

## Chapter 31

My brain buzzes with thoughts as I watch Maximo stare at the other woman through squinting eyes as if she's trying to figure out whether or not she can trust whatever the woman is telling her. The car I'm hiding behind feels warm under my hands as I lean forwards even more, trying to gain a better understanding of what I'm seeing. There's a gnawing feeling of doubt, or dread, or something equally unpleasant at the back of my mind, but I don't know why. It almost feels like my head knows something it's not yet sharing with the rest of me, like it's being told to feel anxious. Something about this entire thing doesn't feel right, and yet I know virtually nothing, I have absolutely no facts to go on here. Maximo feels like a complete stranger to me at this point. I am struggling to figure out what connection Maximo and the woman have, why she would have gone to her. What is Maximo playing at? The dark-haired woman mentioned Westview, which Maximo had a bad reaction to, and never seems to want to talk about it in greater detail, either reacting defensively, or dancing around the subject. There is definitely something there. But what? Did Maximo meet her there, or did she know her from before? My mind is racing, grasping at anything and everything, and then my blood runs cold as Maximo frowns under her cap, her head slowly turning in my direction as if I've just called out to her. I instantly lean back behind the car, out of sight. If it were anyone else, I would be certain they didn't have the time to see me before I ducked away, but this is Maximo, and I am a hundred percent certain she can hear me. I silently curse myself, trying to empty my head of activity, which of course I fail miserably at. Now that we are further away from the square teeming with people, in the middle of a small street devoid of anyone besides Maximo, the other woman, and me, I'm certain Maximo can at the very least sense my presence. As if on cue, the other woman speaks.

"What is it?"

"I..." Maximo begins, her voice thick, clearly distracted. "I think... but I don't know how..."

Shit. I panic, closing my eyes and focusing on connecting to the mist again. I'm struggling, my mind constantly fretting back to Maximo standing just mere meters away. Focus. Focus. Focus! I feel the stirring of the mist beginning to awaken, uncoiling like a snake. But it's lazy, so slow, feeling like the heat of the sun is making it just wake up from a long nap. Too slow. Focus.

"Where are you going now?" The woman's annoyed voice reaches me and I double my effort. Focus!

My head begins to pound, and I'm forcing myself to keep the image of the square, in the present, in my mind. I'm trying to recall the warmth, the sounds, the feeling of the chair under me at the cafe, the smell of coffee finding me from inside. The mist begins to stir in all honest now.

I begin to feel a slight pull somewhere around the region of my navel just as I hear a familiar voice right near me.

"Olivia?" I open my eyes and barely have the time to lock eyes with an honestly surprised-looking Maximo before the world around me turns into nothing but streaks of light and colors and then, just as soon as the world turned into nothing but lights, it all comes to a stop and I'm suddenly sitting at the cafe I thought of earlier, and I know I'm in the present again.

"Ce puui mei!" Someone loudly exclaims and a glass shatters somewhere behind me.

I turn around, breathing heavily from the pure rush of adrenaline coursing through me, and am met with a very shocked waiter, who must have just witnessed me materializing onto his chair from nowhere.

"Scuze." I mutter and hop off the chair, heading off without a look back, feeling the waiter's eyes locked on me as I make my hurried escape, head spinning, but now with newfound vigor and purpose.

I find my way to a car rental agency and manage to find myself a car using my beginner's Romanian. I make sure to stay out of sight from the cameras, but sadly, with my impromptu escape from work, I didn't have time to grab any cash with me, so I'm forced to use my card. I know that when the FBI will have reason to suspect I've fled, they'll trace any signs of me, and this is a stupid breadcrumb to leave them, but I don't have any choice. I need to catch up with Maximo before it's too late. And the gnawing feeling at the back of my mind is making me feel like my time is very limited.

When I'm well on my way, steering the car out of the city, I decide it is time to make a call, finally.

"Hello?" Darcy's cheerful voice sounds through the car speakers, and I feel a rush of relief at not being in this alone anymore.

"It's me, Liv." I say, a smile creeping up my face at Darcy's genuine little squeal of joy.

"Liv! Why are you calling me at... oh, it's ten already."

"Five o'clock here." I tell her, the smile on my face still wide.

"It's always five- wait, you're serious?" Darcy stops herself, sounding doubtful. "Where are you? Do I want to know?"

"Romania, currently." I shrug, sounding nonchalant. I know I could get to the point quicker, but honestly, it's nice to talk to Darcy again; to talk to someone who actually cares about me. I haven't realized how stressed this entire ordeal has made me, and traveling across the globe on little to no rest hasn't done me any favors.

"I have heard it's a lovely spot to visit, Romania, great sights..." Darcy muses and I giggle. "I'm sure you haven't done much sightseeing though, have you?"

"Well, I am very familiar with a certain town square." I say, not elaborating further.

"And the Feds are well aware of this little trip, I am sure?"

"That's actually why I am calling you." I begin and Darcy blows a raspberry.

"Here it comes. I thought you missed me too much, and yet..."

"Stop it." I roll my eyes.

"Flattery will get you everywhere, love."

"You're my first call." I say and she laughs, humored.

"Alright, what can I do to bail you out? Am I correct in assuming this has something to do with a certain witch?"

"Well, yeah. I know I don't have to ask you, but please, don't let anyone in on this quite yet. I have a bad feeling, and I don't want to make things worse for her."

"You don't have to ask." Darcy's voice instantly switches tone, becoming serious.

"Thank you." I honestly feel a swell in my chest.

"So, what has she gotten herself into now?" Some of the levity from earlier returns and I chuckle.

"I honestly don't know. I've followed her here, but I don't understand. She's with someone, I've got bad vibes, Darcy."

"Right. And you want me to figure out who she's with?"

"If you can, please."

"What have you got?" Darcy asks, now all business.

"I don't know. She's American. Long, dark hair. Around her forties. She knows Westview."

"Alright, one second..." She draws out the last word and I can faintly hear Darcy's nails clicking against a keyboard as she does whatever the hell she does.

I press my foot against the gas in my anxiousness to get some answers, feeling the car speed up more. The Romanian city landscape has turned into sweeping landscapes of lush green fields and never-ending blue skies.

"Aha!" A triumphant Darcy exclaims and I jump slightly, taken by surprise. "I think I've found her."

"Who is she?" I press on.

"Well, there's actually nothing on her." Darcy says casually.

"You -what?" My eyebrows shoot up in surprise; I really thought that if anyone could easily find the woman's identity, it would be Darcy.

"I went back and found footage from Wanda's little show."

"Wanda's what?" I'm quite confused at this point.

"Did you not do any research?" I can imagine Darcy rolling her eyes at me.

"I -yes I did! I read her file, I don't remember any show?"

"Humph. That was my stroke of genius, of course, it goes unmentioned." Darcy's voice sounds very unappreciative, but I'm too out to be able to reply in any meaningful way, so I keep quiet, letting Darcy get to the point. "Anyway, she was with Wanda in Westview. They seemed friendly. Then, they had this massive fight."

"Fight?" I interrupt.

"Yeah, like Avenger's style fighting. Like, intense. What a queen, I've never seen any of the Avengers fight in sweatpants, though. The other witch was throwing spells left and right, and so was Wanda. It looked mad."

"She's a witch?"

"Yuh-huh, big time."

"And they fought?"

"How are you an agent? Yes, they fought. Jesus." Darcy chuckles.

"Anyway, Wanda won. Like, spoiler, and she did something to her and she turned all... weird. Like, normal. And that's it, as far as I know."

"What do you mean?" I grip at the wheel, trying to understand why Maximo would fight her, and now seemingly work with her.

"Like, that's it, end of story. She doesn't exist on any databases, there's no trace of her. She only exists in Westview."

"Interesting..." I slowly say and Darcy hums in agreement, keyboard still furiously clicking in the background.

"And now they're what, taking a girl's trip in Romania? I heard of hot girl summer, but damn, didn't think it was happening over there! What am I missing out on!?"

"I honestly don't know." I can't help myself but laugh at Darcy's antics.

"So, what next?" Darcy stops tapping her keyboard.

I take a minute to reply, mulling everything I've learned during the past few hours over in my head. I still am none the wiser as to who the woman with Maximo actually is, and that unsettles me more than I care to admit. What they were doing in Romania, I also have got no clue of. All I know, is that they were here, and have quite the head start on me. I think back on what I observed during my visit in the past. Maximo and the woman might be working together on something, but they did definitely not seem friendly, which would make sense if what Darcy just told me is true, and they did fight in Westview. I let a passing thought flash by, hoping I knew more about what actually happened there, instead of just the facts shone through the lenses of S.W.O.R.D. and the FBI.

"Liv?" Darcy urges me on.

"I'm going to find out what they're planning. My instincts are usually pretty accurate, and I have a bad feeling about this."

"No shit, Sherlock." Darcy mutters and I ignore her, going on.

"I may not know what they're going to do, but I know where I'll find them."

"Where?"

"Back where it started." I say with a heavy sigh. There's a short pause on the other end of the line, and then;

"Right, and where's that? I can't read minds, sorry. Stop hanging out with witches so much, it makes you weird!"

A/N: So many new readers, wowow! Hello! Question, how do we feel about possibly having more chapters from Wanda's POV, or are we liking this more? If we go with Wanda, we'll obviously see things from her perspective more, and if we not, we get a more genuine idea of what Liv is working with, I guess!