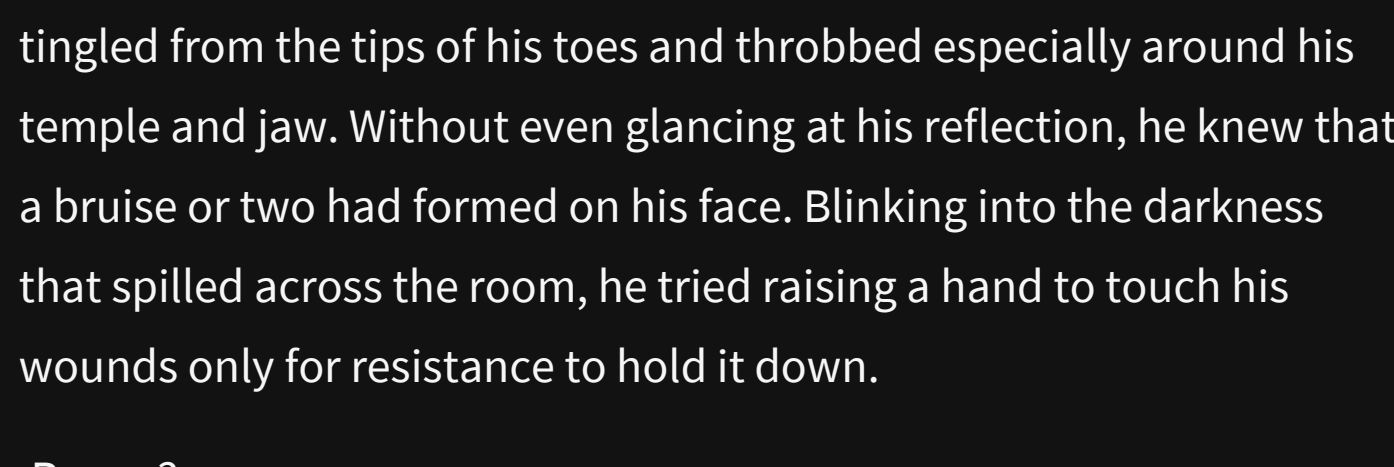


18 | Torture



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Pain

That was the first feeling Ron felt as his body began to awaken. It tingled from the tips of his toes and throbbled especially around his temple and jaw. Without even glancing at his reflection, he knew that a bruise or two had formed on his face. Blinking into the darkness that spilled across the room, he tried raising a hand to touch his wounds only for resistance to hold it down.

Ropes?

More conscious about the situation he was in, Ron squinted into the darkness while twisting his hands trying to work on the ropes. Whoever had tied him down knew exactly how to twist a rope with all the loopholes and knots. And for a moment he had completely forgotten about who could do it, until the voice spoke up-

"About time you woke up." Alex's voice echoed from somewhere within the darkness. "For a moment there I thought I'd have to kiss you awake, sleeping beauty style."

Despite the thick feeling of something sealed over his lips, Ron managed to sound a slight gag at the thought of it.

He'd rather deep throat a cactus than kiss him.

The sound of something clicked and suddenly warm light flooded the room forcing him as it seared through his dilated pupils forcing them to adjust.

Alex appeared sitting in what looked like a couch. Beside him stood a small table with a bottle of whiskey and two cups. He himself seemed to have dressed out of the clothes from the previous day and into a pair of light joggers and black hoodie. Ron felt his lip twitch at the sight of the black bruise on his jaw and the bandage placed over the bridge of his nose.

Good He thought smugly.

Alex got up, making the couch groan in appreciation from the lessened weight, and came to stand before him, peering down at him through narrowed eyes. In one quick movement Alex ripped the duct tape clean o his lips leaving an immediate searing burn following in its wake. It was as if he took the skin with him too.

Ron hissed, bringing his hands instinctively to his lips before realizing yet again that they were tied down.

"How's the nose?" He couldn't help but ask, groaning slightly from the busted lip that split open when he talked. It stung like a bitch but the pain was something he was almost accustomed to. His general taught him how to heighten his pain tolerance during all those training sessions.

Alex walked across the room and grabbed a single wooden chair, the sound of him dragging it across the floor echoed throughout the room before he set it only a few feet from him and sat. "I've had better days." He shrugged picking his glass of whiskey and taking a big gulp. He set it down, the sound of ice crushing between his teeth. "How's the head?"

"Amazing," Ron grit out flatly, focusing on blocking out the pounding rising between his brows.

Another moment of tensed silenced passed between them, both not backing out of the death stare. Ron took this moment to think about where Alex could've brought him.

It could be somewhere remote where he could easily die without no one being aware... but Alex wouldn't kill him... That he was completely sure about, yet Alex could use someone else to kill him. Make it look like an accident and Ameena wouldn't be the wiser.

Suddenly Alexander smiled, a slow poisonous tug of the lips. Almost sadistic with the cold eyes that held as much humor as an executioner about to carry out a decapitation.

"Do tell me," Alex started, leaning into his chair suddenly fiddling with something in his hand, "how did you manage to remain incognito under our radar for so long Ron- or is it Cheslav now?"

He opened a light brown file held between his hands, peering into it while speaking before snapping it closed. It took Ron a moment before he realized that it was his file that contained enough information about him, including his badge.

Ron shrugged almost flippantly, "It wasn't really that hard considering you were too busy trying to win Ameena's attention instead of covering up your tracks." He shook his head almost condescendingly, "I must admit, when I was handed this case, a good part of me knew I would never be able to track down your father's organization, let alone one of his sons. Yet lo and behold-" his eyes lazily trailed up and down Alex, "his son was right under my nose. Perhaps the rumors of your family being fearless monsters are exaggerated, or maybe it's you whose gotten sloppy at the job."

Alex's smiled didn't waver, "Is that what they tell you back at Quantico? That my family consists of mostri senza paura?"

Ron opened his mouth to answer but hesitated when Alex stood to his full height before tracking around him like a predator watching its prey, storm grey eyes never wavering from him. The hunger that swallowed his pupils let him know that Alex, if given the chance, wasn't going to hesitate killing him. His heartbeat was spiking yet somehow he managed to keep a calm demure whenever Alex moved out of his line of vision only to reappear within seconds.

"Hmm?" Alex's hands landed on Ron's shoulders from behind. He squeezed them firmly poking at the bruises on his shoulders and back.

Ron grit his teeth hard keeping the pain at bay, "Yes."

Silence.

"And who told you I was guessing," Ron raised an eyebrow that stung at the miniscule muscle movement.

"It's pretty obvious Ronnie" Alex stretched, "The Federal Bureau's system is such an easy thing to hack. They know only what we want them to know but you, I guess you've been doing some homework all on your own now haven't you?" Alex's fingers le his shoulders, as he sat back down with a pitiful smile. "I bet they haven't even approved of your humor Mafia rantings."

Ronaldo stayed silent, twisting his burned wrists back and forth tirelessly.

"I'm still curious though," Alex leaned forward, "how did your supervisor to piece everything on to me, of all people."

Ron wasn't one to chit chat about his plans and his motives in moments like these, this wasn't a cartoon with an evil villain that spilled everything without worrying about the recuperations, plus he found those characters highly annoying. No, this was reality. And reality had him swearing an oath of silence to the agency. The moment he opened his mouth, he doubt he would be able to shut it. He stayed silent glaring at the little miscreant in the shape of a dude who hung around his Ameena.

"Won't talk?" Alex raised an eyebrow, "Oh, okay... then, we'll remedy that." Alex got up from the chair, there was an almost inaudible swish sound before Ron felt something cold press against the skin of his throat. His breathing went stone rigid along with his body.

"One quick slash from here-" Alex murmured tracing the tip of his switchblade dangerously below Ron's jaw along his neck, "To here, along the jugular artery and you'd be dead within five seconds. Ten max." Ron didn't move, feeling the sharp double edge gently pierce through the layer of his neck. A bead of blood bloomed before trailing down the side of his skin like a tear.

The breath he never knew he had held felt almost painfully blissful as he exhaled the moment Alex removed the blade, dangling it in front of his face. "I won't kill you Ronny," Alex taunted "but I can use my methods to get what I want, and what I want is answers. So what if you go back to Ameena in shreds? At least you'll be alive."

"Now," his grin went darker, "First question—"

' He must be blui ing' Ron thought to himself.

"— come cazzq' Alex continued, "did you know it was me."

' He simply must be—Ron's train of thought crashed to a stop the moment he felt something press into his thigh. His eyes snapped to Alex's for a split second in horror just as he raised the blade stabbing it directly into his thigh, holding it firmly in place.

The pain was intense, almost blinding, as it sheeted through his body like fire burning him from the inside out. Ron almost bit his tongue o to stop the scream that rose a the back of his throat, "S-Stop!" his hands dug into the ropes which bonded them.

"Eeen! Wrong answer." Alex spoke humorlessly before he dragged the knife an inch slicing flesh and maybe bone in process. Beads of sweat glistened on Ron's forehead, hands trembling from the pain he tried reeling in. "Now, try again. Except this time it has to be the right answer."

Ron blinked against the sweat that dripped into his eyes, "F-fuck you- " he spat.

Disappointment flashed across Alex's eyes, not a second later he pulled the knife out of the wound as Ron couldn't hold back the sound that ripped his vocal chords.

Alex tsked with a smile, "I can stab you in over twenty di erent areas without hitting your vital organs. We have all day Rod'

"Oh yea? Well you try to be silent with a fucking knife skewering your le—Ahhhhh."

Alex had rammed the knife deeper into his skin.

Ron struggled against the ropes in vain, "You—You cannot do this! Ameena will b—" Blood spilled from his leg like a running tap, soaking through the fabric and pooling around his feet.

"Oh sta zitto!" Alex spoke dismissively, twisting the knife and hearing the man scream from deep within his throat, "Ameena this, Ameena that- Ameena will eventually forget about you if you die today." He backhanded Ron sharply before capturing his jaw in a vice like grip. "I fucknglare you to go unconscious. Keep those eyes open Ronnie boy."

"Y-you can't kill me-" Ronaldo tried diminutively, blond strands of hair sticking to the sweat on his forehead and nape of his neck.

"On the contrary, I can," Alex laughed, "You certainly wouldn't be the first nor the last."

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This chapter was longer than we expected so I cut it in half.