

Chapter 5

"We have a visual of the target's location" Greer mutters into the comms over to Hayward whom I presume is waiting impatiently on the other side. "OK everyone, this is go time. Remember, they want her alive and we need to get those fucking shackles on, that's our number one priority. I don't give a shit if you break her arm if you have to, just get the shackles on."

Greer's voice emanating clearly from my earpiece as if he's whispering into my ear. I really dislike Greer more and more, but I do understand the want to not be strangled by some mumbo jumbo. I'd rather break the suspect's arm any day over that. I don't dislike enhanced individuals, but oh boy would I prefer it if they didn't exist. Would make our job a hell of a lot easier.

I'm awakened from my thoughts by the tall lanky agent touching my elbow, silently telling me to get into position. I unholster the glock I keep on my back, not taking the safety off just yet. I look around me and see all of the men looking stoic and getting their gear ready to go. A sudden calm has descended upon the group. I look out onto the lake and take a steadying breath. This is what I'm good at. I tell myself there's a reason I have been selected for this mission. I've done hundreds of missions extricating hostages, and this is technically no different, I lie to myself. I have a bad feeling about this whole thing.

"I want myself, Jackson, Graham, and you-" Greer points at me. "to go in the front. Farrington, Kelley, Lourde, and other FBI guy, you circle around back."

We rearrange ourselves into smaller groups with no further talking. I make eye contact with the tall and lanky agent, silently reassuring each other. I cast a look at the small cabin, but there seems to be no movement; it's as still as ever, and I'm almost doubting Maximo is in there. It all looks so insignificant with the huge mountain towering over us.

"Lourde, you take the lead. I want the back secured, she's not getting out under any means, ok? We don't have a chance if we let her out in the open, the element of surprise is all we got. Once the back is secured, FBI and Lourde stay back and the other join us and we get these shackles on, copy?"

"Copy." Everyone mumble, afraid to break the eerie silence of the valley.

"OK, Move out." Greer says and the group moves as one along the edge of the tree line towards the cabin.

The moon makes an occasional reappearance, lighting the valley up in a misty glow, but we keep out of sight, staying under the covers of trees I gather must be hundreds of years old. I feel a shiver run up my back, the hairs standing up on the back of my neck. We are unwelcome here.

Soon, we have reached the side of the cabin. It's very small, there can't be more than two or three rooms in there.

Greer gives us the go sign, and we half run-half walk-half squat towards the side of the cabin. The ground seems frozen beneath my boots, the frozen grass breaking under my weight. There is a small window on the side of the cabin with curtains drawn. It looks dark inside. I remind myself to breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth in a bid to calm my racing nerves. The closer we get the less confident I feel about this whole plan. She's asleep, I tell myself. She's asleep and we'll get her easily.

We part around the cabin like water parting around a rock in a stream. I follow along up onto a dark porch, thankful for my night vision goggles; without them we'd be blind as bats. There is an old rocking chair on one side of the porch, and a little workbench on the other side with an empty mug placed on top. Otherwise, the cabin could just as well have been abandoned.

Greer shuffles for a short amount of time, and the door suddenly swings open with an ominous creak. Greer walks in first, followed by two other agents, and I form the rear. Well inside, the air is warm, and it smells faintly of smoke and pine. There is a small round table in the middle of the cabin, a small, tidy kitchen and I get a sudden rush of memories that take me back to childhood summers spent at my grandparents' cabin up in Montana. I don't have time to study anything else in more detail before Greer's voice sounds through my earpiece.

"Clear." He states, and signals to the only other room in the cabin.

The door to the room is closed, and no light comes through the cracks. The silence is roaring loud in my ears and I can practically hear my heart race and I'm amazed the sound of it hasn't woken Maximo up along with the rest of the forest. I hear a sudden shuffle behind me and our around swiftly, raising my gun to face my opponent.

But it is not Maximo, but the other S.W.O.R.D. agent who makes a steadying motion with his hands. I lower my gun and turn back around towards the door and the other agents.

Greer manages to open the door silently, and I grab onto the gun in my hand tighter. Greer enters and the two other agents follow him swiftly.

Then, everything unfolds in slow-motion, it seems like. I manage to catch a glimpse of a floating, red silhouette shimmering with red light, before a sudden force like a brick wall hits us all straight in the chest, knocking the wind out of me and flinging everyone backward back into the main room of the cabin.

I hit the floor with a thud, my head bouncing on the floor, but my helmet softens the blow. I struggle for a second to catch my breath, feeling like I'm sucking in water instead of air. On my left, Greer is already getting up, just to be hit with a shimmering ball of red square in the chest over his kevlar, sending him tumbling back again.

"You should not have come." An icy voice breaks the silence. I hear the voice everywhere on my body, inside my head. I recognize the Sokovian accent laced in the words instantly.

I'm suddenly back on my feet, dodging the ball of red I'm expecting to come flying at me. I roll out of my dive and go to stand with my back against the wall next to the door to what I'm assuming is Maximo's bedroom.

The rest of the agents are back on their feet too by now. Everyone assumes defensive positions, and I see the shackles and collar being readied. I still feel pressure on my chest.

"I do not want to hurt you. Please leave." The bodiless voice sounds in my head again.

"Go, go go!" Greer shouts and the agents rush back into the room.

I try to follow, but as soon as I'm in the doorway I'm hit by a body flying out of the room. This time, I feel the back of the table hit my square in the back, the impact of my body and the big agent's body on top of mine is too heavy for the old table to take and it shatters loudly under me. Again, the wind is knocked out of me as I struggle to push the man off of me. He curses and slowly rolls over. I stand up, wheezing. The other agents have been sent flying out of the room too, and I see one of them is unconscious, a bloody trickle coming down his face.

"Last warning." The voice sounds again. It's icy, and I feel the blood in my veins go cold from the sound of it.

I hold my side as it burns and assume my position by the door again. I quickly peek around, catching a glimpse of the dark shadow floating in the back of the room again before I have to duck back out, forced by a red ball flying past me, missing my face by inches. I feel the hotness emanate from it as it zooms by.

"I'm going in, you two follow me and get those shackles off! Greer says through gritted teeth. "FBI, back us up."

I take a shallow breath to prepare myself, and just as the men roar past me into the room, I hear a sound so faint I could easily have missed it from my left further in the room. I turn my head in the direction of the sound and almost scream out loud as I see a pale face framed by long hair look back at me from the shadows beside a huge cupboard. Two red eyes stare back at me. Without thinking, I instinctively point my gun at the figure, aim for her right shoulder and fire three shots.

I hear shots fired from inside the other room as well and shouting and swearing. We're royally screwed, I have the time to think before registering that my bullets never reached their intended target. The figure moves out of the darkness, her hands now matching the red glow in her eyes, a hateful expression marring her face. I try to move, but I'm frozen in place. All I can do is fearfully watch whom I now recognize as Maximo move towards me silently, her chest rising and falling rapidly. She cocks her head to one side, and I'm suddenly pushed back with such force I swear I feel a rib or two break under my kevlar vest, and as my back and head hit the opposite wall, my vision goes black.

I slowly open my eyes and instantly feel a barrage of pain everywhere. I blink lazily, confused about where I am for a second, before I'm brought back to reality by the same voice I heard earlier echo in my head. This time, the voice is not coming from the inside of my head, but more precisely, from behind my head.

"-I said enough." The thick accent makes the voice sound fuller, but the voice itself sounds frailer than earlier. "I will do it. And then you are next."

I suddenly realize I'm not lying on the floor as expected, but am suspended vertically a few inches above the floor. I look down, seeing my glock laying just out of reach below me. Then, I realize there's a faint, but red-hot red swirl around my neck, tightening in on me by the second. I feel my throat constricting.

"I mean it!" The voice shouts behind me, and the red magic dramatically increases its pressure around my windpipe. I'm starting to see small spots of light dance around my field of vision.

"OK!" I can faintly see Greer hold up both of his hands in the air.

"Fuck! OK!"

"Get out." Maximo appears to my right, her left hand slowly moving in my direction, controlling the magic around my throat.

Suddenly, there's a yell, and she's knocked off balance- one of the S.W.O.R.D. agents has snuck up behind her and harshly headbutts her with the shaft of his gun. Maximo falls to the floor with a thud, just barely managing to place her hands in front of her to so on her fall. I fall with her, the red magic is now gone and I take a deep breath, feeling a sharp pain on my side as I collide with the floor.

"I got-" The agent yells, but can't seem to finish his sentence.

My night vision goggles have been lost somewhere, and the cabin is dark. I can faintly see Maximo next to me, on her hands and knees. I look away from her and try to fix my flickering gaze onto the agent.

I'm shocked back into a momentary feeling of clarity when I see him shoot up into the ceiling with a sickening crunch before he falls face-first back onto the floor, where he lies still.

I feel heat on my side, and turn my head to see Maximo getting up, her face illuminated by the red glow in her hands. I start struggling away from her, but my movement attracts her attention, and her head snaps in my direction. I meet her glowing red eyes and dive towards where I know my gun still lies. It's futile. I know it, and she knows it. But like a mouse between a cat's paws, I still struggle. My fingers barely graze the cool surface of the gun before I feel a pain in my arm that threatens to knock me out again. I struggle against the so darkness creeping in from every corner as I feel my body slide across the wooden floor towards Maximo, who is now but a blurry dark figure. I'm lied on the floor, but I'm too out of it to sense in what direction I'm hanging. The darkness is nearly over me, the red glow the only thing I can focus on. Suddenly, my fingers touch something so familiar it makes my heart jump with a flicker of joy. The gun strapped to my leg.

"She's next." Maximo's voice sounds from somewhere in my proximity, but all I can focus on is getting the gun without her noticing. There's the familiar feeling of the magic squeezing down on me again, reducing my breaths to raspy gasps.

"We'll be back, witch." Someone says from further away.

"I hope not."

I focus on my breathing again. In. Out. In Out. My head throbs painfully as blood starts pooling in it; I must be upside down. What I assume to be my broken arm dangles pitifully under me, while I keep my other arm fighting gravity as I grab the gun from the holster. I force my eyes open and try to locate Maximo. I finally find her. She's turned away from me, her red hair glistening in the moonlight shining in from the open door. She's examining the agent she sent flying to the roof. I try to move my arm and point the gun at her, but I can't move. Instead, I'm left dangling in the air, hand squeezing the useless gun to my side.

My tongue blacks out again, but I fight not to pass out. I bite my tongue, feeling the coppery taste of warm blood fill my mouth. I open my eyes again. Everything's grey and undefined. I can't focus my vision. Only one thought fills my head. Shoot her. If I could only move my arm.

Suddenly the room is filled with the angry red glow again. I struggle to find Maximo. Then, without warning, I fall to the floor limply. I let out a small gasp as my broken arm twists underneath me and my head once again hits the floor, causing me to see stars. I somehow manage to keep hold of the gun, though.

I slowly, weakly push my upper body off the floor and force my eyelids to stay open. I see a blur of red, and understand that Maximo is levitating the body of the agent out of the cabin. She's not facing me.

I feel blood rush down my forehead and down my face. I hear my heart pound. I suddenly feel calm. I can't feel anything else. My vision slowly blurs more and more and I know it's now or never. I lift my arm and point the gun at Maximo. I try to steady my arm. I can't miss. I click the safety off, the sound making Maximo turn around. Her eyes aren't red anymore. My finger presses down on the cold trigger. There's a slight resistance. She looks so pale in the moonlight. The gun shakes in my hand as the bullet fires.

A/N: Long chapter! Woohhhh