



575 BC Babylon

"Phastos, did you go to that party last night like I told you?" Ajak walks into the room and asks him.

Phastos sco s. "The party? Yeah, it was..."

"He worked all night," Druig snitches.

"Who was talking to you!" Phastos spits out.

"Get a life," Ajak tells him. "And where is Sersi?"

"Late as usual," Sprite rolls her eyes.

"I'm sorry, but I have something very exciting to show you, okay? Wait till you see this," Phastos begins. The framework of a new machine floats on display. The invention confused Ada. It all looked like a bunch of metal scraps. How was it supposed to do anything? She did never fully understand he was able create these things. But knowing Phastos, she knows it will be good.

"What is it?" Ajak examines the invention.

"It's an engine. It moves steam from high pressure to low pressure. Uh, uh, it'll help them till their fields at an incredibly fast rate."

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"It's gonna freak them out..." Sprite tells him.

"I mean, they only have had the wheel 1,000 years, so..." Druig comments.

"You know, we could do that thing, you know, where you use your mind to control them and then they could do it quicker."

"Ajak, are you listening to this?" Druig whines.

"Phastos, this steam..." Ajak begins.

"Engine. It's a steam engine," he corrects.

"It's too soon," she comments, then Sersi comes running into the lab, "And there she is."

"What did I miss?" Sersi asks.

"Nothing, just the screams of my deep disappointment..." Phastos tells her.

"I am sure you have something simpler," Ajak mentions.

"Simple. Okay, let's see. Uh... Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you...the plow," he tells them a er taking apart his original idea, unimpressed with the machine.

"What's it do?" Ada asks innocently.

"It's a plow, Ada, it plows dirt," Druig deadpans.

"I'm sorry, I don't remember asking you Druig," Ada turns to Phastos only for him to shrug, nodding towards Druig.

Druig laughs in her face. Ada uses her abilities to shove him o the back of the table he was sitting on. She smiles at the look of complete shock plastered on his face. His mouth hung open in surprise.

"Ada..." Ajak scolds in a motherly tone.

"Sorry," she tells her, hiding her amusement.

"I'll get you back for that!" Druig projects into her mind, ensuring Ajak couldn't hear them.

"Sure you will..."

"I met another group of settlers who are building their homes in the northern fields. They'll need to plant their own crops," Sersi mentions, trying to make Phastos feel better.

"Thanks, Sersi."

"Listen, humanity may be coming along slower than some of us want. But there's no telling what wonders they will discover as they advance.

Later that evening...

Ada sits alone on a ledge at the top of the temple, watching the sunset. The pink clouds stretch across the sky like waves, hiding the faded blue sky. The sun disappeared over the edge of a mountain, but the bright orange that licks the horizon like fire is just as bright.

"There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you," Druig joins her on the ledge. "What are you doing up here by yourself, I thought we were going to put scorpions in Kingo's bed again?"

"Sorry, I just have a lot on my mind right now," she admits. Ada's eyes stare seemingly empty at the extravaganza below, but the bags present above her cheeks and her sunken shoulders suggest otherwise.

"What's wrong?"

She hesitates for a second, wondering if he will judge her or tell her she's being ridiculous. He wouldn't do that, would he?She think to herself. Druig looks her in the eyes as he patiently waits for a response. His eyebrows knit with worry. She decides to take a chance. "This is going to sound selfish and dumb, but I feel like I'm not contributing enough to this mission. Phastos invents these amazing, groundbreaking machines. Sersi uses her abilities to help the humans garden. The others fight deviants...We don't even get to use our abilities. I almost never see you use yours...The only time I get to use mine is when I need to clean up the mess that the fighters made. The rest of the time, I sit around doing nothing. I just feel like my abilities are going to waste."

Hearing this kind of surprised Druig. Ada isn't usually one to speak her mind, but rather listens intently to others opinions or arguments. Not that she wasn't allowed to have her own opinions, she just didn't normally vocalize them. This must really be bothering her if she's telling me about little lets her speak. No snarky comments. No jokes. No teasing. She was serious, so he had to take this seriously.

"It's stupid, I know. I just, I feel like I could be more useful doing something else."

"It's not stupid. I've actually been thinking about that for a while now." He wasn't about to lie to her and invalidate her feelings. He knew what she was saying was true. Neither of them got to use their abilities too o en. Maybe they were being singled out because of what they could do. Maybe they weren't trusted.

"Have you considered talking to Ajak about it?"

"You know what she's gonna say...She's going to tell me everyone has an equally important role in the mission and that we were each selected for a reason. I don't need to hear that from her. You know what? Never mind. Talking about it isn't going to change anything anyway, it'll just make me more upset."

"Ada..."

"Can we just talk about something else, please?" She retreats back into her little box, keeping her thoughts to herself. Technically, Druig could read her thoughts if he wanted to, but he knew he shouldn't. That's one thing he'd never do without her permission. As her friend, he respected her boundaries. He just wished she wouldn't shut down like that. She opens up a little, then runs away, shoving her feelings back into a chest, and locks it.

Against his own temptations, he nods, not wanting to push it too far. Ada halfway listens as Druig tells her about something Makkari stole recently, paying more attention to the fading colors in the sky. She watches as the sunset disappears below the horizon and is replaced by a dark sheet with twinkling lights.

"You know, there's another party tonight..." Druig mentions.

"Okay? You know I don't go to those things."

"Yeah, but Kingo does..."

"And you still want to put scorpions in his bed..." Ada guesses.

"Yes!"

"Remind me again why you want to do that so badly?"

"Because he deserves it. And besides, you owe me."

"I really don't, but okay."

Three Weeks Later...

"Ada, can I talk to you?" Ajak calls her over.

Oh no...I'm in trouble. What did I do? Was it that shed I hit with a boulder the other day? I knew I shouldn't have listened to Druig!Ada follows Ajak to the top floor of the temple. From up there, she could see everything in the city, even the village outside the walls. It looked like the land stretched on for an eternity.

Ajak takes a deep breath before speaking, "Ada, I feel like you aren't using your abilities to their utmost potential."

Now that was something Ada wasn't expecting Ajak to tell her. But she didn't need Ajak to tell her something she already knew. Like she was telling Druig a couple weeks ago, her abilities were being put to waste. She's just glad Ajak finally agrees. But what she doesn't understand is how she isn't using them to their full potential. What does that even mean?Does that mean they aren't good enough?

"What do you mean?" Ada asks her.

"Well, I believe you are capable of achieving so much more than simply li ing objects, wouldn't you agree?"

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying, maybe I could help train you to be stronger and tap into the complexities of your abilities."

"I didn't think my abilities had more complexities to them."

"Then allow me to help you. I could help you gain more control."

"Okay, let's do it."

"Great, let's go!"

"Wait, you mean right now?"

"Yes. Will that be a problem?" Ajak asks. Ada looks at her, shaking her head. Ajak leads her outside the walls, away from the villages. More importantly, away from humans.

"So, I have an idea and I feel like you're going to hate it..." This grabs Ada's attention. "I want you to put all your focus on me. Reach inside and connect with the flow of my bloodstream. Don't do anything, just see if you can sense it."

Ada li s her hand slightly and closes her eyes to focus. Her mind dives into the skin, then the tissues, then the muscles. It takes her a moment to find a vein. A surge of energy flows through her like a river. She could feel the blood rushing through, not just one vein, but all of Ajak's veins and arteries. She could feel each pulse as her heart contracted, pumping blood throughout her body. There was something about the human body that fascinated Ada. Maybe it was the complexity of it. Or the way it could function all on its own. Or the way everything worked together.

"Have you found it?" Ada opens her eyes and nods. "Great! Now I want you to find a way to take control and stop the flow of blood."

"What?" The word falls out of her mouth in confusion. She wants me to stop her blood? How am I supposed to do that? Unless she wants me to-

"I want you to temporarily stop my heart," Ajak tells her. Is she crazy? She can't be seriously...That'll kill her.

"Ajak, I can't stop your heart. What if I accidentally..." she trails o , not wanting to say it.

"You won't. I trust you and your ability to do this. Besides, I'll be healing myself the entire time. You won't hurt me. I promise." Ajak could tell Ada was beginning to shut down.

"But what if I lose control and can't start your heart again?" Ada panics, retreating back to her comfort zone.

"Then let's get Druig out here. If you start to lose control, he can step in and help you," she tells her.

Ada pauses for a moment, considering the option. Maybe having Druig there would bring her a little bit of comfort, at least. "Fine." She may have hesitated, but she still agreed and that's all Ajak needed.

She projects her voice into his mind, asking if he can come outside to help them with something. He immediately agrees. Minutes later, Druig approaches them.

"What do you need me to do?" he asks before biting into the side of a fresh apple.

"All you need to do is step in if Ada loses control," Ajak informs him. He looks over to Ada, curious as to what she might be doing. He could see the stress visibly radiating o f her. Whatever it was, she was clearly uncomfortable and didn't trust herself. Meanwhile, Ajak stood confidently, patiently waiting for Ada to be ready.

Ajak didn't want to rush her. She knew this was something Ada's never done before. She also knew how much Ada hated hurting people. But, Ada needed to expand her abilities and this was the only way she could practice safely.

"Are you ready?" Ada hesitates again, but still nods.

"Alright. I want you to stop my heart, count to three, then start it again," she explains.

Something in her brain was telling her to stop. That this was a bad idea. She forces the thought down. Her mind reaches into Ajak's body again. This time connecting to her blood stream a lot quicker. She finds the heart. The delicate muscle pumped steadily in her palm. Her raised hand shakes as she rotates her wrist and squeezes her fingers into a loose fist. Instantly, Ajak's heart stops. Everything blurs around Ada. Her ears began ringing. Her head felt light. She could see Ajak's complexion turning white as paper. Having zero concept of time now, Ada forgets to count, electing to start her heart again. As soon as she unclenches her fist, the color in Ajak's face begins returning to a fleshy pink. Ada's hands continue trembling at her sides. The ringing fades away slightly, but it's still present.

"That was good Ada! Except you forgot to count. That was six seconds, not three." Ajak keeps talking, but the words flow in one ear and out the other. Ada's brain was a little too overwhelmed to process anything Ajak was telling her.

Ajak grabs Ada's shaking hands. "Look, I know this is a little scary for you. I get it. But you need to learn to start trusting yourself more. You have the ability, you just need the confidence. You were able to stop my heart, e ortlessly. What broke your focus, though...was your fear. It's holding you back. That's why I want to practice with you. You have a remarkable ability, Ada, we just need to work on this." She wasn't yelling at her, nor was she just telling her what she wanted to hear. Ajak was telling her exactly what she neededto hear. As she finishes, she pulls Ada into a motherly hug, holding her close to her chest. The words "I'm proud of you"tickles her eardrums.

Ajak heads back to the city, claiming she needed to check up on Phastos' new invention. Ada turns to look at Druig, who stood there with his hands behind his back the entire time, doing absolutely nothing. A thin apple core rests in the dirt by his feet.

"Looked pretty cool to me. However, I do have a couple notes, just a little constructive criticism."

She rolls her eyes and swipes her hand. Druig's legs tangle themselves, making him trip and fall flat on his face. He chokes on a gasp before scrambling to his feet and lightly shoving her. She laughs at his rustled hair and dusty face. There is dirt and sand all over the front of his suit.

"You're annoying, you know that right?" He remarks. Ada unable to hide her grin now.

"You were practically asking for it."

"Seriously though, I'm proud of you, Ada," he tells her.