



Chapter 1

For the past couple of years, whenever I had been feeling, for the lack of a better term, absolutely shit, I would succumb to coping mechanisms which, according to my therapist (not by choice), were "damaging". Damaging. That word always irked me. It was a word without activity. It was a word that didn't place blame or consequence. Damaging. I looked down at the glass in my hand and gave the amber liquid a swirl, before lifting the cold glass to my lips and letting the cool, velvet-like liquid gush through my mouth and down my throat, burning as it passed. Damaging was a word my therapist would use to describe that, I bitterly thought as I placed the glass down on the polished wooden table in front of me. At least by sitting in this almost empty bar and drinking to suppress (or fuel) my anger and resentment, I was giving "damaging" urgency. I was the antagonist, doing the damaging in the form of drinking burning alcohol, numbing my senses. Another way of "taking the power back", as my therapist had urged me to do for the past four months. I wasn't dumb, I knew I wasn't really doing anything to take any power back, but for the voices in my head to quiet for a few hours, this was as good a way as any, I thought.

My routine was always the same. 3:30 am, my alarm goes off and I tell myself I'm tired and that the two to three hours of sleep -if I'm lucky, haven't been enough and that I should just hit snooze. I never do. I quickly dress without looking into any mirrors and make my way through sleepy New York to the gym a few blocks down from my apartment. At the gym, I do a good two-hour session until I'm drenched and it feels like my legs are made of string cheese, and only then do I allow myself to feel tired for the amount of time it takes me to shower and change into my office clothes. By the time I'm at work, I'm back to my good old self, and not an entire building of FBI agents trained in human behaviour can tell I'm putting on an act even Meryl Streep couldn't best. And then, a fourteen-hour workday later, I'm sat at the bar, at the same table away from the rest of the people who dare frequent this dump.

Awoken from my reveries by no liquid meeting my lips as I bring the now empty glass up to my mouth, I stand up on wobbly legs and make my way to the bar, and without even having to ask, the bartender has placed my usual in front of me. I look up at the man, my vision slightly cloudy, and nod. He nods back. We've rarely exchanged words other than: "Rum. Neat." And "Gotcha, coming right up". I make my way back to my solemn little corner, feeling his eyes on my back. I sit back and let my eyes gloss over and start repeating my earlier motion of swirling the liquid in the glass.

This little routine that I had carefully manufactured had come to an abrupt end the next afternoon. I had been sitting at my desk in the bullpen amongst about forty other agents, most of whom I only knew by last name and hadn't spoken to. I had been busy writing up a report on a double homicide in Queens I had been forced to take the lead on -homicides weren't my usual assignment, but since four months ago all I was assigned to was crimes I could've solved way back when I was in training at Quantico.

Suddenly someone had cleared their throat behind me, making me slightly flinch and turn around in my chair. The head of my department was stood in front of me, his suit slightly ill-fitting and his breath smelling of tobacco and coffee reaching my nose, causing me to inwardly recoil, but on the outside I sat still, eyes fixed on his. I had not bothered learning his name, I knew they'd call me back soon enough, and perhaps soon enough was now...

"Follow me." Was all he said before he turned on his heels and marched, or rather swayed back into his office.

I sighed and gathered my notepad. Maybe I had been wrong. Maybe I was being sent to investigate who stole little Henry's lunch during fourth period at preschool. Nonetheless, I didn't let my thoughts betray me and marched head high through the bullpen to whatever-his-name-was' office. I had only been in here once before, when I was transferred. As much as I didn't want to, my brain instantly betrayed me and started replaying memories from that day. Thankfully, before my brain had time to replay the real good parts, it was interrupted by a man I had not seen before extending his hand towards me.

"Agent Woo" He said, his hand firm in mine as I took it. "Pleased to finally meet you."

"Pleased to meet you." Was all I said, busy scanning this new persona.

A firm handshake, a seemingly genuine smile, and a fitting, albeit slightly wrinkled suit. Cologne, but not an obnoxious amount. Woo seemed slightly uncomfortable, but a reassuring nod of his head towards me signaled he wasn't new to this, whatever this was.

"Have a seat, both of you." My boss said, indicating two seats in front of his cluttered desk.

Woo and I sat down, me starting to actually feel a tinge of excitement in the bottom of my stomach. This was new. I had never been called into this office, and I had certainly not seen Agent Woo before. My brain might've been a bitch most of the time, but whatever you called it you couldn't say it was not great at remembering faces. My superpower. I crossed my legs and placed my notepad in my lap, politely expectantly looking from Agent Woo to Coffee-Breath.

"Right. You're probably wondering why I called you in here today." Coffee-Breath began, stating the obvious. I bit my tongue, not feeling that a sarcastic remark would be greatly appreciated. The air in the office seemed heavy. This was serious.

"I've been contacted by your old office down in D.C." Coffee-Breath continued, but Agent Woo cleared his throat and slightly shifted in his seat, clearly indicating he wanted to take over. Coffee-Breath raised an unkept eyebrow at Woo, and I turned to look at him too.

"Sorry." He began. "I realize this is not the way we usually go about these kind of things but..."

"What kind of things?" I interrupted, not being able to bite my tongue anymore.

"Right, sorry." Agent Woo repeated, briefly meeting my eyes and then looking down at his hands intertwined in his lap. "We've got new intel, a new sitch, if you want..." He met my eyes again and smiled slightly, making the corners of my mouth slightly rise in a small smile. "Right, I know you were stationed in Eastern Europe before, well, er..."

"Yes." I cut him off dryly. "And?"

"Yes, right, I am working on a priority case for the US government, can't tell you more than that at the moment I'm afraid, sorry." He gave a small apologetic half-shrug as if he was well-versed in this sort of situation. "This goes above my pay grade, but they want you on this mission with us."

"Who are they?" I asked, already having a good idea in my head.

"The higher-ups." Coffee-Breath interrupted and I glanced at him. He looked uncomfortable. Or maybe he ate something bad. Again.

"Yeah, sorry, don't know much more than that." Agent Woo confirmed, steering back the conversation onto his "sorry-I'm-just-like-you" spiel.

"Right. Do I have any say in this? I was actually enjoying New York. The people here are just my speed." I sarcastically said, thinking back on my brief encounters with the very, too friendly, homeless man who has set post outside of my apartment.

"I'm afraid not." Coffee-Breath hummed, sounding pretty pleased.

"We need your expertise." Woo shrugged again, an awkward smile plastered on his face.

"There's no one else in the FBI who has been to Eastern Europe?" I asked incredulously.

"It's... more complicated than that." Woo stated and stood up. "I know this is sudden, but we really need to get going, this case needs to be solved very urgently."

Coffee-Breath and I stood up as well. I pocketed my empty note-pad in the back of my pants and sighed.

"Guess we're off to wherever, then."

A/N: That's the first part done and dusted! I promise this will pick up speed soon, but we need to set the scene, yanno? ;)

Testing the waters, this sort of chapter length too long, too short, just good...?

And what do we think in terms of character name???

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