

## Chapter 30

It's not difficult to find the location the news segment was broadcast from. What proves more difficult, is knowing what the hell to do next. Having le without any plans (once again) other than to find Maximo, I'm le having to improvise. Hell, the entire flight was spent overthinking, which ultimately did not produce any sort of credible plan. The one thing I am clear about is doing this on my own. Who else could I call to help? I cannot use more of the FBI's help without possibly alerting them to what I've discovered, which would lead to S.W.O.R.D. getting involved, which is something I am not keen to see happen. It would also prove quite difficult to face up to Maximo and try to regain any sense of what trust I thought was shared between us originally should I rock up hand in hand with Hayward. Whilst on the plane, I did debate whether or not I should confide in Darcy, or even Agent Woo, but ultimately, what would I gain with their help? Unfortunately, I don't know any of the Avengers either (well, not really), who could have possibly helped Maximo. No, all alone is how I have to handle this.

And so, I've come to where I saw Maximo in the background of the news broadcast, but there is no trace of her now, or of the other woman she was with. The city square is busy with commuters scrambling about, milling around, all in an exaggerated hurry. I have been surveilling the square for the better half of a day, and I am getting increasingly irritated and anxious, doubting whether I've, once again, acted brashly in thinking this is something I should get involved with. Maximo isn't my responsibility anymore, and yet the sense that I am somehow responsible for her doesn't seem to want to leave me. Conflicting images of Maximo keep distracting me as I scan the square for her. I see Maximo shrouded in shadows in one corner of the square, her eyes clouded with burning scarlet piercing me, sending an icy chill through my body as she slowly allows thin, crackling fingers of scarlet energy to seep out of her hands. When I blink, she's gone, replaced by Maximo sitting next to me on the couch in the lonely cabin, green eyes filled with worry.

I impatiently let my fingers drum against the mug in my hand which not too long ago was filled with hot coffee. My brain feels comfortably alert despite having been awake for far too long. The air is warm against my face, the telltale stickiness to it which can only be found in a lively city. Whether or not I want to admit it, I am beginning to lose confidence in Maximo making a reappearance. What she is doing in Romania in the first place is something I haven't been able to figure out, but then again, I don't feel like I know Maximo at all. I hunch and will my stiff limbs to stretch out. I need to do something else than sit and wait. I leave the confines of the shaded cafe and begin my walk around the square for what feels like the hundredth time. As I pass the corner of the square in which I thought I saw Maximo I stop, a sudden, insane idea coming to me. I look down at my hands, wondering whether I could actually pull this off. I did do it, once...

No one seems to mind me, quietly standing there, looking at my hands, so I decide to at least try. I close my eyes to better concentrate without the overwhelming stimuli of the busy square. As I begin to search my body with my consciousness, I feel the untapped energy of the mist swirl around beneath my skin and so I concentrate on that feeling. The mist energetically answers my call and I will all my thoughts onto that image of Maximo in the square. My muscles tighten with the effort of keeping the mist on the surface of my mind and body, and my head throbs with the mental effort. I don't give up nor do I open my eyes as an icy bolt of pain surges through my head, I just try to keep feeling that energy that is everywhere, rippling through me with the intensity of an electric current, but with the ease of cool water. A loud buzzing white noise fills my head and the sounds of the square fade away. My muscles begin to lightly tremble with effort, and then, a sudden release and the noises of the square return.

Disappointed, I let the energy of the mist slowly retreat further back into my consciousness until I can only faintly feel it stirring. It was a long shot, anyway. I open my eyes, finding myself in the same exact spot I was in when I closed my eyes. I sigh tiredly and turn around to walk back towards the cafe to resume my patient sitting and waiting, perhaps alongside one of those cakes which have been taunting me for hours. I am met with closed doors, and the chairs and tables which just five minutes ago were placed outside now are stacked on the other side of the big glass window in the empty, dark cafe. Surprised, I look around me properly. More and more details pop out now that I am looking. I'm in the same square, but also, not. My heart begins to beat strongly against my chest as if sensing something I am yet to see.

I curiously wander around the edges of the square, wondering if my efforts actually worked. My suspicion is confirmed when two frazzled-looking men emerge into the square, one of them hauling a camera over his shoulders. I watch them set up, both of them looking stressed and lightly sweating. Finally, they seem to agree on where to point the camera, and I quickly sneak around them so that I am standing behind the cameraman from a safe distance. The news presenter begins talking into his microphone, but I cannot hear him over the noise in the square. But I don't have to. I know what he is saying. My heart continues to pound almost unnervingly as I wait. Just as I begin to think she won't show, she does. Maximo and the other woman enter the square, briskly walking. The other woman is speaking, looking serious, and Maximo is keeping her head down, not really reacting to whatever the dark-haired woman is saying.

I quickly match their pace, walking alongside them, but on the other side of the square. I'm so engrossed by keeping my eyes fixed on them so that I don't lose them, that I'm taken by surprise when I roughly bump into someone.

"Ferește-te pe unde te plimbi!" The man I've just accidentally made drop his phone yells at me and I mutter something in form of an apology as he picks up his phone to inspect it.

I look away from him quickly and freeze as Maximo turns her head towards the commotion, and despite being far away enough to not be able to read her expression under her cap and sunglasses, I can almost imagine her brows furrowing.

Before she has the chance to see my face, I quickly turn my back towards her and return my attention to the man in front of me who is now angrily shoving his phone towards me, pointing at the slightly cracked screen.

"Uita-te la asta!" He growls. "Era complet nou!"

"I'm so sorry!" I say, frazzled, my Romanian not having been used in a while but still understanding what the man is upset about.

"Turist." The man spits as if just having cursed me out. He shakes his head and pushes past me, evidently deciding that I am not worth more of his time.

I turn on my heels back to see where Maximo went, but she's gone.

"Shit." I curse to myself and begin jogging towards where she and the other woman were walking towards.

I pause when I come to the edge of the square, at the gape of a narrow road with small shops on the sides. At the end of it I can make out two silhouettes, which I am positive are Maximo and her friend. I quickly move to get closer, all the whilst thoughts are buzzing about my head about how close I can get before I am detected, visually or if Maximo is able to sense me, or hear me. You're loud! can almost hear her sneer at me. Hopefully, I am only loud in the middle of nowhere, but in a big city teeming with life, I'll be able to blend in. For some reason, a girl only wanting to talk to Maximo, I now suddenly feel apprehensive.

There is a reason why she le. A voice in my head says and I try to push away the thought as I sneak closer and closer, until I can discern some of the conversation between the women.

"...can see why I had to meet them." The stranger tells Maximo with an American accent.

"I didn't ask for their help." Maximo counters, sounding slightly annoyed.

"No, but you did ask for mine." The other woman reminds her and Maximo hushes.

"So far, you are not very helpful. I would have been there by now."

"And then what, Wanda?" The woman raises her voice, clearly exasperated. "You're just going to do whatever comes to your mind, like in Westview? That ended so well."

"Don't talk to me about that." Maximo snaps, lowering her voice instead of raising it and coming to an abrupt halt.

I quietly panic and without thinking cower down behind a small car parked on the street to hide myself from view.

"...whole point!" The woman says as I carefully peek around the car to see what the women are doing. I can't lose them now.

"Don't you think I know that?" Maximo growls and I can practically feel the energy pulsating off her as her temper rises. Thankfully, that also seems to mean she isn't focused on listening out for other people as her entire focus now seems to be on the dark-haired woman in front of her.

"I wasn't insinuating that!" The woman crosses her arms, clearly annoyed, now with Maximo. "Did you not learn anything from it?"

Maximo cocks her head and I can see small red sparks twirling around her hands. The other woman doesn't seem phased at all, but rather the opposite as her eyes fall down on Maximo's hands with an expression I cannot quite read.

"Do you want to find out, again?" Maximo asks her, her tone of voice reminding me of how she sounded back in the cabin, before we became... whatever we became.

"You've spent too much time with Tony Stark." The woman says, looking away from Maximo, seemingly bored, now. "You're cocky."

"I am not like Stark!" Maximo's hands grow redder, her accent growing thicker.

"Hmm." Is all the other woman dignifies herself to respond. "At any rate, you can turn me back to Agnes if you want to, I wouldn't mind living here!"

The woman lets out a cackling laugh. "Or," She continues, growing serious once more, swinging from emotion to emotion with the ease of an actor. "we can stop wasting time and get to Wundagore and bring them back."

A/N: Just a quick thank you to everyone for continually voting and adding this story to your reading lists, it's so so nice to see! x