

## Chapter 17

Well out in the hallway, I feel like I can finally breathe again. I angrily march back to the conference room where I know everyone is waiting for me, probably having watched everything that just transpired in the small interrogation room. It feels good to let my body move, and I don't feel quite as trapped by the time I step into the messy room and they all turn to look at me.

"I want that collar gone!" I hiss as the door slams shut behind me.

"And the straightjacket. Gone."

"Well done, agent." Agent Smith gets up from his chair and walks around the table, ignoring my outburst. He taps me on the back, sending jolts of pain from my ribs shooting through me.

"I didn't get anything useful out of her." I retort through gritted teeth, not wanting to show any weakness in a room in which I am the youngest and probably least experienced.

"But she talked." Garcia now nods appreciatively. "Hasn't said a word till now."

"Probably because that damned thing is half choking her." I say angrily, but no one seems to share in my outrage.

"We need to take every precaution." Agent Smith says and walks back to his seat.

"Look at her." I say, stomping up behind him and pointing at a monitor which they have been looking at. A live image of Maximo takes up the screen. "What is she going to do? She's exhausted."

"Exhausted or not she's just as dangerous." Garcia says and I hu angrily at the balding man.

"I'm not helping you unless you take them o . The shackles work. I've seen them work." I tell the room, ignoring the memory of Maximo 's shadow self or whatever she called that apparition I saw when in her room in the cabin. I vividly see her glowing red eyes in front of her and blink the mental image away.

"You are not in a position to-" Agent Smith begins, but I cut him o .

"But I think I am. I do recall Garcia here so happily noting that Maximo has not spoken a word until just now, with me." I smile sweetly at Garcia who looks up at me, shocked. "So, if you want to get your statement, you are removing that jacket and collar."

The room is silent for a few beats, the lawyers pretending to be busy reading whatever they have in front of them, not meeting my eyes, and the agents are all looking between Agent Smith and me, curious as to what he will do. Agent Smith eyes me for a while, then o ers up the fakest smile I've ever seen.

"Fine. Get back in there."

I nod brusquely and turn on my heels, walking out of the room head held high. My footsteps echo around the cold walls as I march back towards the holding cell. I am half amazed at the fact that I got my way. They were not overstating their loss at how to get Maximo to talk, I note smugly.

The guards are still standing sti ly outside of the room as I approach them. They inspect me carefully, checking my ID multiple times despite having let me out of that exact room not fi een minutes ago.

"The collar and straightjacket are coming o ." I tell them as they open the door to the room and I step through.

I turn around as they don't follow me in. They look at me, then at Maximo , and finally at each other, seemingly hesitating. I pu out my chest, standing up taller.

"You heard me. Now, thank you." I say, and turn away from them and sit back down on the cold chair.

Maximo has been following the situation with glossy eyes. I notice her flinch as the guards start removing the collar, exposing tender, blue and purple skin underneath. She visibly relaxes once it has been removed. She looks up at me while they remove the straightjacket, but I can't read the emotion in her eyes and face.

Finally, the jacket is o and she slowly stretches her arms out, or as far as they will go with her still being attached to the table between us. I watch her, keeping still. The guards exit the room, leaving us alone.

"Better?" I ask her, breaking the silence. She looks up at me and nods so ly.

Maximo looks down at herself, straightening out the wrinkled blue jumpsuit she's wearing.

"I don't think blue is your color." I say, trying to lighten the mood. I don't know if I've succeeded, but Maximo 's attention snaps back up onto me as her hands come up to touch her neck. "Does it hurt?"

"Again, you are wasting your questions." Maximo speaks, her voice still as broken as before.

"Hmm." I hum, crossing my legs. "We've got time."

Maximo doesn't reply, still seemingly quite out of it. I assume they think keeping her groggy will limit her powers. It seems to have been working quite well, as I'm not a hundred percent certain Maximo even knows this isn't happening in a dream of hers.

"They seem quite stressed back there." I tell her with a nod at the door. "They are all very keen on hearing from you."

"Which truth do they want?" Maximo asks so ly, not looking too stressed about her current situation.

"Yours."

"Hmm." She closes her eyes. A er a beat, she continues. "I know what they want."

"And what's that?"

"Me. Here. Forever." She opens her eyes, looking into mine and I feel a chill at how empty and dull they are compared to the green and sparkling ones I was met with in the cabin.

"Do you think you should be here?" I ask her carefully.

She looks away from me and focuses her gaze on her hands, which are busy pulling at the skin around her nails. I notice how it seems like she's been doing that for a while, going on the specks of blood here and there around her nails.

"I think sometimes you want to do the thing you see as right, but it's not always as straightforward as you imagine in your head." Maximo directly quotes me from back in the cabin.

"That sounds intelligent. Who said that?" I smile, and notice a faint smile cross Maximo 's face too, although she doesn't look up from her hands. "Would it be crass if I quoted myself too and told you sometimes it helps to talk about it?"

"Two quotes in a row might be pushing it." Maximo says, and I'm slightly relieved to note that she's still there, underneath the lethargicness.

"Hmm, maybe. But I've been known to push a boundary here and there." I shrug.

Maximo looks up at me with a sad expression and I go still, allowing her some space as I feel like she might just open up. I'm suddenly acutely aware of the camera broadcasting everything to the room filled with people a few hundred meters away.

She opens her mouth, but closes it again. She resumes picking at her nails. I dare resume breathing. Somehow, I am almost relieved at her not saying anything. I know how easy it is, especially for good lawyers like the ones watching us this instant, to twist anything to their advantage. I shi , feeling guilt at my thoughts. I am supposed to do my job, and here I am wanting to do the complete opposite.

"Remember when I told you we didn't come to hurt you, back in the cabin?" I ask her, feeling like I have to at least try to do my job. "I still don't want to. I want to help."

"Look where your help has gotten me." Maximo says, and I blink, biting my cheek. "My knife might have been bigger but yours was in my back all along and I didn't even feel it."

A/N: Not going to lie, I was struggling for a bit with finding where this story was going, and this slightly mad idea popped into my head, and it's so happening, and it's so going to get me into trouble but eyo ;)

Get ready.

[Continue reading next part](#) □