



Chapter 4

"Everyone clear on the plan?" Hayward shouts across the buzzing field, trying to be heard across the terrain vehicles starting up and the agents running back and forth.

I instinctively reach down to the side of my thigh, feeling my block rest securely in its holster, before checking the gun that's resting on the small of my back. Secure as well. I switched boots, thinking my trainers would not be the best choice, now wearing chunkier black ones that have a comfortable grip on the slippery ground. The jacket I've been given is warm, only my face is exposed to the cold Eastern European night air. Hayward had not wasted any time after the FBI touched ground, wanting to move in to secure the target in the dead of night, thinking the element of surprise would work in our favour.

I look up at the sky, trying to see if I can make out any stars or the moon- I need to know how much of a shadow I'll cast, but the bright spotlights of the camp blind me.

"Agents, you ready?" Agent Woo walks up to me and the tall, lanky agent who flew in with us from New York.

"Missing some beauty sleep, but what can you do." I shrug, slightly shifting my stance to alleviate the cold creeping up my limbs.

"Hm, clearly needed." The lanky agent chuckles.

"Right, that's enough." Agent Woo interrupts my next sentence, which is maybe for the better. I turn to look at Agent Woo, who smiles at me.

"Remember, I think she wants to do good. She is dangerous, but only when backed into a corner, or when she feels threatened."

"So, you don't think us sneaking up on her in the middle of the night and strapping a shock collar on her will make her feel threatened?" I deadpan.

"I'd rather it not come to that." Agent Woo says, and I believe him.

"Did you ever meet her?" I ask him.

"Not directly. But someone I think of as a close friend did. And I trust her with my life, and she trusts Wanda."

"Right." I say, turning back to face Hayward, who is now shouting at some poor soldier who made the mistake of dropping something in the mud.

As much as I'm starting to like Agent Woo, and trust his judgment, I don't usually go with trusting friends of friends, or whatever. Agent Woo seems to be set on seeing Maximo as someone good, but honestly, after reading up on her file, I don't think anyone who flees justice as she has is wholly good, nor innocent.

"Agents!" Hayward's shout interrupts my thoughts. "Line up!"

I nod to Agent Woo and start walking across the camp towards Hayward, followed by the lanky agent. When we reach Hayward, we're surrounded by six S.W.O.R.D. agents. They nod at me as I meet their gazes, but none of them make any attempt at seeming friendly. I note that Hayward must've chosen these six purely based on size - they're towering over me and even the tall lanky agent. I wonder how this is going to end. Any woman waking up in her bed surrounded by men like these will surely not react calmly. And this woman can kill without even touching a weapon.

"OK. To go over it once more: we drop you one kilometre from Miss Maximo's location. You make your way to her, Jackson, you have the collar? Good. Greer, Lourde, Farringdon, and Kelley, you apprehend Miss Maximo and Jackson attaches the collar and Graham attaches the shackles. Make sure you turn these on, they'll restrict her usage of magic."

"In theory." I mutter. Dr. Lewis explained the need for the shackles, stating that from what she's observed they should at least weaken Maximo's powers. She said they shouldn't hurt, and hopefully, if Maximo can't use her powers, there won't be any standoffs or any casualties. The shock collar, however, she cursed the hell out of Hayward for.

"And you two," Hayward looks at me and the other FBI agent. "I don't want you interfering. We have been training for this for months. You remember your place. You're here so you can report back to the FBI. That is all. Am I clear?"

"Yes, sir." The lanky agent and I mutter in unison.

"Good. Greer is in charge, you follow his lead. Greer, once you have secured Miss Maximo, you radio in, understood?"

"Understood, sir." Greer, a tattooed man - probably the biggest of the bunch, arms.

"OK. Get in the chopper, and good luck." Hayward says, and we start moving away towards the military helicopter behind Hayward.

The blades start rotating as we near it, deafening me to any other sounds except the blades and my breath. I jump in after the S.W.O.R.D. agents and the helicopter promptly takes off. The last thing I see before we're in the air is the camp diminishing in size, Hayward already walking away from us, and Agent Woo and Dr. Lewis standing a bit away, watching us depart.

Greer hands me a small earpiece. I press it into my right ear and feel the tell-tale pop! As it adjusts to the size of my ear. Then, it lets sound through again. I now mimic the other agents and put on a big helmet and fasten the strap around my chin, tightening it until I feel it is secure. No one speaks for the entirety of the journey, which does not last very long. Before the knot in my stomach can really start tightening, the helicopter makes a right turn and starts descending.

"Alright, move out, team." Greer's voice sounds crystal clear in my ear, and one by one the agents jump out of the helicopter, which takes off again without ever even touching the ground as everyone has jumped out.

We've landed in a big clearing, surrounded by tall, old pine trees, and darkness. Out here, I can't smell sweat nor mud anymore, just the clear mountain air. I watch the helicopter turn and head away from us, and a huge, towering mountain peak ahead of us. The moon is nearly full, casting a ghostly shadow on everything around when it emerges from wispy-like clouds. It's a still night, there's barely a breeze. The silence is deafening compared to the cacophony of the basecamp.

"Gather round." Greer says, and we gather in an imperfect circle. "OK. I know we are clear on our mission. Everyone is clear on their job? Good. It should take us about twenty minutes to reach Maximo."

Greer checks our location which emerges as a holographic map from a watch-like contraption around his thick wrist, illuminating our faces in a green shine.

"Yes. Straight towards that mountain." He says, glancing up at what I know is Mount Wundagore. I shiver slightly. I know of the historic significance this place has, and wonder if that is precisely why Maximo has chosen to relocate here. I curse her for not choosing a lovely tropical beach somewhere in Thailand, for example. I can't help but smile at the thought of Greer in a speedo, holding that ridiculously large firearm, trying to coax Maximo out of crystal blue waters.

"And you two," Greer says, his deep voice ringing in the silence. "You stay between Farringdon and Kelley on the walk there. Then, I want you to stay the fuck out of our way. I don't know your names, I don't need to know them nor do I want to. If it were up to me you would be far from here."

"Lovely," I mutter. "Don't sugar coat it."

"I don't give a fuck if your feelings are hurt. All I care is to get this bitch once and for all and get the fuck out of this shitty country." Greer spits. "Let's go."

And with that, we fall in position, silently following Greer in a line as he leads the way through the dark trees. Silence presses in from every corner, only the occasional hum or mutter or break of a twig under a heavy boot pierces the silence. I lower the night vision goggles onto my eyes as the moon disappears behind a heavy cloud, casting everything into darkness.

For twenty minutes we walk silently through the woods, the mountain ahead of us only towering larger and more ominous above our heads. As I begin to think we must have gotten lost, Greer lifts his hand in the air, causing us to come to a halt.

The forest has thinned out, allowing us to see a huge lake in front of us. It's dark and still, unmoving. I follow a small river to the left which leads towards the mountain. And there, around five hundred meters ahead of us, next to the river, is a small, dark cabin, contrasted against the snow-covered foot of the mountain behind it.

A/N: Last semi-slow chapter. Believe me when I say it's all kicking off in chapter five. Geeeeee

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