

Chapter 7

As soon as I awaken, I can tell the short moment of rest I allowed myself was indeed not short. I keep my eyes shut, noting that my surroundings are now bright. I can hear birds. Every inch of my body aches. I need to check on Maximo. Reluctantly, I lift my heavy eyelids. My eyes are dry, and I have to blink a few times before my surroundings come into focus. I'm still lying where I last was. It's now day outside. The agent is still lying where Maximo left him. Speaking of, I turn my head to the left, expecting to see her still lying next to me, but she's gone. Only a half-dried pool of blood indicates that I indeed have not hallucinated the whole thing.

I try pushing myself up on my feet, but my body has had enough, and I collapse back into a slouching position on the floor.

"Fuck." I exhale, hand on my ribs.

I slowly remove both my warm jacket and my kevlar vest, letting them drop on the floor next to me, along with the knife. I gingerly lift up my shirt which is plastered against my sweaty skin. Underneath I'm not met with evenly coloured skin, but instead something that looks like modern art. A huge, blue and purple bruise has spread across my torso from the right side of my ribs. I slowly trace my ribs with my fingers, letting out a soft whimper as the delicate skin underneath protests.

"Probably broken." A low, raspy voice suddenly speaks up from somewhere in the darker parts of the cabin.

I instantly reach out for the knife that's lying next to me and point it at where the voice came from. Maximo slowly appears from inside the room we tried to enter last night to no avail. She is clutching her waist, and I'm relieved to note that the shackles I placed on her are still on, and evidently working as the little green light on each of them is visible to me. I look up at her face and meet her eyes. She's not wholly as intimidating now, her eyes back to a normal human colour, which it is I can't tell, she's staying out of the light. She doesn't look great, but at least she's standing up.

"Nice of you to dress my wound." She speaks again, the accent I heard yesterday much less noticeable now.

"I aimed for your shoulder." I say softly, suddenly feeling slightly dumb, so I lower the knife down slowly.

ā

"You missed." Maximo says flatly. If she was making an attempt at a joke I can't tell; her voice is calm like the lake outside, and her face is blank, her eyes still fixed on me.

ā

"I noticed." I reply, and we stare at each other for what feels like forever, but I can't think of what to say, and suddenly anything I could say or do seems insanely stupid and clumsy.

ā

Maximo sighs and leans against the doorframe, looking like the effort of standing up is draining whatever little energy she's regained quickly.

I suddenly remember the agent I've completely neglected is still lying in the entrance to the cabin. I dare look away from Maximo, trusting the shackles and her current state has reduced her to as little a threat to me as the curtains hanging from the windows. I slowly look away from him and back at Maximo. She's not moved, her eyes still trained on my every move.

"I am sorry." She softly says, answering the question that didn't have time to travel from my brain to my lips.

"We weren't going to hurt you." I shiver slightly, feeling both hot and cold at the same time.

Maximo doesn't reply instantly. She looks away from me, her eyes quickly scanning the cabin. When they return to me, she sinks slightly lower against the doorframe. I know my statement means nothing to her, and that it is childishly naive. Of course, we meant to hurt her. Not me, directly, but I didn't think twice before shooting her. Both times.

As if my inner dialogue was one Maximo also had in her head, she sighs and lifts up one hand to show me the black, shiny metal clamped around her wrist.

"I could have fixed your bones."

"And why would you have done that?" I retort, slightly more forcefully than intended.

Throughout our conversation, Maximo hasn't given much away in terms of body language. One of the things I pride myself most on, and the strongest suit in my job, is my ability to decipher messages suspects involuntarily give away through their actions. Maximo though, has a very subtle baseline, I have come to note. She does not move her body around much -maybe due to the pain from her wound, nor her mouth, hands nor head. Her eyes are also hard to read, but they're the ones that give the most away, so far. At my last statement, her eyebrows rise slightly, her breath hitches and she blinks quickly. I've obviously hit a slight nerve.

"I came here to be left alone." She says, her voice dark.

"Surely, you knew-" I begin, but she chuckles slightly, pain flashing across her face quickly as she irritates her wound.

"I'm not going back." She looks back at me, a similar angry expression as the one she wore yesterday starting to grow on her face.

"I don't think you have much of a choice." I tell her, in vain.

"What?" She looks at me condescendingly. "You are going to stop me?"

I breathe out, closing my eyes for an instant. Then, I slowly push myself up, ignoring my ribs. I falter slightly, having to steady myself on the same wall Maximo herself not so long ago was leaning against, unconscious. I spin the knife in my hand quickly, readjusting my grip. I try to relax my broken arm, but it doesn't help the pain the slightest.

"I have my orders." I tell her. "I've already followed through."

Maximo sizes me up for a moment, her eyes moving from my face to the knife, to my arm, and to my ribs, and back up to my face. Finally, her lips turn upward in the slightest of smiles. I raise my eyebrows at her.

"You can't use your magic, a bullet tore through your abdomen a few hours ago. I can't use magic, I've got a broken arm and probably some broken ribs, but I have been trained in hand-to-hand combat. And I have a knife." I tell her, sincerely hoping she won't be dumb enough to try to fight her way through me.

Her smile grows as she listens to me. She tilts her head slightly, then pushes herself off the doorframe and slowly walks towards the kitchen. I frown, confused. Maximo looks at me, still smiling, then turns away from me and opens a drawer. She shuffles inside it for a bit, then turns back around to face me, now holding a kitchen knife in her hand. She lifts it up for me to see, and smiles even wider.

ā⁴

"Oh for god's sake, seriously?" I let out an annoyed huff.

"My knife is bigger than yours."

ā²

[Continue reading next part](#) □