

## Chapter 14

I sleep through the night, vividly dreaming but when I wake the next morning, I cannot seem to grasp the memories of the dreams as they elude me like whips of smoke. A very direct, hands-on Eastern European woman wakes me up and checks my vitals, and checks on my arm. Apparently, the wound became infected, which led me to suffer from chills and eventually a fever which could not be broken without treating me with antibiotics, she tells me in a matter-of-fact manner. I try asking her how I ended up here, where here even is, and how Maximo is doing, but all I am met with is silence and shaking of the head. It does not even help when I try to ask in broken Hungarian. All she does is hiss at me that she speaks Romanian.

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So, all morning all I can do is wait. The hospital is now buzzing with life and I know I wouldn't make it five meters without being stopped. I am apparently a very interesting patient, as I believe I am being checked on quite a lot more than necessary. Every nurse that comes to check on me I try asking the same questions to, but they all refuse to speak to me. After a highly disappointing breakfast and later a similarly disappointing lunch, I begin to feel quite peeved. No one is answering any questions, not even the doctor who finally comes to check on me. All I'm told is the status of my arm: broken -what a surprise, they've had to insert metal pins to pin the shattered bone in place, and that I've got two broken ribs which I am lucky did not puncture my lungs. Weeks of healing, taking it slow and later weeks of physiotherapy for my arm is what I can look forward to. None of this does anything to improve my general irritability.

As the day goes on I become more and more anxious, wondering how Maximo is doing and what they are doing to her. When I begin to seriously plot my escape to check on her, I finally notice a familiar face amongst the rest. Agent Woo rounds the corner and instantly makes eye contact with me, walking straight up to me, looking like he knew exactly where to find me. He looks just a bit more tired than the last time I saw him, his appearance just slightly disheveled. It looks like he hasn't had a proper night's sleep in a while.

"Nice of you to come round." I say sardonically once he's reached the foot of my bed, but a genuine smile spreads across my face. "I was beginning to think I had been entirely forgotten." "I'm happy you're awake. How are you feeling?" Agent Woo looks at me concerned. "Not loving the food here." I scrunch up my nose. "You're quite lucky you got here, you know." He says, ignoring my comment. "I've been wondering how I got here, actually. No one seems to want to answer any questions. How is Maximo?" Agent Woo looks around uncomfortably, and I'm slightly annoyed that he doesn't seem to have prepared himself to be asked that obvious question. "We had to get you here by helicopter. You were quite out of it." He says, tiptoeing around the elephant in the room. "Maximo?" I decide to address it directly, too curious to beat around the bush any longer. "I guess I might as well debrief you." Agent Woo sighs and walks around the bed to my left side, his eyes flickering to my cast speared by the metal pins as he drags over a chair and sits down. "Well?" I prompt him, eager to know what happened. Before beginning, he looks around, making certain that the curtains are drawn shut around us. I don't have the heart to tell him that would anyone want to listen in on our conversation, the curtains would hardly keep them from doing so, but rather make it easier for them. "Well... we were all running around like headless chicken when Agent Greer told us what happened." Agent Woo begins, leaning back on the chair, giving me a small smile. "Hayward was furious. It took the team about half an hour to contact him after your... altercation with Wanda, something was messing with the comms. Or someone." We both chuckle slightly. Agent Woo wets his lips before he clears his throat and continues. "Hayward wanted to bust straight back in once he was made aware, and we had to fight quite hard for him to realize that Wanda had two FBI agents as hostages. That complicates things quite a lot." At the mention of the tall, lanky agent, I feel my heart drop slightly. "He's dead." "I know." I meet Agent Woo's eyes and he smiles sadly. "He was a good agent." We stay silent for a moment as if honoring the agent's memory. After an appropriate pause, Agent Woo continues again. "We were making up tactics, which was proving difficult as we did not know in what state you were in, if you could help us from the inside, if you managed to restrain Wanda's powers or if you were in imminent danger. Also, she would now be expecting us. We still do not know the full extent of her powers, but we were quite certain that she could easily best us no matter what we threw at her. Our mission had now changed; the FBI's primary concern was now to get its agents out of harm's way, we were no longer prioritizing getting Wanda. S.W.O.R.D. however, did not seem too concerned with that." "No, I don't think Hayward gives a rat's ass about me." I bitterly say. "Well, that might have changed." Agent Woo says, looking at me. I furrow my brow and open my mouth, but Agent Woo continues. "Then, the wind picked up and it was not safe to get to you. So, we had to wait." Agent Woo pauses, looking at me as if in thought. "Well, when we finally could move on Wanda, Hayward had suffered a bit of cabin fever and came in with all the firepower he could summon despite my protests." I look at him incredulously and Agent Woo shrugs. "You met Hayward." Is all he says. I let out a sarcastic laugh. "Yes, lovely guy. So, what happened when you got to the cabin?" I can tell Agent Woo's body language has changed now, he is beginning to look uncomfortable, wringing his hands together in his lap, tapping his foot against the floor, and not meeting my eye contact directly. "Wanda was standing outside waiting for us. We could instantly see that she was hurt and that you had gotten the restraints on her. She had her hands up in the air, kind of struggling to stay standing, it looked like. Anyway, she did not look like she could pose a threat to even the worst agent we had with us." Agent Woo stops, looking extremely uncomfortable at the thought of what happened next, which tightens my chest with worry for some reason. "Wanda was yelling over the sounds of the helicopters something about having to get you help, and that she would comply. Hayward, being Hayward and excuse me for saying this, but a total prick who I believe is still butthurt by how Wanda bested him in Westview and created all sort of trouble for him, saw the opportunity to humiliate her and took it." "What did he do?" I ask, my voice low, dreading the answer. "Well, he um..." Agent Woo seems to debate how to put to words what he experienced. "Well, he managed to humiliate her. He personally walked straight up to Wanda and just... punched her straight in the face." "He what!?" My voice rises with shock. "Yes. And when she fell over he deemed it necessary to kick her straight in the stomach." Agent Woo looks disgusted. "We could all tell she had suffered a wound of some kind, but Hayward keeps insisting she was resisting." "I swear to god I'm going to-" I begin, starting to get out of bed but Agent Woo stops me. "Please, don't." He sighs. "I have already filed a report." "A report? A report!? What is a report going to do!?" I loudly exclaim, and Agent Woo looks tired. "It's all we can do for now." "I thought our entire reason for being here was to make certain this operation was handled in all legality?" I angrily ask Agent Woo. "Yes, but I do not have the rank to actually stop Hayward from doing anything." Agent Woo tells me so ly. "I am as mad as you." "So we just sit back and watch Hayward fucking kick an injured civilian who is complying?" "Please calm down, agent." Agent Woo tells me and I snort but stay quiet. "So, we transferred you both here from the cabin by helicopter. I haven't been allowed to see Wanda yet, but she didn't look great when they took her away." "What a surprise." I roll my eyes, leaning back against the pillows with a hu-

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A moment passes, agent Woo is seemingly trying to let me calm down, but I just can't seem to let go of my anger. I somehow feel personally responsible for Maximo, and I know it is because of the time I had to spend with her, making sure she did not bleed out, but a small part of me also knows that it is because I've come to see her as an actual human being, almost like a friend. "How long have I been here?" I finally ask, still riled up from what I've just been told, my blood pounding in my ears. "Just two days. They kept you under just in case." Agent Woo says, and looks like he is finally getting to the bit he was waiting for. "So, what happened to you in the cabin?"

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