Chapter 35

My heart aches a little as Maximo 's tears have made their way through my shirt as she clings onto me like she'd float away into the dark sky above would she let go. I've let us sink down onto the ground as I am holding Maximo in an awkward one-armed hug as she continues to sob into the crook of my neck, seemingly not noticing the awkwardness of my embrace. The hard mountain has gotten cooler and cooler underneath us now that the sun is well gone, deeply burrowed beneath the dark horizon. My back and legs have become numb with the cold, but I'm not feeling it at all as the heat radiating from Maximo is still significant as her body tries to settle after having used such a significant amount of energy. She trembles in my hold, and I am certain it isn't from the cold but from exhaustion. Come to think of it, I don't know when she's managed to sleep last. My thoughts circulate around her, worrying about what I should do to comfort her. I feel stupidly insignificant as I hold her silently, my hand rubbing small, what I hope to be consoling circles on her back. She clings onto me a little tighter like I somehow could ease whatever is tearing her apart, but I know I can't. I feel almost guilty for witnessing her like this as if this is something not meant for me. Maximo doesn't seem to notice my trepidation, or my inability to console her properly. Gratefully, I realize I'm not needed to do anything else than hold her, so that's what I do.

Her broken sobs eventually start softening until she only lets out small, soft gasps. I continue my methodical circles on her back as she slowly regains more composure. When her trembling obviously transforms into shivering, I give her a small squeeze.

"Let's get you inside, okay?" I ask her almost so silently I'm uncertain she heard me, but then she nods against my shoulder, telling me she indeed was listening.

I lower my arm from her and get up, my body protesting as everything aches, but I ignore it, instantly missing the warmth from Maximo as the cold air softly hugs me instead. I reach down to help Maximo up and she places her hand in mine and I pull her up. She stumbles slightly as if drunk when I know it is in fact from having absolutely no energy left in her body.

"Can you make it to the cabin?" I ask her worriedly, scanning her slumped shoulders and pale face.

She hugs herself and nods, not looking at me but keeping her eyes on my shoes. Unconvinced, I walk closer to her and wrap my good arm around her waist to steady her as we begin our descent. She tenses up slightly, but doesn't do anything to indicate she wants me to step away, instead she gives me some of her weight and we cumbersomely make our way back down the rocky mountainside.

I cast one last glance behind me at the woman Maximo threw against the hard rock. She's still lying, unmoving, on the ground. I am itching to check on her, and ask about her, but I'm not so stupid to think now is the time to ask Maximo , who still occasionally breathes in a way that tells me she's trying to not start crying again.

It takes us a long time, but we finally do make it off the mountain and onto more level ground, which makes walking a lot easier. Maximo seems to be able to walk on her own, but I don't dare to let her go, in case she does faint, or...

We haven't uttered a single word during the walk back to the cabin. My mind is racing with possible things I should do, or say, but I cannot find the courage to grasp at any of those suggestions. Again though, Maximo doesn't seem to mind, or care. I have a strong suspicion she actually prefers the silence, maybe because it gives her the opportunity to rebuild her walls before I eventually do ask her to talk about it. I make a mental note to not let her do that, but not to quell my own intrigue but to actually maybe let her help herself by talking to someone. I know I'm probably not the person she would choose to confide in, but honestly, I don't see many other people caring about her, so I'll have to do.

Maximo suddenly lets out a breath that sounds oddly like an amused huff so I look down at her to read her face, but she keeps looking down at the ground in front of her, but I swear there's a very small upturn to the side of her mouth.

By the time we make it to the cabin, night has well and truly fallen and it is almost impossible to see where we're placing our feet, having caused either me or Maximo to stumble quite a few times, while the other has had to fight to keep us from completely tipping over. The half of me which is not attached to Maximo is absolutely freezing at this point, whereas my other side is comfortably warm. I am suspecting Maximo 's magic has something to do with keeping her this warm when all she's wearing is a light cardigan over her shirt. She wraps it more tightly around herself when I finally do let go of her to open the door to the cabin. It opens with a small creak and I turn around to let Maximo step in. She has turned away from me and is looking back at the mountain. Her hair shines softly in the moonlight, and her sorrowful expression makes me hesitate again.

"I'll make some tea." That is what I settle on saying after overthinking for the past hour. However dumb I think it sounds, she doesn't make any indication of thinking the same. Actually, she doesn't make any indication whatsoever of even having heard me.

I don't press her, not now, but turn away from her, giving her some space and entering the dark cabin. I fumble on the wall to find a light switch, quickly realizing I have no clue whatsoever where to find it. instead, I feel my way into the kitchen and find a pot, filling it with some water and placing it on the stove, turning it on by using a match. In the dim light of the fire under the pot, I spot a candle, which I light. Now being able to see slightly better, I reach into a cupboard, finding two slightly chipped mugs. In another cupboard, I find some loose tea which I prepare before leaning back against the counter with a tired sigh as I wait for the water to start boiling.

My entire body is letting me know how unhappy it is with how it's been treated recently and I rub my ribs, the ghost of the feeling of their aching still there. There's a soft sound of a creaking floorboard and I look up to see Maximo slowly entering the cabin. It's difficult to see her expression in the darkness, but I can tell her eyes finally meet mine when I feel my stomach twist slightly. I absentmindedly rub my ribs slightly harder and Maximo 's eyes leave mine and travel down my body onto my side. She continues walking into the cabin towards me, and now I can see that she looks slightly worried underneath the exhaustion. The light of my candle lights up her face slightly, painting it in a softer, more orange glow, making her appear healthier than she in reality is. Her brows furrow softly, creating that little 'v' in the middle of her forehead that always appears when she's confused, worried, or thinking about something.

"Probably broken." She whispers as she's standing right in front of me, and looks up at me with a sad smile.

I can't help the small smile that creeps up my face as she repeats those two words she spoke so long ago now. Her eyes are puffy and red, the green in them flickering in the light of the candle, not unlike the leaves of a tree in late summer. She looks back up into my eyes and exhales softly.

"Thank you. Again." She says and seems to shrink slightly.

"No need to thank me." I shrug softly, not daring to move, my back pressing up against the counter as she stands so close I could count each freckle on her face. She studies my face for a moment, her brows still furrowed. Then her eyes are diverted to something behind me.

"I think it's ready." She says and looks back at me.

"Huh?" I stutter, confused, which makes her smile a more genuine smile.

"The water."

"Oh, yes, the water, right!" I awkwardly move out of her way, turning my back to her, and remove the indeed boiling water from the stove, pouring it into the two mugs.

The tea leaves swirl around furiously, instantly sending out a minty smell as they begin to stain the water. I turn the stove off, the absence of the light from it plunging us into slightly more darkness with the candle being the only source of light.

"Careful, it's hot." I say and extend one of the mugs towards Maximo . Her eyebrows stop furrowing and instead jump up slightly, but all she does is hum in agreement as she takes the mug from me.

I grab my mug and stand there, not knowing what to do -again, as she blows softly on her tea in an attempt to cool it down. I try to ignore my sudden nervousness by copying her movements.

"I, uh, I guess you wouldn't mind if I slept on the couch again?" I speak and she looks up at me with a slight surprise.

"It's quite dark out and I don't know if I can find my car." I quickly continue, interpreting her expression wrongly, apparently, for she shakes her head, making her red hair glisten in the light of the candle, resembling a burning fire, or, I think with slight apprehension, her own magic.

"Come sit on the porch with me." She leans forward towards me and I unintentionally stop breathing for a second as she takes the candle with her and then turns around without waiting for my reply. I follow her obediently onto the front of the cabin, where the air is cold again.

Maximo places the candle down on the wooden railing which goes all around the porch, then lifts one hand in the air and gracefully twirls her fingers as her magic crackles to life, dancing on her fingers and suddenly the broken rocking chair which has been left on the porch miraculously springs back together with a red crack. She twirls her fingers again and with a quiet whooshanother rocking chair appears next to the original one.

Maximo goes to sit on the old one, leaving me to take the one she just created. I sit down while marveling at just how much detail is in the wood beneath me.

I lift my legs up to cross them on the chair as I make it slightly rock. I cuddle the warm mug between my hands in an attempt to let some of its warmth travel through my hands and arms. My breath slowly fogs up in front of me, mixing with the steam of the mug. I glance a look at Maximo , but she seems completely lost in thought as she stares out onto the silent lake in front of us. I sigh, wishing I could know what she's thinking of, slightly jealous of her ability to read peoples' minds.

"Don't be." She speaks and her breath turns white in front of her.

I don't say anything in return and she takes a deep inhale, still looking out at the dark wilderness with fondness.

"I come here to be in silence." She continues just like I hoped she would. "when I first got my powers, I kept getting panic attacks because I was overwhelmed all of the time. Pietro was the only one who could calm me down. Then they separated us... and it was horrible, I just wanted to die."

She speaks with some detachment to her voice, I can't fail but notice. She keeps her eyes fixed on something in the distance, unblinking, and I know she's fighting against her own emotions once again in her never-ending battle against herself.

"Then, we realized we could communicate without using words. I could feel everything he was feeling and thinking, and so could he with me. At first, that too was overwhelming, but when we learned to curate it, it was a comfort."

She smiles softly, but it doesn't reach her eyes. I take a slow sip of my tea, hoping to show her that whilst I am listening, I won't interrupt. She accepts the space evidently as she continues.

"I learned to not get lost in other people's minds, and only skim through. It became easy, but it was because there were never that many people around me. We were kept far below ground. Then when..." She pauses and her right hand goes to twiddle with rings on her fingers which I haven't seen her wear before. She takes a breath and blinks rapidly a few times as her eyes start becoming watery again. "when I moved in with the Avengers I got those problems back again and Pietro wasn't there in my mind anymore..."

She trails off, still fiddling with her rings as she holds the cup of tea, seemingly having forgotten about it.

"Is it easier when you're out here, then?" I ask her as I can tell she's ventured too deep into her own thoughts to snap out of them on her own. She turns her head to look at me, almost surprised that I'm still here.

"Mhm." She nods softly and smiles a small, fond smile. "I can only feel the occasional animal that walks by. I don't get lost. It's finally silent. Well, when you're not here. You're loud." She adds with a little chuckle and I huff, rolling my eyes at her.

"It's difficult when you're just so smart, like I am, you know? I just can't stop thinking." I shrug and she giggles a little again, lifting my spirits. When the moment passes, I ask her something that has weighed on my mind for a while whenever I am near her.

"Do you read my thoughts?" She looks at me. She looks almost sad, and I notice she's stopped twiddling her rings.

"I used to not be able to tune thoughts out... but now, now I don't hear unless I specifically listen. It's more like... like a constant stream, and I catch emotions and sometimes I accidentally overhear things."

"Hmm..." I try to understand what that must feel like, always having someone else's thoughts in your head. Maximo clearly mistakes my silence for disapproval, for she quickly goes on.

"I don't listen, though. I don't feel comfortable. It's your privacy. Just sometimes... sometimes you just slip into my head even though I have my walls up." She looks at me curiously. "It only happened with Pietro."

I don't know what to say to that, so I take a sip of my now lukewarm tea. I feel Maximo continue to look at me, so I pretend to suddenly be very intrigued by the contents of my mug, as if I've only just now discovered that there is something in the cup. From the corner of my eye, I see Maximo shift a little in her chair and take a sip of her tea too.

"What happened? Why did you run away?" I suddenly hear myself say and I horrified keep staring at my cup, wondering if I've pushed her too far and that she's going to run again.

For a while, I am convinced she's going to bolt or brush me off as she radiates tenseness, but then she surprises me and actually answers my question.

"I come here to be alone, because of the voices, but I am also alone in every sense of the word." She softly clears her throat and I look up to make sure that she isn't going to cry again. She isn't, but she looks broken once again, and I can clearly tell she is forcing herself to open up.

"I've felt loneliness many times before, but there was always someone I could use as an anchor. Pietro when our parents died, then Vis when Pietro died. But when Vis died, I had no one."

"But you had your team, didn't you?" I dare to ask her and she shrugs, giving me a sad smile.

"No I didn't. When they took me in after Sokovia, they only did it because of my powers, and because I think they felt sorry for me. Most of them hated me."

I frown, not really believing her take on the Avengers' feelings towards her, but there is no point in arguing with her or trying to convince her otherwise, so I just listen.

"It took a long time to gain their trust, and even then I don't think I was ever really a part of the team. Clint took care of me because he felt he owed Pietro. Steve and Nat had to set an example. I did come to view Natasha as a sister, but she left me too, and I had no one again." She shifts slightly, tucking her knees into her chest.

"I went to Westview because... I lost control of my powers and I hurt a lot of people again. So I came here, for my sake and for everyone else's. But I also discovered something about my powers... and I was - well you stopped me from doing something stupid again." She looks at me and gives me a half-hearted smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes.

"What were you doing?" I ask her, dreading the answer.

She regards me for a moment, clearly debating whether or not to answer me. I can see her come to a conclusion as she hugs her knees closer and looks out onto the lake again, clearly putting up her walls again.

"I was foolish." She mutters. "But I didn't want to be alone anymore."

"But you're not!" I say, surprisingly strongly, clearly surprising Maximo too as she jumps slightly and looks at me with wide eyes. "I'm sorry, but you're not."

"Look around." She says and I roll my eyes again and she narrows hers in reply.

"I am, and all I can see is you running away. I'm sorry, but you say you don't want to be alone, and yet you distance yourself from everyone who cares about you."

Maximo 's expression is unreadable as she looks at me. Her mouth is slightly opened in surprise and she blinks a couple of times and then leans back into her rocking chair and huffs, looking out in front of her.

"I distance myself from everyone who cares about me because I don't know if you've noticed or not, but those who care about me tend to die."

It's now my turn to look at Maximo with my mouth slightly open in shock. No, I had not thought of it that way. I suddenly feel like I've put my foot into my mouth, and I feel incredibly insensitive.

"I'm sorry." Is all I can muster myself to whisper in stark contrast to my earlier sudden outburst.

"It's ok." Maximo sighs heavily.

I lean back in my chair and look out over the lake. It really is beautiful. I can understand how Maximo must feel when she's here. No matter how much I'd like to ignore it, we are similar. I too tend to distance myself from most people, not by running away to a remote cabin but by burrowing myself in my work. I shiver slightly, my tea no longer enough to keep me remotely warm.

Maximo must have noticed as she stands up and surprisingly enough places her mug down on the floor next to her chair, then extending her hand to me. I frown suspiciously.

"Come on, you're cold."

"I'm not."

"I don't need to look into your head to know you're lying. Let's go." She smirks and I relent, letting her pull me up.

She lets go of my hand and goes to take the candle from the railing. It's now nearly burnt out; I've not even noticed how long we've spent on the porch. Maximo starts walking inside and I grab her mug, taking it inside with me.

I place the half-empty teacups in the sink and turn around to start walking towards the couch. Maximo is standing in front of her bedroom unmoving.

"You ok?" I ask her and she turns around to look at me with an odd expression.

"Can you... can you stay with me?" She asks shyly.

"Of course, I'll be right here." I tell her with a small smile, plopping down on the couch.

Maximo still doesn't move, looking back into her dark room. Then, she looks back at me again with an uneasy expression on her pale face.

"I mean, can you stay with me in there?" She clarifies, then quickly adds; "I'm sorry, it's fine. You're probably tired. I'll leave you to it. There's a spare hoodie in that drawer if you want to change."

She finishes rambling, a soft blush creeping up her neck and she smiles awkwardly and finally steps into her room. I stay seated on the couch, confused. I notice her door doesn't close behind her. I sit still for a few heartbeats, then take her up on her offering clean clothes as I notice for the first time how dirty and worn my clothes actually are. My limbs ache as I shuffle out of my clothes and remove the sling my left arm is in. It aches dully, but not strong enough for me to bother putting it into the sling again. I slip on the oversized grey sweatshirt with a worn Dodgers logo on the front. Somehow, I suspect this hoodie used to belong to a certain Captain America. I shake my head at the bizarre realization. Then, I turn towards the couch to sit down again, but something stops me.

I frown, confused. Then, I realize I don't really want to spend another night alone in the dark. I turn towards Maximo 's bedroom and silently approach it, a lump in my throat. The room is dark like the rest of the cabin, but it has a dim, soft, orange glow as Maximo has placed the dying candle on the nightstand next to the bed. She is lying on one side of the bed under the covers, only her head poking out with her red hair cascading down onto her pillow. Her eyes are shiny as they stare into mine and I walk up to the bed as if on autopilot. She pulls out an arm from under the covers and uses it to pull the covers away from the other side of the bed so that I can lie down. I awkwardly sit down on the surprisingly soft and warm bed and swing my legs onto the bed and she throws the covers back onto me. I shuffle down slightly so that I am on her level.

She smiles softly at me, gratefulness radiating off of her. I smile back, grateful not to have to spend the night scared of being dragged into one of my nightmares again. My body instantly relaxes as it realizes it's in a bed, and my eyelids become heavy. Maximo reaches out towards the bedside table next to her and blows the candle out, leaving us in darkness. My eyes take a while to adjust, and I'm left blinking in the dark.

"Can you..." Maximo gingerly whispers next to me. "Can you just hold me, please?"

I nod although she can't see me and shuffle closer to her. She stays still as I wrap an arm around her. I am very aware of how close we are as her breath tickles my face, but it doesn't feel uncomfortable. We stay like that and I can hear her breath slowly start to deepen.

"Thank you, Livvy." She whispers and I can hear the lazy smile on her lips.

"You're welcome, Wanda." I whisper back.

A/N: A slower chapter, but i think it was needed and i absolutely adore writing these, so i hope you liked it as much as i liked writing it! x

Continue reading next part