

Chapter 6

My ears are ringing. I open my eyes with a gasp. Everything is still dark around me, I can't see. There's a sharp pain on the right side of my torso as I start breathing, panicked, taking in gulps of air. The ringing in my ears so ens slightly, and I can make out shapes around me. I'm lying on the ground. Above me is a dark ceiling. To my le is what remains of the broken table. I can see vague shapes of other furniture that have been knocked over or broken. There is a big window on the wall with light curtains fluttering so ly from a small breeze. It's dark outside, too.

I grunt as I push myself up slightly with my right arm. The pain in my torso intensifies, and I almost feel like puking. I'm still groggy and am struggling to make sense of where I am, or what has happened. I don't think I can move particularly far. The pain in my torso flares up every time I inhale, or exhale, so I try to calm myself down and take small, steady breaths.

My eyes are suddenly drawn down onto my le arm, which is hanging in an odd shape. I stare down at my forearm, which is covered in blood, with a sharp, white bonesticking out. The sight of it is too much, and my stomach contracts and I spit out what I assume is stomach acid. Shit. Focus, I try telling myself. My arm is still leaking out a steady trickle of blood, but I'm in too much of a state of shock to feel anything. I know I can't do anything about the bone, but I have to apply some pressure to stop the bleeding. I look frantically around me for anything that could serve me but only see broken wood and glass shards.

As I'm looking around, I see two bodies by the open front door. It's slightly lighter outside than where I am, so I can see them quite clearly. One of them is huge compared to the other. I suddenly remember, Maximo . I stay completely still, holding my breath, eyes fixed on her form. She doesn't move. I have to get to her before I can tend to my own injuries, I don't know if we'll ever get a better chance. I look around, trying to locate anything I could restrain her up with, and my heart takes a little leap of relief when I see the shackles the agent dropped before Maximo knocked him out -or worse; I'm reminded of the sickening crunch that was heard when he was slammed to the ceiling.

With a huge push of e ort, I drag myself over to the shackles. My breathing is the only thing I can concentrate on as to not pass out from the e ort. Thankfully, I'm not too far away. I grab the cool, black things that look like thicker handcus, place them on my lap and look over to where Maximo and the agent are lying. Five meters. I can do this. I half drag, half shu le my way across the cabin floor. My vision flickers, but I keep going. I've reached their feet now. I steady myself, not letting myself pass out before I've restrained her.

One more push, and I've dragged myself to her level. She's leaning against the wall next to the open door, but most of her body is on the floor. Her head is hanging limply, her face covered by her red hair. My stomach suddenly drops. I can instantly see the blood slowly, but steadily flowing out of her body where my bullet hit her.

"Shit."

I aimed for her shoulder, but missed quite significantly. She's managed to drag herself back from where she was hit, standing by the doorframe to the wall next to the door. There's a significant pool of blood next to her. I quickly scoot closer, ignoring the screaming pain in my ribs. I use my one good hand to push some of the hair covering her face away, accidentally smearing her cheek in my -or her, blood. It creates a stark contrast against her skin, which looks too pale to indicate anything good.

I press two fingers against her neck, trying to find a pulse. For a few horrifying moments, I struggle. I let out a breath as I finally feel a slight pulse against my fingers. I don't know how long I blacked out a er shooting her, but thankfully, she's still alive. My orders were never to kill, and I've managed to survive in the FBI for quite an impressive amount of time without having taken a life. Call it great aim. Ironic.I think as I look down onto Maximo 's right side. I can't tell exactly where the bullet hit her; the entire right side of her abdomen is covered in dark blood. I know I have to stop the bleeding or she won't have a chance.

I look around, again trying to come up with anything I could use to tie around her. This time I'm lucky, and spot a tablecloth amongst the splinters of the used-to-be table. I drag myself over to it, place it in my lap over the shackles, and pull myself back. I fumble to find what I hope is still attached to the outside of my ankle. Still there, I note with gratefulness as I pull out the sharp combat knife I never really use. I know I won't be of any use to Maximo if I pass out again - which I'm close to, so I use the knife to tear o a smaller piece of the cloth and gingerly place it over my broken arm.

I take three breaths, grab one end of the fabric with my teeth and the other with my hand, make a loose knot and then pull. I bite down hard on the fabric as blinding white pain shoots up from my arm. My teeth clamp down hard as I fight the urge to let myself blackout.

She'll bleed ou! I think over and over until I feel steady enough to double knot it. I look down at my arm. The mustard-yellow tablecloth is already turning red, but the fabric is thick and I'm convinced it's as good as I can do for now.

I turn my attention back to Maximo . She's sunken slightly lower down against the wall, blood still staining her clothes more and more. I fold the tablecloth over a couple of times until there are enough rolls of fabric to make it thick enough, and I lay it down on the floor next to Maximo . I'm hesitant to move her, but I want to get her heart parallel to her feet so as to not strain it, so I wrap my good arm around her torso and pull her down on the floor over the tablecloth.

Her head makes a so thump on the wood as I ease my arm out from underneath her.

"Sorry." I whisper. I'm taken aback by how little e ort the action took. I thought she'd be heavier. In fact, she's a lot smaller than I imagined. Now, lying on the floor of the dark cabin in the middle of nowhere, the shadow of the enormous mountain looming overhead, she's not that scary at all. Her reputation truly precedes her.

I take a quick moment to steady myself before I get back to it. Somehow, keeping my focus on Maximo seems to dull the pain I'm feeling. I lean over her and carefully pull her knitted jumper up to expose the wound. The blood has colored her skin a coppery red, and the movement of placing her down on the ground seems to have angered the bullethole which I can now tell is just above her right hip. I grunt as I flip her over to her side, and am almost completely lying down on her as I desperately feel to see if the bullet has exited. To my relief, I can tell it did.

I let her fall back on her back, take a hold of the two ends of the tablecloth on either side of her and repeat my earlier action of tightening it around her waist, using my teeth and good hand. I tighten it as much as I can, and once I'm pleased with the pressure it's applying to the wound, I let myself fall down on the floor next to her.

My thoughts briefly flicker to the shackles that lie forgotten by my feet. I'm hit like a freight train by exhaustion, finally feeling my broken arm and ribs again. I make one last movement, securing the shackles. I crawl closer to Maximo , fighting the impending darkness in the corners of my vision. I grab one cold hand, putting the anti-witchcra bracelet on. It gives a so little click. I repeat the action on her other arm. It clicks. I give the floor my full weight again. I can hear the shackles working by the so hum they emit. Pleased with my e ort, I allow myself to rest. I close my eyes, just for a short moment...

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