

Chapter 8

I stay leaning heavily against the wall, blocking Maximo's exit as she stays in the kitchen, leaning against the kitchen counter. Our knives are still raised towards each other as we stare at the other, waiting for them to make a move. Maximo is still smirking, but it seems like she's struggling to keep up the charade as she clutches her stomach, her face draining of color. I furrow my brows and my eyes travel down to where her hand is pressing against the table cloth she still has wrapped around her midline. I lower my knife slowly as I see the fresh blood starting to stain the cloth, creating a juxtaposition with the color of her hair.

I very slowly and deliberately, keeping my eyes fixed on Maximo's, drop the knife onto the floor next to my feet. My ribs protest as I straighten up, showing her my now empty hand. Her smile drops, and she thankfully places the knife down on the counter as she exhales, leaning onto it even further, closing her eyes.

"You need to lie down." I tell her.

"I'm fine." She says through gritted teeth, her accent now creeping back.

Her eyes remain closed, and she makes no move to try to escape, so I slowly inch towards her back into the cabin. She grimaces and opens her eyes, following my moves. I keep my hand out in front of me, as if I am approaching a wild horse that could spook at any moment. She doesn't, just keeps watching me with wide, green eyes. Now that I'm closer, I can tell how forcefully she's breathing. When I'm just an arm's length away from her, I stop.

"I'm going to help you onto the couch, ok?" I ask her, not quite sure how that is going to work in practicality with my one functioning arm and cracked ribs.

She looks me up and down quickly, looks like she's about to retort, but finally seems to accept my offer, nodding with closed eyes. I nod back and place myself next to her, keeping her on the side of my right arm.

"I'm going to put my arm around your waist, and you can use me as a crutch, alright? We're just going to walk around the table and to the couch, it's not far." I speak as I look over at her. She nods again, eyes closed, frowning her brow.

I carefully sneak my arm around her and take a hold of her waist, careful as to not come close to her wound. The moment she feels my arm she leans over on me, still clutching herself. A small whimper escapes my lips as my ribs groan in protest and her eyes flutter open and she looks at me, her eyes searching mine.

"You ok?" She asks me.

"Yes." I lie, at which she looks unconvinced. "Let's get this show on the road." I say before she has the time to say anything, to which she lets out a soft chuckle, before so lightly letting out a word I recognize as a curse word in Sokovian.

"This is going to go fine." I reassure her and myself, and I start moving, feeling her follow.

We shuffle our way across the cabin and by the time we've made it to the couch, all color has drained off of Maximo's face and I feel like puking from the pain.

"Careful." I warn her as she slowly sinks down onto the old, grey sofa. She gives me a look and I give her a small shrug.

Once she's on the couch I help her lift her legs up so that she's spread out across it. I slowly sink down on my knees next to her, and we both take a moment, catching our breaths as if we've just done the most exhaustive task. Once I've managed to catch my breath, I return my attention to Maximo. I have no idea what S.W.O.R.D. and the FBI are planning, but I hope they make up their minds soon on how to proceed, I don't know how long I can keep Maximo alive without any medical supplies, and I for one would kill for some Tylenol.

"Bathroom." Maximo suddenly says.

"Huh?"

"Bathroom." She repeats, smiling weakly. "Medical supplies."

"How did-" I stutter.

"You're quite loud." She murmurs.

I stare at her for a second, confused. Then I realize she means my thoughts.

"Stop staring and go." Maximo murmurs, closing her eyes. "That's surely not the weirdest thing you've heard of."

I shake my head. No, it isn't. But it's nonetheless disconcerting having it done to you, without knowing it's happening. I stop my train of thoughts, struck by another one. She could be listening in on me right now. I search Maximo's face for any clue, but she's blank. I realize she's still way too pale, and get up, feeling slightly sickly as my broken arm throbs. Unbeknownst to me, as I turn away, Wanda smiles ever so slightly.

I stand up, swaying slightly, looking around the cabin. In the light of day, it looks much less abandoned, and a lot cozier. I'm standing next to the windows at the back of the cabin, which are letting in soft, grey light. It's most probably cloudy outside. I look past Maximo on the couch. The broken table is littering the floor behind the couch, there are uneven pools of dried up blood here and there, a cabinet has fallen over, but if you disregard the mess, it is not so bad. To my right is the entrance to what I am assuming is the bedroom, and next to it is a closed wooden door. I take my chances and walk up to it, opening it and stepping into a small bathroom.

I find the switch and turn the light on. Straight ahead is a sink, under which there is a cabinet. I accidentally catch my own reflection in the mirror over the sink. Not my best look. My hair is completely disheveled, I have a black eye and blood smeared across my face.

I ignore my reflection and head towards the cabinet. I crouch down slowly, mindful of my ribs, and carefully open the cabinet doors. The inside is rather empty, but I instantly note a white box with a red cross. I grab it without looking inside it and head back over to the couch.

Maximo opens her eyes as she sees me arrive. I return to my crouching position on the floor next to her shoulders and place the box down on the carpet. I have no issue with blood, but I'm not very trained in injuries, I just know the basics from what I learned back when I was in training for the FBI. Gunshots, gunshots, I rack my brain as I move to open the first aid kit. I find a pair of scissors and bandages. Nothing to sterilize the wound.

"Do you have any alcohol?" I ask Maximo, still trying to search through the box.

"I don't usually want my doctor drinking as they work on me." Maximo says, her voice cracking slightly.

"Don't worry, I'm not a doctor." I look up at Maximo, seeing her smile so lightly. I've never seen her smile before, I note.

"I've got some red wine in the kitchen."

I sigh at having to move again, but go to get it, hoping it will have enough alcohol in it to at least clean out the wound slightly. I find the bottle in one of the cupboards and return with it. Maximo now opens her eyes, seemingly not able to focus on me.

"What are you doing?" She asks, her accent making her softly roll her r.

"I need to clean out the wound. I think." I say and she fixes me with her gaze. "It'll be fine. I just need to keep you alive long enough for-"

"Them to kill me?" Maximo finishes my sentence incorrectly.

"They're not here to kill you." I say, incredulously. Why would she think that? "They just want to take you back to the States and-"

"Hmm." She interrupts me again. "Just start."

I don't bother explaining to her the facts surrounding her arrest, instead, I begin untying the tablecloth. The dry blood crunches as I begin removing it, exposing Maximo's stomach bathed in fresh blood slowly trickling from a dark, swollen hole on her right side. I unscrew the cork on the wine bottle and lift it over her wound, before pouring I warn her;

"This is probably not going to be very pleasant."

"Humph." Is all she says and I tilt the bottle, red wine mixing with her blood.

Maximo holds it in for as long as she can, but eventually lets out a pained scream and I instantly stop. It's probably enough anyway. I quickly and as softly as I can start cleaning away the wine and blood from her, before getting her to lift up slightly so I can wrap the clean bandage around her waist, which proves rather difficult as I can only use one hand.

"Here." I say when I'm done, bringing the bottle of wine up to her face, earning a confused look from her. "Figure you might as well clean out the wound inside out." I shrug and she takes the bottle from me, taking a few big gulps.

"For you, doc." She says and hands the bottle back to me.

I smile at her and bring the bottle head to my lips, feeling the cool, smooth liquid tumble down my parched throat.

"Mm, who knew?" I say, looking at the bottle, impressed.

"Who knew." Maximo repeats and sits up clumsily. "Your turn. Give me the box."

"My turn what?" I ask confused, handing her the box.

"To be the patient." She says and pats the sofa next to her.

"I'm fine, thank you." I lie and she cocks her head in that way I've noticed she does.

"I'm not going to break your bones twice." She rolls her eyes. "We don't have to speak at all after this, but let me do this for you now."

I sigh and push myself onto the couch, my weight making Maximo shift slightly next to me. I give her a look, then hand her my left arm. She carefully places her hands underneath my forearm and places it down on her lap. She begins to undo the knot on the tablecloth and I have to look away, my body tensing up. I occupy myself with trying to read the titles on the spines of the books away in the corner on some shelves, but they're in the shadows and I can't figure out in what language most of them are in.

"You know, I could have healed us if you had not put these things on me." Maximo says, slightly annoyed.

"You did this to me without those things on. I much prefer you like this." I tell her and she shoots me a look that tells me to tread carefully.

"You did not give me much choice." She says and continues working on my arm. I'm surprised she's being so careful not to hurt me.

"I told you we weren't going to hurt you." I say again, feeling slightly foolish as Maximo shoots me another of her looks.

We sit in silence for a while as she finishes up with my arm, creating a makeshift sling for me out of the bloody tablecloth. I rest my arm in it and she leans back against the back of the sofa, looking tired, her red hair a lot lighter than I imagined it to be.

"I dye it." She tells me.

"Right." Is all I say, feeling uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry, it's difficult to control when I'm tried." Maximo says and seems genuinely sorry.

"I thought the cuffs are meant to hinder your powers." I say choosing not to use the word 'stop'.

"I can't seem to use anything else, anything that affects something physically." Maximo muses, holding her right hand out in front of her and twirling it softly, her eyes following the movements as nothing happens. The cuffs on her wrist hums slightly louder.

"I didn't mean to hurt anyone." She speaks again, letting her hand drop on her lap. She doesn't meet my eyes but keeps looking down at her hands, studying the cuffs. I think back on what Agent Woo told me before I left;

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

Maximo looks up at me curiously, but doesn't say anything. I think back on what I read up on from her file, trying to match what I read with what I've observed. The Maximo I'm sitting half a meter away from now seems like the polar opposite of the Maximo of last night, who seemed to fall in line with the Maximo from the FBI's file.

"I think..." I begin slowly. "I think sometimes you want to do the thing you see as right, but it's not always as straightforward as you imagine in your head."