

Chapter 9

Maximo squints her eyes at me so ly, her brows furrowing creating a small 'V' on her forehead. I clear my throat and reach out for the bottle of wine, afraid she's going to read into my last statement or start looking through my head. I sip the wine, trying to only think of what I can see, feel, smell and taste to ground myself.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I hear Maximo ask me tentatively, her voice sounding almost as if it is reaching me underwater.

"No, I don't." I firmly say and I feel her shi slightly on the couch.

We fall into silence again. It's not wholly uncomfortable, though. I sip the wine, and she just sits there. A er a while, I glance over at her. She's looking down at the cu s on her wrists, absentmindedly fiddling with them. She doesn't look like she's trying to figure out a way to get them o , though.

"It's almost nice." She says, apparently aware of my attention.

"What?"

"Not being able to use my powers." She says, looking up. "You're still loud," I smirk at her as she continues. "But I feel almost... normal again."

"How did you..." I falter. "Get them? Your powers?"

Maximo sighs and looks at me quickly, obviously checking if I am asking as myself, or as an FBI agent trying to gain information on her. Apparently pleased with what she finds, she looks away and I remain waiting, looking at her profile.

"I was given them, or they were unlocked." She finally says, vaguely.

"By whom?" I ask her, genuinely intrigued.

"Myself, I guess." She says and gives a minute shrug.

We stay seated on the couch for what feels like hours, both of us too tired to move. By now, I've decided that Maximo isn't a flight risk anymore, and allow myself to relax. We've both somehow made an unspoken agreement to not mention the body of the agent lying in the doorway behind us, nor S.W.O.R.D. I know they must be scrambling at the basecamp, trying to come up with a new plan, now that Maximo knows they're coming, and potentially has a hostage. They aren't obviously aware she's wearing the shackles, otherwise, I would have expected them to return as soon as they got word of it. I wonder in what state of insanity Hayward is in at the moment and wonder what Agent Woo and Dr. Lewis are up to. It feels odd to admit, but as much as I'm in physical discomfort, I'm not absolutely hating sitting on the couch talking to Maximo . The conversation I've had with her is the longest time I've spent with another human in months. I feel oddly out of practice and at ease at the same time. Now that Maximo and I are on level playing fields, it's much easier to see her as just another human being, and the longer I spend with her, the more normal she seems. I chuckle as I think back on what one of the FBI agents said when we were debriefing on her case:

"All this shit for this bitch? We better be fucking careful, I've heard she's like seriously lost the plot, this one has."

At some point, Maximo dozes o . She's slumped on the couch, still looking pale, but I'm not too worried; she seems to have regained a little bit of color in her face. I remove an old blanket from the back of the couch and place it on her. The cabin has gotten a lot cooler as the door has been le wide open for hours. Sometime later, I doze o .

I'm running as fast as I can through an unfamiliar hallway. I don't know why I'm running, but I know that if I don't make it to the end of the corridor, something awful will happen. The harder I run, the more di icult running seems to become and the slower I advance. I keep hearing her screams echoing from somewhere. If I can just get to her... Suddenly a dark figure is standing in front of me and I freeze, paralyzed with fear. I suddenly remember I have a gun in my hand, but as I li to point it at the dark figure, Wanda is standing in front of me, a dark red hole in her forehead, and blood oozes from it. She tries speaking, but only coughs up blood. I run up to her and grab her just as she collapses.

"Who did this to you?" I ask her frantically trying to wipe the blood away from her face.

Suddenly I'm holding her in my arms, just like I did then. I feel tears trickle down my cheeks.

I feel tears trickle down my cheeks. I feel pain in my chest. Pain in my arm. My head is pounding. My face is wet. I blink open my eyes, feeling dazed. I've sunken down slightly on the couch. I'm still in Maximo 's cabin. I freeze when I see Maximo on the opposite end of the couch, looking at me, an expression I can't quite read on her face. Embarrassed, I wipe the tears o my face. She swallows, and looks away from me, giving me some privacy. I sit up straighter, mindful of my ribs as they feel, if possible, worse a er my nap than before.

Maximo gets o the couch silently, her sweatpants and sweater stained with dark blood. I don't follow her, knowing somehow that she's not escaping o into the Transian wilderness. Instead, I stay glued to the couch, looking straight ahead, as if memorizing each twist and turn of the wooden planks that make up the walls of the cabin. I hear Maximo rummage somewhere behind me, and she returns a little while later with a clear glass of water in her hand. She stops in front of me, looking down at me through thick strands of hair that frame her face. She hands me the glass silently. When I accept it, she stretches out her other hand towards me, opening it and showing me two small, white pills.

I frown, looking up at her. She extends her hand even more towards me as she explains so ly;

"Pain meds."

I take the pills from her, my cold, clammy fingers brushing against her warm, so palm ever so slightly. I ignore the feeling, placing the pills in my mouth as I wash them down with the so est water I've ever tasted.

I hand her back the glass and look up into her now dark forest green eyes.

"Thank you."

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