

Chapter 11

With our roles from earlier now reversed; with Maximo being my crutch as I lean on her, she gets me out of her room and back onto the couch. A few painkillers later my head is comfortably fuzzy and my ribs only aching dully. Still, I cannot move without a sharp, stabbing pain icing through me starting at my side. The wind outside has only grown in intensity, and I suspect there won't be any visitors until the weather calms down enough. I'm reduced to picking at my nails as Maximo causes pots and pans to clang in the kitchen as she decided she felt bad enough for me and that food would be a consolation. She had seemed so earnest when she suggested she make us something, I didn't have the heart to tell her the last thing my body felt like having was food. Nonetheless, the salty smell emanating from behind me does stir my appetite slightly. And so, I pick my nails, listening to the ruckus mixed with barely audible humming.

"And, voila!" Maximo appears, clumsily handing me a bowl of steaming soup.

"That actually smells pretty decent." I say, inhaling slightly too deep, my ribs angrily stabbing at me.

"Thank you." Maximo says as she carefully lowers herself onto the other end of the couch, bowl in hand.

"Hey, how come you get a nice bowl?" I ask her and she looks up at me and then my bowl, her lips forming a so circle in surprise.

"What?"

"I'm not ungrateful, but that's just rude." I tease her, holding up my old, slightly chipped bowl for her to examine.

"I- I'm sorry, do you want to trade?" She stutters, now holding out her bowl, still looking confused, not catching onto my sarcasm.

"All-powerful witch but sadly, she lacks the power of humor. How sad." I chuckle, placing the bowl on my stomach and taking the spoon in my good hand.

"Hey!" Maximo pouts, furrowing her brows. "English isn't my first language."

"Not an excuse." I tell her, blowing on my soup. "Humor transcends language."

"Not bad humor, apparently." She shrugs, blowing on her own soup, a microscopic twitch playing on her lips.

"Please." I tut. "I double as a stand-up comedian on weekends."

Maximo is mid-swallow as she snorts, soup going down the wrong pipe, making her cough, then place a hand on her gunshot wound, pain flashing across her face. I chuckle, bringing the soup to my lips and the salty soup warms me up instantly.

"Are you laughing at me?" Maximo narrows her eyes at me.

"I wouldn't dare." I tell her, taking another sip of the soup as suddenly I'm hit square in the face with a piping hot potato. "What the fuck!?"

"Physical comedy." Maximo shrugs, grinning.

"Is your target audience seven?" I grumpily wipe my face with my sleeve.

"Hey, at least I have an audience." She says cheerfully.

"Of children." I mutter, catching the brief look of sadness on her face, which she replaces with a forced smile as soon as it appears. "Sorry."

"Why?" She compartmentalizes, I can tell.

"I had to read your file." I explain, treading carefully, my eyes fixed on her to gauge her reactions. "I know what happened to your children."

Her eyebrows shoot up and she swallows, clanging her spoon around in her bowl. I wait silently, giving her space.

"And now you think you know everything about me?" She curtly says and I note her accent thickens slightly as it seems to do when she's emotional.

"No." I simply answer and return to my soup. "Sometimes it helps to talk about things."

"So what? You can update my file?" I hear her shoot at me and I slowly count to three.

"There's no service here."

"Not funny. Again."

We sit silently for a bit, neither of us eating any more of the perfectly fine soup. Suddenly, we're preoccupied with stirring our spoons in the liquid, creating a sad symphony of metal against clay. Then, Maximo lets out a hu and stands up.

"I'm full." She tells me without looking at me, and leaves me on the couch as she marches back to her room, slamming the door behind her. She didn't leave the bowl of soup behind.

I sigh and finish my soup in silence, feeling slightly disappointed with my sudden loneliness. The wind continues its own lonely song outside. I sulk on the couch, picking my nails until they're close to bleeding. I'm suddenly struck by such an outrageous idea I laugh out loud. Surely it will not work...

Deciding I need to give it a go, I sit up slightly, chuckling to myself. Oh boy, there must have been extra painkillers or something in that soup I had. I take a breath, close my eyes, and focus.

Maximo ! I think loudly in my head. Maximo ! Hello? Maximo ! I chuckle again, wildly amused with myself. Maximo ! You're not trying to escape, are you? I cannot get o this couch but I assure you my aim has returned. Maximo ! Hello? Maxi-

Suddenly, a weird sensation overcomes me. I feel warm all over; as if I've stepped into a warm bath.

Shut up.

I open my eyes as if electrocuted and stare around me in shock. I'm alone in the room. And yet, that was Maximo . That was Maximo . In. My. Head. I stare at the door to her room, still flabbergasted it actually worked.

Hello...? I think tentatively.

The same rush of warmth overcomes me as I hear Maximo 's voice in my head again. First, you shout and now you whisper. Not scared, are you?

My head goes blank as her amused voice goes silent. This might truly be the weirdest thing to ever have happened to me. Gasoline drinking crazy inter-state-traveling woman included in the count.

Can you hear me? I try again, still looking at the closed door between Maximo and me.

No, you're going insane.Comes a dry retort.

Again, I'm shocked silent. Which is rare.

Did you want to say anything, or is shouting my name something you do regularly?Maximo asks me and I can picture her rolling her eyes at the ceiling. I am not rolling my eyes.

I feel like this is an invasion of privacy,think and she actually laughs out loud. In my head. Is this what it sounds like in your head?think, closing my eyes to focus on just the words but unconsciously wondering how she doesn't go insane.

It wasn't easy at first.Comes her slow reply. I couldn't spend long times around people without having horrible headaches. Then I got better and closing it out. It's still hard when there are many voices around me. Or when they scream my name in their head\$he adds that last part sounding slightly ironic.

Is that how you knew we were coming?think and feel her hum so ly, which is the strangest experience, but oddly calming. I sink into the couch.

I did not use to be able to listen to people who weren't in my exact proximity before, but recently,she falters, and I suddenly feel insecure. Or she does. I can't even tell anymore. I am learning more about myself.

What do you mean? wonder curiously, wanting to know more, hoping she won't close o again.

For a little while, I fear she's le my head as she stays silent, but then I hear her again. I can remove myself from myselfShe explains vaguely and I frown, confused. When you came into my room with the agents and saw someone. That wasn't me, and it was me.

Today, when you were on the bed but also in the cornerbegin, thinking back to the horrifying Maximo who seemed so emotionless, almost.

Yes.She answers, and I feel the warm feeling leave my body.

Wait! I think loudly and feel her pause. I am sorry about earlier.

She lingers for a second, then the warmth slowly leaves my body and I suddenly feel alone and cold again, opening my eyes to see the closed door between us.