

513 Cannonfire

Frostfang 1

"I know, I know, just—DELTA!"

They came running.

Three of them. Faces pale. Exhausted. They'd been healing for over a day straight.

The lead Delta—dropped to her knees beside Maera, hands already glowing, and her face went white.

"Oh gods—"

"SAVE HER!" Silas screamed.

The Delta's hands moved over Maera's body, golden light pouring into the ruined flesh. The other two Deltas joined her, their hands glowing, working frantically.

"Massive trauma to the lumbar spine," one of them said, voice tight. "The cauda equina is—it's gone. Shredded."

"Bleeding out," another Delta said. "We need to stop the hemorrhaging first or she's dead in minutes."



"Do it!" Delta snapped.

Their hands pressed against Maera's lower body, light blazing brighter. The bleeding began to slow—vessels sealing, tissue knitting together.

But her legs—

Her legs lay at wrong angles, unmoving.

"Silas," The Delta said, not looking up. "You need to step back. Give us room."

"I'm not leaving—"

"Step back."

Silas stumbled backward, hands slick with Maera's blood, watching helplessly as the Deltas worked.

Around them, the battle still raged—but distant now, muffled, like it was happening in another world.

All that existed was Maera.

Dying in the snow.

The Delta's face was tight with concentration, sweat beading on her forehead despite the cold.

"She's stabilizing," one of the other Deltas said.
"Bleeding's stopped. But the nerve damage—"

"I see it," She said grimly.

She pulled her hands back, staring at the ruined
base of Maera's spine.

"What?" Silas demanded. "What is it?"

She looked up at him, and her eyes were filled
with exhaustion and grief.

"The cauda equina," she said quietly. "It's a
bundle of nerves at the base of the spine.
Controls everything below the waist—legs,
bladder, bowels, sensation, movement. It's one
of the most complex nerve networks in the
body."

"Can you fix it?" Silas's voice was desperate.

She hesitated. "In theory? Yes. But it would take
hours. Maybe longer. Nerve regeneration is
delicate work. Precision. Every connection has
to be perfect or it doesn't work at all."

"Then do it."

"We can't." The Delta beside the lead delta—a
younger man, barely holding himself upright—
spoke up. "We've been healing for over

twenty-six hours. We're running on fumes. We can save her life—rebuild the tissue, stop the bleeding, keep her alive. Or we can try to regenerate the nerves perfectly and risk killing her if we run out of energy halfway through."

Silas stared. "You're saying—"

"We have to choose," she said, her voice breaking. "Her life. Or her legs."

"That's not a choice!" Silas roared. "You save both!"

"We can't!" The delta's voice cracked. "I'm sorry, Silas, but we can't! We don't have enough left! If we try to do both and fail, she dies. Is that what you want?"

Silas opened his mouth. Closed it.

Looked down at Maera.

Her eyes were open. Staring at him. Tears streaming down her face.

She'd heard everything.

"Maera—" Silas dropped to his knees beside her.

"Do it," Maera whispered. Her voice was so faint he could barely hear it. "Save... my life."

"Maera—"

"Please." Her hand twitched, found his. Squeezed weakly. "I don't... want to die."

Silas's throat closed. He looked up at the lead delta.

"Save her," he said hoarsely. "Do whatever you have to do. Just—save her."

She nodded, tears streaming down her face.

"We'll create basic autonomic pathways," she said, hands already glowing again. "Enough to keep the tissue alive. Maintain circulation. But the motor nerves, the sensory nerves—we won't be able to regenerate those. Not properly. She'll—" She stopped. Swallowed. "Her legs will heal. But she won't be able to move them. Won't be able to feel them." 2

Maera sobbed—a broken, wrenching sound.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I'm so, so sorry."

Then she and the other Deltas bent over Maera, hands blazing with golden light, pouring everything they had left into keeping her alive.

Across the battlefield, James stood frozen.

The cannon had fallen from his hands.

He was staring at his mother.

At the blood.

At the Deltas frantically working.

At Silas, kneeling beside her, covered in her blood.

"No," James whispered.

Around him, his forces were retreating—pulled back by the appearance of more Obsidian reinforcements.

But James didn't move.

Couldn't move.

"MUM?"

She didn't respond.

Couldn't hear him.

"BETA, WE NEED TO GO!" one of his gammas shouted. "NOW!"

Hands grabbed James, pulling him back.

"No—wait—I need to—MUM!"

But they didn't stop.

His prime feral grabbed him by the scruff, lifting him bodily, and ran.

James struggled, screaming, reaching back toward the battlefield.

Toward his mother.

"I DIDN'T MEAN TO! I WAS AIMING FOR HIM!
MUM, I'M SORRY! MUM!" 3

But she didn't hear.

And then the trees swallowed them.

Gone.

25:50:00

The Deltas finally pulled back, hands dimming, faces gray with exhaustion.

Maera lay on the snow, breathing shallowly.

Her lower body was—healed. Intact. The flesh was sealed, the bone rebuilt, the bleeding stopped.

But her legs lay limp. Lifeless.

She sat back, swaying with exhaustion. 1

"It's done," she whispered. "She'll live."

Silas exhaled—a sound somewhere between a sob and a laugh.

"Thank you," he said hoarsely. "Thank you—"

"Don't thank me yet," She said quietly. She looked down at Maera. "The tissue is healed. The bone is whole. Blood flow is normal. But the nerves—" She stopped. "I'm sorry. We did what we could."

Maera's hand twitched.

She tried to move her legs.

Nothing.

Tried again.

Nothing.

"I can't—" Her voice broke. "I can't feel them."

"I know," she said gently.

"I can't move them."

"I know."

Maera's face crumpled. "No. No, please—"

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "We saved your life. But the nerves—they're too damaged. Too complex. We couldn't—" Her voice broke. "I'm so sorry."

Maera stared at her legs—whole, intact, useless—and sobbed.

Great, wrenching sounds that tore through the air.

Silas moved to her side, taking her hand.

"Maera—"

"He took my legs," she whispered through her tears. "He took my legs, Silas."

"You're alive," Silas said, his voice fierce. "You're alive. That's what matters."

"I'm a soldier," Maera said, her voice hollow. "I'm a commander. How am I supposed to—I can't even stand."

"You saved me," Silas said. "You jumped in front of a cannon to save me. That's—" His voice broke. "That's the bravest thing I've ever seen."

"You're not broken." Silas squeezed her hand. "You're alive. And we'll figure out the rest. Together."

Maera closed her eyes, tears streaming down her face.

Around them, the battlefield was littered with bodies.

Frostfang had held.

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But the cost—

The cost was written in blood and broken bones
and Maera's useless legs.

And somewhere in the trees, James was
screaming. 4

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