



Nineteen

The great city of gold and lapis lazuli that had once been Babylon was now nothing more than stone foundations and the occasional cracked mosaic. Archaeologists dotted the site as dust blew around them. The desert having reclaimed the land that Agil recalled as vibrant and thriving. It was easy for Druig to send the humans on their way and their cars drove on in clouds of golden dust just as Sprite let the illusions around them drop. Phastos was leading the way, a golden hologram hovering over his watch as he tracked down their spaceship. The others trailing behind him. Sprite was walking in that prim way she did that reminded Agil of dancers he had seen. Pixieish and elegant and also snooty. (There was a reason why fae were rumoured to be trixters yet proud). Druig strolled behind her. The man having found a leather jacket and shades in Kingo's closet and Agil doubted the man would return them. The leather jacket suited him and fit him a lot better than Agil's stolen tshirt.

Phastos came to a stop and they all paused as the earth began to crack over the valley before them. The cracks grew, expanding across the dry earth as remains crumpled and trees fell. The ground falling as something rose from deep underneath and was exposed to the light. Agil let out a fond sigh at the sight of their ship. It had been home to them for thousands of years or all. It was only five hundred years ago that they had all left the ship to go their separate ways, well, almost all of them. Sometimes Agil had wanted to go back there, a rare Alexi and that night. But something had always stopped him, his need to know why humans were so important to his family. It lingered and made him wait. Now, he was returning without any answers and it tasted slightly like defeat.

"A forbidding atmosphere fills the air", Kingo whispered in mock theatrical narration as they entered the ship. "An eerie stillness chokes our lungs". Karun waking backwards in front of them in order to capture them all on his camera. Agil wondered how many cameras the man had brought.

"What are you doing? You know you're creeping us out right?" Phastos scowled. Then there was a bang and he yelled. "Oh my god! Stay calm, T, please!" Agil sniggered as he picked up the chip packet he had stepped on and shook it at the taller man with a smug grin. Phastos let out a relieved giggle. "It's chips. It's just chips. Sweet sugar honey ice tea Agil, you scared the living daylights out of me".

"Sugar honey ice tea?" Agil raised an eyebrow as he handed the bag to Druig. The man began snacking on them happily. "Just say shit or fuck for hell's sake".

"I can't swear. I'm a dad now", Phastos retorted. "My husband would be furious if Jack picked it up from me".

Kingo was rolling his eyes at the camera. "As you can see being an Eternal does not preclude you to having human emotions, such as cowardice".

"A human family. How's that working out for you?" Agil smiled as he stole a chip from Druig's bag. It was an testament to how much the mind controller liked him that his hand was not immediately slapped away. Phastos frowned at the lack of reaction in confusion.

"We are very happy. Thank you for asking". His tone was wary and Agil decided not to press further. He was immediately distracted but the sight of their main hall coming up.

"What has she done?" Phastos' voice was high with surprise. "Is that.... a sarcophagus in my lab?" Their hall, what used to be bare dark stone and glowing gold lights, was full of objects. Books piled in towers, weapons leaning against uncoordinated and seemingly random furniture. Statues of gold and gems for multiple civilisations. Agil even spotted several food packets lying empty on the floor. In the middle of all this chaos was a oak chair with red velvet standing like a throne. Makkari was sprawled across it, eyed concentrated in her book.

"This is Makkari", Kingo introduced to the camera. "Or should I say miss Havisham".

At his words, she looked up and smiled at them. No surprise or annoyance, just simple joy to see them. She was wearing jeans and trainers, a red and grey jacket hanging over her black tshirt but her hair was still in her usual braids. With a crisp noise, the book was closed and her hands came up to sign. " Ready to go home?"

The rest of them all stood in silence for a second, faces grim. "About that"... Gilgamesh let the words trail off. Makkari's face fell and she let her head thud back against the wooden frame in disappointment.

Agil let out a sigh as next to him, Druig crunched loudly on his chips. Then he opened his arms and grinned. "Hey Makkari". Her face lit up and in a second she was a step away from him and reaching out to hug him back. Agil smiled into her braids and pressed her tight. He had missed her. Out of all of them, Makkari was the one he felt the most like a sibling too. Thena came close but Makkari had a way of bringing joy with her. When they separated, he gave her a so smile. "Let me explain everything", he spoke, hands signing with his words. "It's a long story".

" So you're telling me that a seven thousand years of waiting, our home, Olympia, doesn't exist? And that were all androids Makkari's face was a picture of frustration and annoyance. They had moved to the lab. The pair seated with their backs to the small garden of alien plants that occupied a lit up window in one wall. (Those plants were supposed to remind them of Olympia. Now all it did was remind Agil of the worlds they had supposedly helped destroy. In the background, he was aware of Phastos messing with the golden holograms as he thought of a way to stop the emergence. Thena was messing with a sword she had found and the others were picking through the objects Makkari had collected.

"That", he shrugged and then grinned. "And the world is ending".

" At least my boredom is ending Makkari threw her hands up in a silent groan and he laughed.

"Same". He glanced over to see Druig picking up a box of Twinkies from a pile of books. The man walked passed Ikaris, who was glancing at an emerald tablet. Both men looked up and eyed what each other was holding. There was a second of nonverbal tense communication then they were trading, each snatching the object from the other like children afraid it would be taken away. Agil shared a fond look with Makkari and they both sniggered at the two guys with rolling eyes.

Druig came sauntering over to them with a pleased smile. Agil and Makkari stood up to greet him. "It seems our friend here has finally scoured an Emerald tablet", he grinned, waving the object at Makkari teasingly. She reached for it and he handed it over. "How did you manage that".

" A thief never reveals their secrets she signed back one handed. Agil's lips twitched but then his eyes caught on something half hidden behind a statue. He quickly averted his gaze but it was too late, Druig had already glanced in that direction. A slow, surprised smile filled his face and the man was walking over towards the stature.

Agil shot an accusing glance at Makkari, signing silently at her. "I thought these were hanging in a gallery somewhere. I sold them over a hundred years ago".

" They are pretty Makkari shrugged. Agil let out a deep sigh as he turned to see Druig pulling the stack of familiar paintings out from behind the statue and leaning them against the paints. The first one on the pile was a city of white stone and golden sun. Thena visible on a mountain ledge above, golden hair in the wind. Druig placed that canvas to the side to reveal a bigger one. This one was an army lit in fire, a dark figure leading them far from the flames and into shadow. Druig's amusement faltered and with a glance back at Agil, he pushed that canvas back to reveal a much smaller one, no bigger than A3. This one was of a different face. None of the eternals. No, this one was human. It was a young man, barely out of his teens. He was slim with pale skin and high cheekbones, dark curled hair around his neck. It was only shoulders and up but there was a light in his blue eyes, the way he was staring at the viewer, or the artist, as if they held everything he wanted. It was greedy.

Agil tore his eyes away from Alexi's face, hand straying to where his bullet scar stood and glanced at Druig. The man had been watching him, blue stormy eyes narrowed and a furrow in his brow. Druig glanced at the painting again and then covered it up. He rose from his crouch and stepped closer to lean over him. "What that the man who hurt you?" His voice was so but angry.

Agil sighed and leant his forehead on the taller man's shoulder. "I sold those years ago. I didn't expect to see them again". A gentle hand rested on his shoulder and he glanced up to meet Makkari's worried brown eyes.

" You can get rid of it if you want. I only kept it because I was curious to see you painting a human".

Agil spared her a small smile. "Thanks. That maybe best".

"Hey", Druig reached out and gently cupped his face. "Are you alright?" Agil leant into the touch as thumbs traced under his eyes. "My lovely Agil. I've got you". His eyes closed and they pressed their foreheads together so ly.

"Is this new?" A voice broke the moment. Agil opened his eyes and scowled at Phastos. The man was watching them with a look of faint horror and disgust. "Because I don't like it".

"Ewwwww", Kingo added as he stepped up to Phastos' side. "You should have seen them yesterday on the plane. It was traumatising".

"Yuck".

Agil and Druig both glared at the two men before flicking them their middle fingers in unison. Makkari clapped her hands happily. " I win the bet!"

unedited

I low key love Makkari. She's so adorable and badass. best girl.

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