

## And I was unaware

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# And I was unaware

by [EssayOfThoughts](#)

## Summary

“The Vision that came back may never become the Vision you knew again,” Pietro says, gently. “It is not like me. I died unbroken and came back unbroken. Both you and Thanos and Shuri all sought to take Vision apart from the stone that let him be. And with that stone gone now-”

“I know.” Wanda doesn’t dare speak louder than a whisper. “I know. But I saw his mind. It’s- I know-” She pauses. The words war within her, the emotions rising in her throat. “He will never be who he was. But he is enough as he was that if I just leave it is not fair to him.”

## Notes

I kind of mashed up two of your prompts, those being that Thanos is dealt with sooner/differently and then what happens after Endgame. I have... not seen Endgame (I didn't like how dirty IW did Wanda so I decided not to give Marvel more of my money) and so I've kind of winged it with an alternate take on Infinity War and Endgame both.

I confess to having written most of your other prompts for these two before, and didn't want to rehash old ground, so I hope this is both close enough to what you wanted to be to your taste while also being different enough to be fresh.

Title comes from the last stanza of "The Darkling Thrush", which is an old favourite of mine. I hope it should be obvious which characters are unaware of what.

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

i.

“We don’t have to go back, you know.”

The voice is quiet beside Wanda and she glances over to her brother. It’s still weird to see him there beside her, whole and unharmed. There’s not a mark on him, not from when he died, not from the battle when he was brought back. Instead, his hands are firm on the steering wheel as he glances to her.

It’s like he never died at all, and Wanda looks back out the window.

“Wandaaa,” he says, and its sing-song, almost a whine. The same thing he’d do when he thought she was being obstinate and needed to loosen up. “Wanda. Listen to me.”

She glances over to him again, instead of out at the flat plain of the desert. The road ahead is miles and miles of exactly the same and she can’t imagine how bored he has to be driving this. Probably why he’s doing this, now she thinks about it.

His voice is terribly soft, like it used to be when she woke from a nightmare.

“Listen to me. We don’t have to go back if you don’t want to.”

“I promised-”

“Because you feel like you still owe it to everyone. That you still owe it to the world to be a hero for what you did before, even though in trying to be a hero you died.” His eyes are bright and earnest, and Wanda can see the madness that chases around his head as he finally puts that to words. All their lives he’d always accept his death far before he’d accept hers. “You *died*. You came back. *I* came back. We fought for everyone. You have done far more than you have to. You’re allowed to have a break.”

Wanda scoffs. “Are you sure it is not you that does not want to go back?”

Pietro shrugs. “I don’t care. I go where you go. I do as you do.” He swerves the car over a pothole and back again, then looks to her. “You know that. If I have reservations, I’ll say.”

It strikes Wanda that, for all her using English, he’s sticking to Sokovian.

“Wanda,” he says, soft and wheedling. “Do not think I do not know that you are conflicted.” One hand rises from the steering wheel and taps against his forehead. “You made the link as soon as you felt my mind again. I know everything you know. Everything that happened. Everything that you gained, and that you lost.”

She watches him, silent, and he sighs.

“Sister, we’ve always known one another better than we know ourselves.”

Outside the desert rolls off into the distance. The sky is clear and blue, extending for miles and the road is a long dark line in front of them. Beside her, for all he needs to keep his eyes

on the road, Pietro keeps glancing to her.

She knows he's not wrong.

"Do you-"

She trails off when he shakes his head. "It's not about what I think you should do, Wanda."

She pulls her shawl up around her shoulders. With the air-con on enough to keep temperatures to Pietro's preferred cool, she's covered in goosebumps.

"You're seeing something," she says. "Something I'm not."

He glances over to her, calm and quiet. Watchful. A watchful protector. He always has been.

"Tell me," she says. "Please."

For a while they just drive. Pietro doesn't look at her but she can see how his mind is turning. Processing his words. His observations. Piecing together everything he's seen. Wanda knows when to leave her brother be. In the years he's been gone she may have become more accustomed to him not being there but she will never forget what it is to have him. The thought patterns, the presence. The way of existing as half of a whole, of knowing that the other is as much a part of you - is as deserving of respect - as you are.

"You are leaving," Pietro says. "Because you are scared. You are scared that the world will hate you. That the team is disappointed in you. You are scared because the Vision who came back is not the Vision you watched die." He takes a deep breath, taps his fingers over the steering wheel. "You think that a break will be enough. That if you have a break you can see how the world treats you. How the team thinks of you. If the Vision that came back is even close to the Vision you knew and you loved. You think that a break will give you distance. Will let them all have time to reject you themselves, or mean that when you go back you will find it easier to refuse them all and go your own way."

He glances over to her, eyes clear as crystal. "I know you, Wanda. You have always cared too much. If you go back to them, you will not want to leave. If you truly think you need a break, you should tell them from here and not return until you are ready. If you truly wish to stay with them, you should go back now and tell them."

His hand reaches out, blindly, towards her. Without thinking she reaches back, takes his hand in hers. She can feel the calluses on his thumb as it strokes over the back of her hand.

"You think it will hurt them. To tell them that you may want to leave. You think taking a break might prepare them. You think it will hurt you, to go back and see a Vision that is not your Vision, and that it will hurt Vision to see you know and yet not know him. You think you have had enough of hurting, and of being hurt." He shakes his head. "I do not blame you for that. We have seen enough in our lives to want freedom from pain. But I know you. You will never be able to stand back and let people be hurt. You will never be able to leave without looking back at those you love. You will never be able to stop yourself loving because you have always and will always care." He sighs, soft and gentle, taps his fingers

quickly on the steering wheel, his thumb on her hand, before letting them still again. “If you wish to leave and go your own way and avoid hurt and being hurt then I will follow you. I will keep you safe. You just must tell the team, you must decide now.”

His hand squeezes Wanda’s with an odd gentleness. “But, Wanda. You always used to tell me - to hurt, that is how we know we are human.”

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**ii.**

“All right,” she says.

It’s dark out, now, the headlights of the car illuminating ahead but not quite far enough to stave off the darkness entirely. They paused once, for food and a toilet break, but continued on. Pietro, she knows, can go without sleep for three days if he thinks she requires it of him. She hopes it will not come to that.

Pietro glances at her, hums a soft question. It’s not like they ever needed words to be understood, after all.

“You’re not wrong,” she says. “You’re not wrong.”

The twins have always known one another better than they know themselves.

“I’m scared,” she says and Pietro’s hand reaches to take hers without question. His thumb is gentle on the back of her hand. “Not of the team. Not of them rejecting me. That- I know they won’t do that. But I am scared.” She takes a deep breath. “I need to confront that. I should not just run. It is not fair - to the team, to myself, to-”

She feels Pietro catch the tail end of her thought before she cuts it off.

“The Vision that came back may never become the Vision you knew again,” Pietro says, gently. “It is not like me. I died unbroken and came back unbroken. Both you and Thanos and Shuri all sought to take Vision apart from the stone that let him *be*. And with that stone gone now-”

“I know.” Wanda doesn’t dare speak louder than a whisper. “I know. But I saw his mind. It’s- I know-” She pauses. The words war within her, the emotions rising in her throat. “He will never be who he was. But he is enough as he was that if I just leave it is not fair to him.”

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**iii.**

Pietro calls ahead. They pull over for a break, to have food, to talk. For a little while they

simply sit in the back of the car, hugging. It has been, Pietro thinks, far too long since Wanda has simply been hugged and known that she was loved. Her relaxation, curled up next to him, is palpable.

She falls asleep there, in the end, and Pietro folds the seat back, makes sure she's belted in, and goes back to the front.

It's a long drive back and he does not want to waste time.

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#### iv.

The others are waiting for them when they return. Not all in one bundle but Steve and Bucky and Sam are there to greet them, waiting by the doors. Clint is not, but she knows why; his family back is not something he dares miss or neglect, and while she is family too to him, they each have their own people to attend to. She will be welcome at the farm any time she wishes to visit, and that is more than enough.

"Your room's ready," Steve says after hugging her welcome. "I, uh. We didn't know what to do about Pietro, but I think Maria made sure a camp bed was set up in there for him."

Pietro at her shoulder shrugs. "I sleep wherever," he says. "As long as I am near my sister."

There is something warm to that, something comforting. Despite the years he has not changed; despite the years he is still himself. As he'd said in the car: he goes where she goes, and persistent proximity is part of that. He will let her go no sooner than she will him.

"Figured," Sam says with a grin. "Come on both of you, let's see who else we can scrounge up."

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#### v.

As they go through the base they meet: Hill, organising groups, chatting with Natasha and Sharon Carter and Helen Cho. They meet: Shuri in something halfway to an argument with Bruce, debating over the best way to adapt their current tech. They meet Pepper and they meet Rhodey, on their way down to Tony's old lab. "He's not surfaced since the fight," Pepper says. "Lord knows what he's up to down there."

There is not an explosion to punctuate this statement, but Wanda suspects that is simply because when Tony rebuilt the base he reinforced it as well.

They meet, also, Thor and Carol, the guardians from space and Fury arguing with them over what place they might have on the repaired Earth.

Slowly, they filter through the base, from the open areas to the quieter ones to the private ones, until they walk down paths that Wanda remembers and which Pietro knows from her memories. He slips ahead of her into her room, already back to old habits. He has so often checked the path before them lest she come to harm.

They do not, in that time, see Vision.

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vi.

Vision does not join them until dinner, and there he stands to one side, an empty plate set for him at the table. It had not been uncommon before, at the base, for Vision not to eat, but he *could* and Wanda has too many memories of him eating with her for his silent stance at one corner of the room to feel right.

She cannot find the words though. She is not sure she *wants* to. Those memories she has, those many shared meals, they are hers and - if Vision no longer recalls - hers *alone*. She is not sure, yet, that she wishes to give them up to share with the others.

“It’s Vision, isn’t it?” Pietro’s voice rings out. “That is what they named you once I was dead?”

Wanda tries and fails to stave off the wince at that. Pietro’s hand finds hers and squeezes, in the bond between their minds his thoughts nudge hers. *Your memories are mine*, he sends. *Remember?*

Across the room Vision seems startled and uncertain why he has been startled. Slowly, looking over at Pietro, he nods. “I am, yes. Though, I think, not quite the Vision that many of you seem to have known.”

Pietro shrugs. “Maybe,” he says. “But then, I did not know you, did I? Come and join us. Introduce yourself.”

Vision has never moved like a human, even when grounded to earth. Wanda has always liked it. He has never- even when he stayed with her, there was something inhuman to him and when in his human guise perhaps only she saw it, the mechanical parts of his mind alongside more human neurons, the bright colours of his thoughts and his emotions as slowly he learned them. Now, as he moves across the room to take the empty seat at the empty place left for him, she sees it once more, how he seems almost to drift, not quite tangible in the way they are and yet not intangible either. He sits at the table and it is old reflex that sees Wanda passing the bowl of potatoes over.

“I have not-” he says, then pauses, when their gaze meets.

“You did,” she says gently. “Before. You would try things just to see if you liked them.” She tries to smile but does not think it comes through. “Maybe you will like different things,

now.”

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**vii.**

He eats, that first meal back, with tentative small bites just as he did when first trying food before. It is familiar in a way that sets Wanda’s heart aching and she tries not to offer him too specific things as the others pass bowls down the table, tries not to give any indication as he smiles at roast potatoes but pulls a face at parsnips. Pietro’s hand finds her wrist several times during the meal as he talks to Vision, tugging him into conversation as before only Wanda really had.

It is strange. Strange that he is the Vision she knew, and yet not. Strange to have a meal with all of them in a way so familiar, and yet to have her brother back at her side, which is familiar but not in this context.

Firmly, warmly, Pietro’s hand squeezes hers.

*It will be all right*, he sends, crystal clear and cobalt blue down the bridge between their minds. *One way or another. It will be all right.*

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**viii.**

Vision is... around, the next few days. She knows it. She cannot *miss* it. He is a familiar presence and a comforting one: the one, from the very beginning of his existence, who never feared her. Pietro does not fear her, but for him it is a choice: he has always admired her intelligence, respected her insight. The development of her powers, the thing which truly clarified her as a witch, it was, for him, just another reason not to be afraid. Pietro has always been certain that she would never hurt him, or that, if she did, there would be reason and has decided that to fear would serve no purpose.

Vision has never feared her because it has never occurred to him that she is someone who should be feared. She is not sure what to make of it that, even now, even this remade Vision who has so many memories of the old, should not fear her. He knows what she is capable of.

“Perhaps,” Pietro says, a whisper in her ear as they watch Vision glide through a wall and outside for a flight over the forest, “He does not fear you because he knows, like me, that you will not hurt without reason.”

“No,” she says softly, peering carefully closer at his distancing mind until it hits her with a flash of insight. “No,” she says, more certainly. “He simply does not know how to fear, let alone how to recognise it. It was lost along with the rest of his emotions.”



Pietro beside her stills, even his faintly trembling tension gone to silence. “That is not good,” he says.

He does not have to say the rest - they both of them know it. Even if Vision is nigh on indestructible he is not so *completely*. That is he as he is now is proof of that. Without fear, without the knowledge of the potential for harm, without the driving motivation to avoid it, it is all too easy to take foolish risks.

Vision is not a complete fool, that Wanda knows, but he has the potential for naivety, even now, and even a computer’s calculations will not contribute the same as the simple recognizance of true fear.

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## **ix.**

Wanda tries not to look. It is easier not to look - better not to. Even with all the training she has done, though, she cannot switch off her ability to see minds, it is as constant as ever, an underlying layer to the world: the physical, with all its moving parts, and the mental, the bright orbs and mindscapes of people’s thoughts and selves.

Pietro she knows. Pietro is familiar and comforting, a mind she knows and has always known, even before the experiments. Even now, even as he learns and changes, incorporates the knowledge he has gleaned from her and spends time elsewhere - giving her space as though he knows how unused she has become to having him nearby because of course he does, as much in her mind as she is in his - his mind is familiar, central blooming tree, cascading vines, strong and certain bedrock over an ever-pouring well of water, of primordial fundament upon which his whole self is made.

The surface changes, the flowers bloom in different colours, the creatures that carry his memories take on new forms, but the bedrock, the well, the blooming tree, they are always familiar.

Vision is familiar too, more so than Clint’s inscrutable purple mind, a blur as though a hawk or falcon flying high above, more so than Natasha’s bloodstrewn snowscape or Steve’s shattered temple, far more so Tony’s armoured, infected mess of issues and confused trauma.

Vision’s is almost as familiar as her own mind, the synagogue beneath the church, the angel shape dripping down over the hanging chandelier. Neurons and networks, databases veined together like mycelium, technology learning what it is to *live*. It is not half so bright as it was, more gold and grey-green than the warm maroon that had infused him before, but the maroon is there, is growing, and it is familiar in another way, one which halfway breaks her heart.

She had known before, when this had happened, watched as he struggled to learn to identify emotions he was learning to feel and offered some little help by sharing examples, giving comparisons, sending her own thoughts and emotions for him to guess the meaning of.

She dares not do that, now. He is his own person, this Vision, a different Vision to the one she knew and she dares not risk moulding him to what she remembers.

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**x.**

Are you doing all right, Wanda?" Clint's voice is gentle. "You seem... stressed. I'd have thought-" He gestures to the hall Pietro has just sprinted down. "Having your brother back, you'd be dancing on the moon. What's got you down?"

She sighs where she sits, rubs her fingers against her forehead and wishes things were simpler.

"It is not... I am not feeling *down*, it's that- it would have been nice if everyone returned as they had been. And they did not. And they are- they are who they are, that is not-" She sighs again. "You know-" She gestures to her forehead, a flicker of scarlet. "I will always recognise you all. But familiar is not the same. Pietro is. Pietro is. But not all."

"You mean," Clint says gently, "Vision."

"He is the same," she says. "But not. Like before- before the Raft. Having emotions but unable to fully recognise them or accept them. They are even more muted now."

Clint frowns, mouth open as though about to say something. "Ah," he goes. "Are you gonna-like, are you gonna help him? You did last time, right?"

"Clint," she says. "If I do, how can I know I am not trying to make him like *my* Vision?"

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**xi.**

"You are being stupid."

Pietro's curled half around her, his chin on her head, his arm around her shoulder. She pulls away a little, looks up at him.

"You *are*. You are too moral to meddle in minds. Not now. Not after Ultron." His finger touches her cheek gently. "Not after what that led to." He does not have to say *my death*. Instead, he shrugs. "Besides. You were close to him once. He has those memories. Do you think he does not wonder even a little why you avoid him now? Do you think he does not deserve an answer for that?"

Pietro, as he always has, knows exactly which buttons to press.

“Fine,” she says, pulling herself from his embrace. “I will ask if he wants my help. But do not expect it to go well. He is not-”

“Not who you knew.”

She does not expect Vision to be there, standing in the doorway.

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## xii.

“I am not-” Vision pauses and rolls the words around his mouth. He isn’t sure why it feels right to do this; more usually he simply waits until he knows what to say, but this is Wanda, and he has memories of her even if he cannot make sense of all of them. “I am not the person you knew,” he repeats. “I- some things were lost with the stone and ... while I am similar to who I was, and while I have many of the memories, I am not-”

Wanda, where she stands, shakes her head. There is a glint to her eyes, a gathering glow of tears at her lashes, but there is no wobble to her voice when she speaks. “We knew that was a chance,” she says. “To take the stone from you, to remake you without the stone? When Shuri and Bruce suggested removing it, we knew-” and there her breath *does* hitch, in a way that Vision knows means upset even if for the life? Unlife? of him he doesn’t know why. “We knew you would be something different but still you. It is-” She pauses again and seems too to roll the words around her mouth. “It makes sense that you would be more different in a situation where you were remade entirely rather than... rather than reworked from what you already were.”

“I am sorry,” he says, as earnestly as he can. What memories he has of Wanda show that she mattered to him-as-was, that he-as-was mattered to her and that alone explains the tears in her lashes, the wobble to her voice. “I- I do not wish to cause you hurt. It would, I think, be easier on all of us if I was... well, as I was. But without the stone and without a... continual memory from before to now, there are aspects of what I learned before that have not carried over.”

Wanda tilts her head at that, and Vision recognises this move - curiosity, and it seems that, in Wanda, curiosity can override upset. “Are you missing memories?” she says. “I-” she flicks fingers, flicks *scarlet* and it is a bright rich red as the Aether was. “I imagine you know what I can do,” she says, softly and gently, in the same careful way as when the Captain speaks to him now. “And that before you would let me dip into your head. I- I may have some of your memories, if you are missing them, and if not, I may have the context.”

Her brother at her shoulder is swaying, leaning towards her as- there is a comparison to be made there, that he knows, but he doesn’t know for the life or unlife of him what it is.

He is not sure why so many of these comparisons, these attempts to find ways to express things are coming to him *now*. He has had several days of being back, of relearning what was lost and adjusting. He knows, he thinks, his own mind. He has no reason not to - it is his,

after all, and it is some measure of Ultron and some measure of JARVIS and some measure of things that came from the stone and in combination it is *him*.

If there is anyone that should know him and his mind, surely it should be himself?

Pietro's hand reaches gently, touches his sister's shoulder with a kind of care Vision has not seen him exhibit for any but her. Pietro is sociable, yes, loud and encouraging in conversation, pulling him to join everyone else just as his memories tell him Wanda did, but he does not reach with such immediacy for anyone but his sister. Vision does not have adequate memories to tell him if this is odd or not, for them or for anyone else, but Wanda never reacts as though it is anything but normal and-

He does not know why, but he trusts Wanda, and it is clear her brother trusts her too. When she turns to see his expression she shakes her head and he settles at her shoulder as though whatever emotion made him reach for her is secondary in the face of her own opinion.

Vision suspects the emotion is worry. He- he thinks *he* worries too, that when it comes to Wanda he will hurt her. He is not the person she knew. He knows, from what the others have told him, from what he has read and researched, from Wanda's own expressions each day each time they face each other, that that is something which can hurt people. He knows too that, even from his first moments, he has had no wish to hurt people.

There is enough pain and suffering in the world. He does not wish to perpetuate that. He is not either of his primary creators, but where he does resemble them he tends more towards Tony's desire to undo harm to the best of his ability than Ultron's desire to create it and believe it will ease it all in the long run.

"Some memories are missing," he says. "There are... gaps in my memory and I do not know why. I suspect that in remaking me some of the damage was irreparable and some things were lost as a consequence. And, of course, without the stone, there are-" he pauses because the words for this do not come as easily, even if he's trying to explain it to Helen, Tony, Bruce or Shuri - people who have every reason to understand him as well as he does. "There are things that the stone gave me that technology cannot. I am not sure what they are but- I am *different* in a way I was not before. I do not know what that way is, but I know it is nonetheless."

Wanda watches him. There are no tears to her eyes now; at some point in all his contemplation she has wiped them away or blinked them gone. When he follows his memory back, he finds the moment - a flicker of her fingers, a flicker of her scarlet. Her brother watched without flinching, though his eyes widened. Vision suspects he had never seen how precise her scarlet could be - given he died before her training with the Avengers it makes sense.

For a long while she says nothing, her brother swaying at her shoulder, rocking from foot to foot as though waiting for her to speak.

"Emotions," she says at last. "You had them. You *have* them, I can see them in your mind, even without reaching in. But it is like before, that you do not recognise them and it is *worse* because they are so much milder. They are not as clear or as strong as before."

Pietro, at her side, leans closer, right in her space, pressed against her back, his chin on her shoulder and Wanda leans almost imperceptibly into the contact, as though she needs her brother's presence to anchor her, to strengthen her.

Vision is not sure how much of that conclusion comes from old memories, from current logic, from the strange *else* thing that he thinks the things like emotions source from.

"Would-" he asks, tentative and careful, not wanting to hurt more than hurt has already been dealt. "Would you help? I would like to learn them properly."

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### **xiii.**

She is hesitant when it comes to reaching into his mind, hesitant when it comes to sharing her emotions with him and he understands why even as it doesn't mesh quite correctly with his memories of her. He wishes, sometimes, he understood emotions better but as Wanda said, what he has of them is mild, their gradations finer and harder to define, it seems, than before. When Wanda shares him examples he does not grasp it and he can see, in her face, the faint edge of disappointment as, each time, she has to define the example more carefully, with more detail.

She persists, though, even as the frown between her brow deepens, even as she seems ever more tired after each time until she leaves their conversations half leaning on her brother.

"Do not drain yourself completely," he hears Pietro telling his sister, poking her in the forehead. "What good do you do anyone if you cannot function?"

"I am-"

"Showing him how to function, yes. But you cannot do that if you do not. That is what you always told me, yes?"

She groans, leaning heavily against him, and sighs. Vision smiles and does not entirely know why, except that it feels right. Comfortable. ... fond?

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### **xiv.**

It becomes easier to reach out. Easier to talk to the others. Smiling becomes easier too, even if he does not entirely understand why he wants to smile and what causes it. But he knows that he does and he is getting a sense, now, of happiness and its absence, for all he has not yet entirely had cause to feel its counterparts.

He knows worry, though, even as Wanda has only shown it to him piecemeal. He feels it every time she walks from their conversations drained and leaning against her brother.

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**xv.**

He goes for late night flights. He knows this is a thing he did before, sometimes, appreciating the world for what it is, bright and brilliant and wonderful, infinitely complex and yet, at times, astoundingly simple. He knows that, once, Wanda would sit on the roofs late at night when she was sleepless, feeding handfuls of seed to the gathering birds, the crows that like to flock around her.

She doesn't do that, now, and when he wanders the base's halls late at night, wondering if Wanda wanders too, he finds her, curled against her brother in the main room.

"We were watching a film," Pietro says, when he sees Vision enter. "But it is finished now."

Wanda, it seems, has fallen asleep, her head on her brother's shoulder, her body stretched out along the sofa. Someone has taken care to lay a blanket over, a checked thing of red and maroon and black, woollen and warm-looking. She looks... comfortable, cosy, even, perhaps, and he almost reaches out a hand before wondering *why*.

He has memories, yes, of times like this, but they do not make sense. There are emotions that follow them, emotions he does not yet fully understand, for all the help Wanda has been giving, that he has not yet fully relearned or understood - emotions he may never even fully gain, as he is now.

And yet, seeing Wanda, stretched out and fast asleep on the sofa, tucked in and cosy, he wants nothing more than to touch a hand to her cheek and wish her sweet dreams.

Dreams can't even *be* sweet, unless one talks metaphorically and yet he knows the intent. Knows *why* it would be his intent. Wanda has endured many terrible things, far more horror than could ever rightfully be wished on anyone and he believes now, just as, it seems, he did as he was before, that she has earned the right to be free of them.

"You won't wake her."

Vision glances over. Pietro's eyes, pale as ice but not nearly as cold (metaphorically) are watching him. Wanda's brother nods his head towards her form.

"She is fast asleep. You won't wake her if you want to wish her goodnight. And she won't mind."

Vision pauses, torn. He knows, now, if anyone understands Wanda as well as she does herself, it is Pietro, Pietro whom she trusts to stand at her back, Pietro to whom she responds as though they're always in each other's heads - and may well be, for all he knows.

But Wanda sleeps. And he is not the Vision she knew. He is-

He is something else. The Vision-that-was, he loved her. Vision-as-is, he does not know if he can love, for all he knows he cares about her. It is not, he thinks, quite the same.

“She cares about you.” Pietro’s voice is soft. “I do not understand all of why. I have all of my emotions and I do not understand it, but she does. If you care about her, she would like it if you showed it.” He glances down to his sister, expression softening. “Too few show her that they care when they do. It means a lot to her. To both of us.” He looks, once more, to Vision. “And she will know, when she wakes. She sees all I see, and I all she sees.”

“I am not who she remembers.” Vision half does not realise it is himself speaking until the words are out. “I- I know I once cared for her. I think I am coming to care for her again in a similar way. But I am not who I was, and that hurts her. I do not- I do not think I have the right to act on memories of someone who is not entirely who I am now.”

Pietro laughs. It’s a soft sound but a clear one, and he strokes a hand over his sister’s hair when she half-stirs, soothing her back to sleep.

“Vizh,” he says, the nickname as easy on his lips as it is on Wanda’s. “I act on my sister’s memories all the time. What else can I act *on*, after being dead?”

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## xvi.

There are stumbling blocks. There are confusions. There are moments when Vision does not think he fully grasps it all. Wanda keeps trying, showing him emotions, asking Steve and Sam and even her brother and even, once, Natasha, to help explain emotions to him when she does not wish to risk sending her own example into his mind.

He appreciates her caution, he does. He appreciates that she does not wish to mould him - what she had said so clearly the first time they sat down for her to teach - but he wishes it were simpler than this, for the both of them.

It is plainer than ever that, for both of them, this is not easy, this is the furthest thing from *fun*.

He thinks, though, that they both know, before both of those things, it is *necessary*.

He thinks, too, that both he and Wanda are pragmatists, at the end of the day, and that they will both of them choose to withstand hurt if it serves some greater purpose.

He is a little surprised, he will admit, that Wanda thinks helping him learn emotions, even if he will be forever different from the man she knew and loved, is so great a purpose she will let herself be hurt for it.

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**xvii.**

He is more and more like what he was, and it makes the differences all the more glaring. He is more serious, even as he learns to smile and laugh, his jokes more deadpan when he learns to make them once again. It is enough to make her fond all over again, fond of the Vision she knows she has lost and this new Vision that stands in his stead, and enough to make her ache for what she has lost even as she is glad to see her friend find himself and his place - the way in which he likes best to exist.

Pietro is swanning off more now, watching from a distance with an assessing smile, waving when she glances to him before blurring into his blue. He seems to think-

Well. She knows what he thinks, that she will come to love this Vision as much as she loved Vision before and she knows, too, that she and Pietro have always known one another better than they know themselves.

She does not know if she is ready for that, though, to risk a greater hurt than she chooses to risk each day.

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**xviii.**

In the end it is not a matter of risk so much as simple closeness, the fact that, just like before, Vision lets her into his head without fear, inviting her in not unaware of the risk she can pose but simply accepting of it, that he finds and fumbles his way through his emotions, confused as they are, that he learns them and how to express them and is, for all the differences he has now, still so terribly *kind*.

She thinks Pietro knows exactly what he is doing, leaving them alone, because for all she cannot predict Vision half so well as once she could, different as he is from the man she knew, Pietro, for all his access to her memories, has far more fresh memories of Vision as-is.

"I think I have a better grasp of it now," Vision says one day.

They're sat close on a corner sofa, knees just barely brushing each other, heads bent together and hands almost touching. It has become too easy to share proximity - Vision, she has learned, *this* Vision, likes touch as an anchor where Vision-as-was simply enjoyed affection, and she has found it too simple to take his hand at times, to let him twine their fingers together as he picks apart and identifies his emotions in his thoughts, understanding how emotions become reasons and have their own logic.

"Affection and... caring for you all. All life is important, it all *matters*," he is saying and it is familiar this, like Vision-as-was and yet not at the same time. "But you are all dearer to me and ... I do not think it is just that some of you contributed to making me as I was before, or that some of you all contributed to remaking me, or even that you accept me." His thumb



rub over her hand. "Some of you are ... some of you I care more easily for than others and perhaps that is the presence of old memories, even when I lacked context, but I think I have some of that now, and my own memories too, of spending time with you all."

He gestures, simply, with his free hand, his eyes on hers. "It is hard to be certain, now. What emotions I have are mild, but... I think that they are still... comparative. I know that I care about you all. I think, indeed, that I love you all and that... that certain parts of that are unchanged, in the fundamentals."

It is with very gentle touch, with very slow movements, that Vision lifts her hands to his lips.

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### **xix.**

*I love you*, Wanda thinks, cupping Vision's face in her hands. *I love you, I love you, I love you*. A mantra, a litany, something close to a prayer for all she has not prayed to anything in years. *I love you*. The mind she can see inside his head, it is not the mind she saw there once, no - it is not the mind from when he came back, it is not the mind from when he was first made, it is not even his mind when he died.

But it is close. It *feels* the same, though it is not the same, not truly, not fully. He does not carry all of the memories, he does not have the emotions those memories carried with them, but he has emotions again, and he has understanding of them and he is piecing it together, the emotions he had in those memories that made them stick with him through life and through death, through the stones and their loss until he can sit before her now and be almost the man she knew while being someone entirely different as well.

His eyes are fixed on hers and they're as human as the last time she saw him. Not the strange geared things of his first birth or his rebirth, but as they had become over time - more human, more human, more human.

She wants, more than anything, to lean forward and kiss him. Vision's hands are gentle on hers where he's lifted them, and it is... it is *painfully* familiar, to stand like this, gem glowing in his forehead, even if now he wears no human guise. She strokes her thumbs over his cheeks, lets them caress the skin under his eyes. The skin there is not fine as it is in humans, it is laced with hard vibranium and for all it has give it is its own kind of sleek and smooth, not soft.

But it is Vision. His thumbs stroke over the backs of her hands, unafraid of the scarlet that rises from her skin, his eyes meet hers, unafraid of the scarlet in their depths. He looks at her, and it is almost like how he had looked at her before, before all of this, before Thanos and his death and her death and his return as some other person entirely.

Slowly, gently, he turns his face to kiss the heel of her hand.

It is with half a sob she leans forwards and presses her lips to his. It is with half a sob she moves her hands, slides her skin over his and strokes her thumbs over the skin of his cheeks, his temples, the not-quite-ears he has in his own skin. It is with half a sob she presses close to him and his arms wrap around her, gentle and reassuring, the same as any movement he has ever made towards her, even this newmade Vision. He is ever a kind and gentle person, someone who does not want to harm. His lips are uncertain against hers but gain surety rapidly; she can see, if she cares to look, the memories skimming across the surface of his mind, and *oh* but they are bright now, coloured with emotions he did not fully comprehend before, but now, with this, it is as though they all sing into place, as though he understands now what emotions might move him to such actions.

His hands slide from hers, slide down her wrists but do not ask her to move her hands, touch to her shoulders for a moment before falling to her waist and there they settle, his thumbs rubbing contented circles on her hips and *oh* but she has missed this, missed Vision, her Vision and he is not him, not entirely, but he isn't *not* either, and they know this, the both of them, the strange balance in which he exists, both the one she loved and not, and the one she now loves as well as though their lives needed to be any the more complicated.

Wanda finds she doesn't care.

"Wanda," Vision says when they pull back for a moment, when they pause, and his eyes are wide and his expression is almost awed and his thumbs press gently beneath her eyes for a moment, catching tears she did not mean to let fall.

Wanda laughs, and it is damp and it is not entirely purely happy, but it is not grieving or bitter either, and when he smiles at her, when he presses a soft kiss to her mouth, she remembers why she loves Vision - this Vision - as much as she does the man he was before.

In the essentials, in his kindness and his caring and his consideration, he remains the person she loves.

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## End Notes

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