand of hair behind Sara’s ear and hums to herself. “In everything we’ve been through—” Ava lets out a quiet sigh, her lips quirked upwards as she thumbs Sara’s chin, “Loving you has been the easiest part of it all.”

The smile that overtakes Sara’s face is wider than it’s been this morning. Dimples appear in her cheeks as the corners of her eyes crease. Ava’s statement was more than true. She has a new job that she loves—even with all the dangers—and a family now. These are things that Ava hadn’t even dared to hope for before Sara crashed into her life. Before Ava can say anything else, Sara shifts on top of her so she’s now straddling Ava. Warm bare skin presses against Ava’s body, the junction of Sara’s hips meeting Ava’s lower stomach. “Sara,” Ava says her name in warning with a little smile and a laugh as Sara leans down over her, “We have to go see what the others are doing. We have to be responsible.”

As Ava raises her hands up to gently push Sara off her, Sara catches Ava’s wrists, her fingers wrapping around the joints. “I thought you like when I cause a little bit of trouble,” Sara teases, her hands already pushing Ava’s own up and over her head. The motion brings them face to face, their chests brushing as Ava’s breathing stutters slightly. Sara must hear the sound, her lips curving upwards in a smirk as she tilts her head to the side.

“We have responsibilities that won’t take care of themselves,” Ava reminds Sara even as Sara dips her head down. Warm lips meet the junction of Ava’s jaw and her neck, her words catching in her throat. “Sara,” Ava tries again, gently jostling Sara, “We cannot stay in here all morning.”

A laugh comes from Sara, the vibrations of the sound rippling through Ava’s skin where Sara’s mouth is still resting against her. “I’m not moving,” Sara replies, sitting up once more, her eyes sparkling with a challenge, “So the question is—” Sara trails off, a single finger running down the length of Ava’s chest as Ava’s eyes follow the movement, “What are you going to do about it?”

Shaking her head, Ava just smiles and reaches up, her hand tucked along the side of Sara’s jaw to draw her down once more. Sara is already smiling when Ava kisses her, her lips pulled tight as Ava frees her hands from Sara’s hold. Carefully, Ava settles them on Sara’s waist before carefully locking her ankles around Sara’s own. By the time Sara realizes what Ava is attempting and breaks the kiss, Ava has already bridged her hips upwards to roll them.

Now Sara lays under Ava, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright as she stares up at Ava in surprise. “This is better,” Ava teases as Sara lets out a surprised-sounding laugh. Placing her palm on the center of Sara’s chest, Ava gazes down at her girlfriend. Tangled blonde hair is still splayed over the pillow, Sara’s hands resting up near her face. Under Ava’s palm rest constellations of freckles that dapple soft, pale skin.

That painful looking scar near Sara’s heart is right by Ava’s hand. With her thumb, Ava smooths the mark over, remembering back to the first time she saw this very scar along Sara’s skin. Even back then when they were fighting, Ava remembers feeling a small ache when she saw this wound. “It’s a good thing I broke my rule for you,” Ava muses, brushing her fingers along the scar once more before looking up to Sara again. There’s a soft smile on Sara’s face, her hands now settled along Ava’s thighs that border her body. With a slight shake of her head, Ava lets out a laugh, “I broke so many rules for you.”

“So I’ve heard,” Sara remarks as Ava raises a single brow, “I’m particularly glad that you broke your self imposed ‘one and done’ rule.”

Ava closes her eyes as she lets out a quiet groan. Her cheeks burn as Sara laughs underneath her, fingers scratching gently at the tops of Ava’s thighs. “I’m going to kill Dmitriy for telling you that,” Ava mutters as Sara’s hands slip to her hips, then up to her ribs, “He was sworn to silence the last time we went back to visit him—or so I thought.”

Again Sara laughs as Ava opens her eyes and looks at Sara once more. “I broke rules for you too,” Sara lifts her shoulder in a shrug, “Plenty of them—if that’s any consolation.”

“I’m not sure it is,” Ava tells Sara pointedly as Sara raises her brows, “You break the rules all the time, so I’m not convinced that carries the same weight as me breaking my rules might.” Sara’s reply comes as a quiet scoff, her fingers pinching lightly at Ava’s hips. “I’m the one who slept with the enemy,” Ava murmurs, lowering back down into Sara’s space. Bringing her hand up, Ava carefully brushes hair from Sara’s face before gently tucking it behind her ear, “That one night led me to this—it brought me everything.”

When Sara’s smile spreads slowly across her face, Ava leans down and kisses her once more. Sara’s hands slide along Ava’s skin, moving from her hips to her back, holding her close. Ava only notices Sara bringing her legs up seconds before it’s too late. The mattress jolts as Sara flips Ava once more, landing on her back again. Sara is straddling Ava now, back in the same position she was before. As Ava opens her mouth to say something, Sara leans in and kisses her again, fingers already tangled in Ava’s hair. “Sara,” Ava mumbles, trying to get her attention.

“In a minute,” Sara murmurs, backing up and propping her hands on either side of Ava’s face as Ava settles her hands along Sara’s bare sides. Again Ava goes to protest when Sara’s head dips down and warm lips meet the side of her throat. “Aves,” Sara mumbles, the vibrations of her voice passing through Ava’s neck, “You just said that sleeping with the enemy brought you everything, why not let it bring you something more this morning.”

Laughing quietly, Ava tries to dislodge Sara from her neck where Sara is pressing open-mouthed kisses to Ava’s skin. “Sara,” Ava carefully hooks her fingers under Sara’s chin and draws her out. But then Sara kisses Ava, her fingers cradling Ava’s jaw as Ava just smiles into the kiss. When Sara does back up, her hair is still tangled and her pupils are larger than they had been before, chasing away the blue in Sara’s eyes. “You’re not the enemy anymore,” Ava tells Sara pointedly, tapping her fingers along Sara’s hip bones.

“Oh well,” Sara remarks with that playful grin as she leans back down again. Her lips brush against Ava’s own when she murmurs, “We can always pretend.” As Sara kisses her again, Ava just laughs

and tangles her fingers into Sara's hair before pulling her down against her chest. The word 'pretend' no longer makes Ava ache like it did before. There's no more pretending with her and Sara. Ava has everything that she longed for before.

There's no more secrets kept, no more nights spent hiding away words and truths that Ava desperately wanted to blurt out. She gets to love Sara with no barriers in the way, no secrets holding them back. And Ava gets to be loved in return. They've grown and changed from the people they were when they first met. So now Ava is okay with pretending to pretend as she kisses Sara in the peaceful bubble inside their room. Ava has everything she always wanted, so there will be no more true pretending ever again. She and Sara are just a former spy and a former assassin trying to make the world better with their family on a time ship, and Ava wouldn't have it any other way.

Chapter End Notes

So originally, I had a clear favourite ending, and it was the non-canon ending, but this one grew on me a little bit. This was the intended ending for the fic, though it looked a bit different. As always thank you to everyone who has been reading along, I've really enjoyed reading each and every comment and the continued support has meant a lot as I've written this AU. I hope that everyone enjoyed this ending, and let me know if you preferred one ending over another, I think I might still like the non-canon ending a bit better. But again a big thanks to everyone, and that's a wrap!

Also, people have asked before, and I'm not on Twitter, but I am on Tumblr @thewritingblues if you want to find me there!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!