

Chapter 16

The helicopter swings slightly side to side as a particularly strong gust of wind crashes into it. I've never been the biggest fan of helicopters, and this journey has not made me any more fond of them. After having walked up to the helipad at the FBI Headquarters hours earlier, I've been sitting in the cramped machine, silently praying that I won't throw up on the other agent sitting opposite of me. The ride is finally coming to an end, though. Through the rain-streaked windows of the helicopter, I can see the dark, intimidating structure rise from the depths of the stormy waves below.

The helicopter swings harshly to the side again, and I close my eyes, gripping the seat under me with my good hand. The helicopter suddenly drops a few meters, and my stomach feels like it's going to turn on me any second now.

"Didn't know you would be scared of flying." I hear the agent opposite of me smirk, and I shoot her a glance that makes the smile on her face falter slightly.

"I'm trying to not throw up on you, if you must know, Agent Davies." I tell her and take a deep breath in.

Finally, I feel the helicopter thud down on solid ground. I don't waste any time in unbuckling myself and as soon as the door opens, I'm out. The blades of the helicopter come to a slow stop above me as a group of people approach us. I look up as a drop of water falls on my forehead and catch the huge metal opening above us close and the grey sky above is hidden from us, plunging us into a harsh, manufactured light.

"Agents." One of the people nods to us, Agent Davies having now joined me.

"Agent Smith." Agent Davies greets the man, shaking his hand. I don't follow suit, opting to just nod. I notice the group's curious eyes on me, lingering on my arm in its sling. I just my chin out slightly, not bothered by their looks.

"Thank you for joining us." Agent Smith thanks us, and we start moving away from the helicopter, deeper into the Ra. "We've made great progress on paper, thanks to Garcia here, and his team. We're close to finalizing the paperwork, but we've not made any progress with Maximo, and we really need her to talk to have a stronger case."

"What do you mean?" I question Agent Smith, not particularly familiar with how indicting a suspect actually works, as I've never been too bothered with paperwork, opting to delegate all of that to some agent particularly keen to please me or our bosses.

"We'd love it if we could get her to incriminate herself, to indicate she knowingly held the people at Westview hostage, for example." Agent Smith scans his ID and a door slides open, allowing us to walk into a room with a big table in the middle, paperwork and computers scattered across it, amongst the occasional empty coffee cup.

"Please, have a seat." Agent Smith says, and the group start making themselves comfortable.

I sit down next to Agent Davies, and again, feel eyes on me as I try to make myself look unbothered by the pain in my ribs. I can now tell most of the group around the table are lawyers, they all have that tell-tale look to them. Apart from me, Agents Davies and Smith, there are two other FBI agents present.

"How long have you been working on this?" I ask the room, eyeing the amount of papers around me.

"Myself and a few other guys here have been on since Westview." The burly man I assume to be Garcia tells me. I meet his eyes and can tell I am being sized up. "Everyone else has been called up when the Maximo Taskforce got a hint of her whereabouts. You are the last recruit."

"Right. I'm sorry, I'm slightly confused as to what you want me to contribute?"

The room exchanges looks, and I feel annoyed at not being up to speed.

"Oh. I assumed that was clear." Agent Smith leans back in his chair, looking at me over his glasses. "You're here to make her talk."

I look around the room, everyone's eyes on me. I don't let it show, but this makes me uncomfortable. I have interviewed victims and suspects alike, and I'm pretty good at getting people to talk, but I never shared any previous history with them, never having known them for more than ten minutes before stepping into the room.

"Are you sure this is the best course of action?" I try. "Would it not be better to have someone else handle the interrogations, someone Maximo has no previous history with. That could make her feel freer to talk without judgment."

"We've tried, she's been here for nearly a week. Hasn't uttered a word." Agent Smith informs me, still peering at me over his glasses, and I feel like I'm back in training.

"Right." I sigh, knowing I've lost.

"Good, that's settled then." Garcia clears his throat and gathers a few papers in his hands. "Here are questions we've gathered for you."

I am handed the papers, and I glance down at them quickly, noting, with a twinge of guilt, the dozens of questions scribbled down. Without further ado, the room breaks into action as people start gathering papers, opening up laptops, and Garcia, Agents Smith, and Davies stand up, all looking at me expectantly.

"Now?" I ask, hoping for a different answer than the one I know I'm getting.

"Now, if you will." Agent Smith smiles, the smile not reaching his eyes.

"Alright." I mutter, standing up with some difficulty.

"Do whatever you need to get her to talk." Garcia tells me as we wait for the heavily guarded doors to open. "The quicker we get this done, the better. I'm not too fond of this place."

I nod, agreeing on both counts. The doors open and I step through and am let into a room they've prepared for my questioning. I step in, and the doors close behind me. I look around the small room, feeling claustrophobic, remembering the tons of water encasing us all around. I lower myself down onto a plain, metal chair on one side of a small table, facing another metal chair. I notice all of the furniture in the room is bolted down to the floor. In the middle of the table is a sturdy metal ring.

I place the papers down in front of me, wetting my dry lips with my tongue. I know I am being watched by everyone else, so I try to convince them and myself that I am feeling utterly confident. I lean back against the back of the chair, trying to look relaxed, but the room is really making it difficult, seemingly being designed to be as hostile as possible.

I hear a beep, and turn to look at the doors to the room which swing open. Two guards are standing on either side of Maximo, holding her arms, guiding her in. They seem to be half carrying her. She doesn't look up from her feet. I stay quiet as the guards let her down on the chair in front of me. They chain her up to the table, which seems unnecessary as she is already constricted by a straightjacket and a thick collar with a red light around her neck.

I watch the guards as they march out of the room, and the door swings shut behind them. I turn back towards Maximo, my heart pounding loudly against my chest. I feel a sudden feeling of shame. Shame at how I am sitting here, completely fine, clean, and well-fed, as she looks like she hasn't washed her hair in days, dark circles under her eyes, which are downcast and dull. She seems almost like she's been sedated.

I look down at my papers, trying to gain some confidence. The first question that meets my eyes reads 'why did she choose Westview?'

I swallow, feeling clammy. The next question goes 'why did she not sign the Sokovia accords?'. I look up from the paper, feeling that the rest of the questions will be as useless as the first two. Maximo is still staring, unblinking, down at the table between us. I know the first step to take when interviewing a suspect is to build trust and rapport, which will then be followed by confrontation and continuous pressure until the suspect confesses.

I open my mouth to speak, but I can't seem to find my voice. Maximo looks so small in her straightjacket, slightly slumped over like that. I look up at the camera above us in the corner, the red light on it going on and off. I look back at Maximo again. She's so still, I could almost believe she was a statue if it wasn't for the small rise and fall of her shoulders as she breathes. Never has starting an interrogation been this difficult for me. Even when I did it for the first time a few years ago, I instinctively knew what to say. But now, my brain has gone completely empty.

"Usually, you're supposed to ask me questions." A small, croaky voice suddenly comes from Maximo as she slowly lifts her head and meets my eyes with a blank expression.

I instantly notice the bruises on her neck, and her pale skin glistens with a fine layer of sweat. Her eyes stay on mine, and I feel uncomfortable, again not knowing what to say or do. Maximo's dark eyes flicker down to the forgotten papers in front of me, and she leans back in her chair. She stares at me blankly, no expression on her face, her eyes blank, no sign of recognition at seeing me.

"How are you?" I suddenly blurt out in a whisper and instantly curse myself.

My question seems to take Maximo by surprise as well as one of her eyebrows shoots up and she squints slightly, giving her an almost comical look. She looks down at my cast, and then back at my face. I shift slightly.

"I'm sorry." I backtrack awkwardly. "I can... are..."

"We're going to be here for a long time if this is your speed." Maximo says, her lips curling up in a small, slightly lopsided smile. I notice her voice comes out compressed, as if the collar around her neck is pressing down against her throat, her voice being rendered quiet and breathy.

"These questions are shit." I find my voice again and sit back in my chair, mirroring Maximo's position. Her head tilts ever so slightly as she studies me.

"I agree." Maximo struggles slightly against the straightjacket, visibly uncomfortable.

"Do they take that off you at all?" I ask, nodding at the contraption.

"I think you know the answer."

I feel a slight pang of anger at the thought. Maximo just sits there, looking like she's going to fall asleep at any moment. My suspicion of her being sedated grows. They have really thought this out, giving Maximo no chance to even plan an escape.

"I'm sorry." I tell her honestly, but she doesn't react, just stares blankly, and it's becoming slightly unnerving.

"I'm sorry." I repeat, this time more forcefully as I stand up, not being able to do this. She looks at me, not giving any indication as to having actually computed anything.

I turn my back to her and march up to the doors, banging on them loudly. They swing open and I'm let out.

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