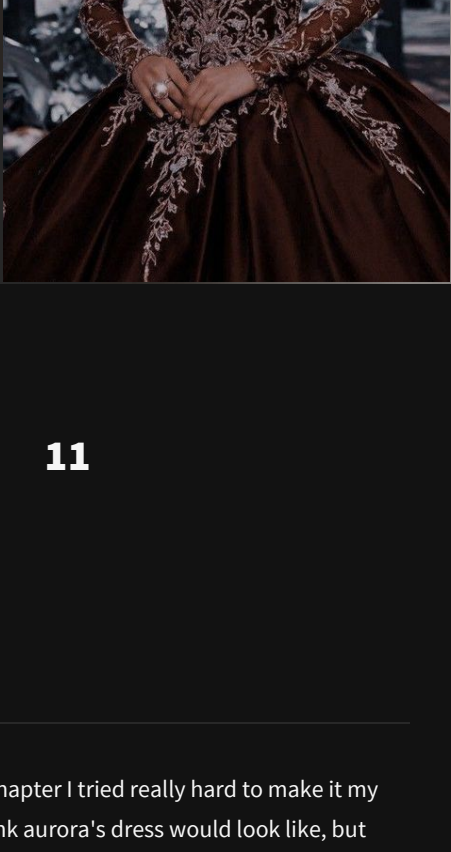




1

a/ i rily hope ya'll enjoy this chapter I tried really hard to make it my best. also i attached what I think aurora's dress would look like, but feel free to imagine it whatever style and color you like)

VICTORIAN ERA
ENGLAND 1700

AURORA

The more i stayed here, the more i hated it.

I hated dancing with a passion, even more than I hated having to dress up and behave like a lady all night long.

I didn't like England if I was being honest. It was big and dirty and filled with men that believed they were better than the rest.

But, I had to admit, these balls were growing on me. Something about people forgetting about everything outside the ballroom seemed to catch my attention.

Except for the dancing part, of course. I did not like dancing.

I adjust my dress, wiggling around inside it and wincing as the corset dug against my ribs.

God, this dress was so uncomfortable.

"Aurora!" Lady Helena's cold voice snaps at me from a couple of feet away. I turn, a frown on my face. She snaps her fingers, pointing to my face and then mimicking a smile.

Lady Helena was a mean old lady that gave me etiquette lessons in the palace. She was supposed to be teaching me proper ballroom manners, but so far it wasn't going too well.

I roll my eyes at her warning, sighing and then putting on the best fake smile I'm capable of making. I bite my teeth as Helena scans me, deciding if my smile was worthy of being kept or if I was going to have to change it.

Thankfully, she just rolls her eyes, meaning the smile is acceptable as she turns and catches another girl that's not doing what needs to be done.

God, I couldn't wait to leave this shithole.

I'd been here a couple of years. Sprite had been here before me, and she'd told me that coming here had been fun and interesting. I'd come to visit one time and I honestly hadn't hated it, which was why I'd moved.

It took me very little time to want to leave. I hated the atmosphere. How I always had to look perfect, how everything I did was to impress a man.

No bad posture, Aurora.

No snickering, Aurora.

No scowling, Aurora.

I was honestly pretty tired of it all—even more so because I honestly didn't like a single guy that got in front of me.

Don't get me wrong, they were handsome. They were kind and they treated me nice enough.

They weren't him, though.

I'd kept in touch with most of the team except for Ikaris. A er Tenochtitlan, the little we had of our relationship had basically shattered, but I didn't mind, I'd never been a fan of him.

I'd visited Thena and Gil in Australia a couple of years back before moving here, and I'd checked in on Ajak, who was busy traveling the world.

I hadn't heard from Druiq at all. Not a letter, not a visit, not anything. I had to admit, it did disappoint me. A part of me had thought that maybe he'd come to find me by now, but my hopes had withered and died as the years had gone by.

Sersi assured me he'd come back eventually, but I'd been waiting for so long my patience was finally ending. I was also sure Sersi was telling me that just so I wouldn't feel sad.

Sometimes, when I'd go to sleep at night, I'd imagine what it would be like when I finally saw him again.

I couldn't really picture what I would do. There were a million different scenarios in different million situations. I'd imagined everything that could be possibly imagined.

But it had been so long since I'd seen him that I'd started to forget his voice. It took me 200 years to realize how much I actually had liked him and how much I'd been forcing myself not to over the past thousand years.

A part of me thanked him though because as much as I didn't like England and I didn't like most of the people, I'd met some pretty nice friends here. The girls I lived with were kind and caring, and I was so grateful for them.

Looked around the ball, the melody of the violins and the piano filling my ears. In the middle of the room, couples were already dancing, twirling the night away.

I headed, turning to one of the waiters and grabbing a champagne flute, raising it to my lips and downing it on one gulp.

I really missed Gupta's alcohol.

Julie walks over to me, laughing at my demeanor. In contrast to me, she loved dressing up. Julie was everything all the girls tried to be. With black hair and blue eyes, she shone brightly against all the others, and with good reason. The girl was beautiful. I knew it wouldn't be long until a man whisked her away and she got married, and I was so happy for her.

"It looks like someone's having fun!" She laughs breathily, going to grab a pair of champagne flutes and handing another one to me.

I sigh, looking around at the party with a wince.

"Oh, I'm having so much fun, Julie. Can't you see?" I force on a smile, pretending to be posh and stuck-up. She laughs, shaking her head and taking a small sip of her drink.

"Lady Helena's being a bit of a bitch tonight!" I note, watching from a distance as Helena points to one of the girls, snapping her fingers so that she stands up straight.

"When isn't she a bitch, is the question?" Julie retorts, laughing.

I chuckle, shaking my head. Around us girls walk from place to place, all of them looking for their main target for the night.

Julie looks around, her eyes widening slightly as she sees something behind me.

"Alright, don't turn around, but there's a handsome man coming our way, and he's looking right at you"

I go to turn around but she holds me back, gritting her teeth.

"I told you not to turn around! He's going to know we're talking about him"

I groan, not really in the mood to be taken out dancing.

"I'm sure he's going to ask you to dance, Julie, not me!" I answer, not really caring about the man coming our way.

In the past few years I'd grown the reputation of not really accepting dancing offers. At first, it was seen as interesting, but by late November men had grown pretty tired of asking me to dance and getting told no.

"No, I think this one's for you!" She whispers, taking a sip of her champagne and then turning suddenly and leaving.

"Julie!" I whisper yell as she walks away. "Julie! Come back!"

She doesn't look back but rather raises her hand in goodbye. I curse at her silently huling in frustration.

"Good God!" I mumble, downing the rest of my champagne and placing it on a small table next to me.

I look down at my dress, adjusting the sleeves and smoothing out my dress.

I feel a light tap on my shoulder. I close my eyes, sighing to myself in preparation to tell another man that I did not want to dance.

"My lady, I was wondering if I could have the pleasure of a dance?" The man's voice comes out over the music, low and steady, a hint of laughter on his tone. There's a slight accent in his voice.

"I'm sorry, I don't really want to dance" I turn towards the table beside me, which is filled with food in order to distract myself. I'm deciding what dessert to grab when it hits me.

That accent.

I halt completely.

My blood runs cold. I can feel my heart start to beat faster. I swallow, afraid to look up.

There was only one person I knew with that accent. One person who could make every single word sound lazy and full of confidence at the same time.

"You look as beautiful as I remember"

I finally look up, my eyes meeting his.

It's like the world stops for a moment, just me and him in a bubble of space. For a moment, I'm reminded of when he le. Of the conversation, we'd le unfinished.

I'm gobsmacked.

I let myself take him in, admiring all his features. He looks as beautiful as ever. His hair is shorter, and he wears a suit, looking clean and ever so himself.

I stare at him for god knows how long, his face carrying that godawful smirk he's had for thousands of years.

And then I slap him.

I don't process what I'm doing. Suddenly my hand is rising and I'm hitting him across the cheek with force, making him reel back slightly at the impact.

Around us people turn to look, girls gasping at what I just did.

For a moment he's silent, his eyes wide.

And then he chuckles, wincing at the expression.

"I guess I deserved that"

I walk a step closer, my index finger digging into his chest. I'm so so upset at him. How dare he show up a er so long? A er not trying to contact me?

My head is reeling as I try to wrap my mind around the fact that he's finally here.

"You deserve more than that!" My voice rises, all the years of anger finally letting loose. "200 years?! 200?!" You couldn't even send me a fucking letter or something?" I yell.

I know people are staring, and I know they're listening to what I'm saying. I just don't care.

He stays silent, his eyes scanning my face. I know he sees the hurt and the anger inside me because I can see the regret and guilt in his own eyes.

As I see his expression the anger in me withers away, leaving me with the feeling I'd been having the past 200 years.

Exhaustion.

I can feel my eyes watering.

"Did you know what it felt? I felt like a fool waiting for you, Druiq." My voice breaks as I whisper, a tear silently trekking down my cheek.

He frowns, taking a step closer to me.

"I'm sorry, I—" He sighs, shaking his head "there's no excuse" he stills, lips pursing.

I stand there in silence, looking at him. Around us people continue dancing, oblivious to what is happening between us. I'm grateful Lady Helena didn't see me slap him because I would have been kicked out without question.

And then I finally step forward, the feeling of relief that he's here taking over me.

I crash into him, hugging him with all my might.

He wraps his arms around me, holding me tight and strong.

It's like the past 200 years didn't exist. It's like I have never hated him in the first place at all.

At that moment, we are one.

I breathe in, holding back tears as I dig my face into the nook of his neck, breathing in his scent.

It reminded me of Babylon, the smell of a mix of woods with a fresh tinge to it.

"I've missed you, my beautiful Aurora" He whispers, cradling the back of my head as he holds me.

I smile at his words, not being able to contain my tears as I pull back from the hug. I put my hands on the side of his face, looking up at him.

"It's really you, right? It's not Sprite playing a trick on me" I look around the ballroom, sniffling.

"No illusions, Rory. It's me" He smiles, his eyes gleaming.

He takes a step back, looking around and noticing a new dance is starting.

"Would the lady gi me a dance?" He bows down, looking up at me with a smirk.

I roll my eyes, unable to keep a foolish grin o my face.

I might have hated dancing. But with him? I loved it.

I take his hand, sparks jolting up my arm at the contact, my heart skipping a beat. He walks me to the center of the room, twirling me around and then placing himself so that he's holding my waist and my other arm.

I laugh, tilting my head back at his strange moves.

"Where did you learn to dance like that?" I ask as the dance begins. He chuckles as we move to the music, settling into a slow waltz.

"Why do you ask?" His eyes squint at me, his smile wide as we drift across the room to the rich melody.

I had never seen Druiq smile as he was smiling right now. I roll my eyes at his comment.

"Because it's horrible, whoever taught you needs to relearn dancing"

"Hey! Have you taken a look at your dancing?" He teases, eyes scrunching as he smiles.

I roll my eyes, stepping on his foot on purpose as we take a step to the side.

He lets out a groan, wincing in pain.

"Don't insult my dancing again!" I try to sound serious, but we both know the threat is just empty words.

He shakes his head, mumbling a curse as we continue to sway across the ballroom, weaving between other partners dancing to the rhythm of the music.

He looks at me, head tilting to the side.

"Have I told you how incredible you look tonight?" He asks.

"Hmnm" I look up at the ceiling, pursing my lips in mock thought. "You might have mentioned it, but I don't remember"

"You look absolutely stunning" He repeats. His face falls slightly. "I can't believe it's been 200 years since I've seen you"

I lick my lips, my mind reeling with questions. I take this as my opportunity to ask him what I'm thinking.

"Where were you?" I look at him dead in the eyes. "I tried to look for you but Ajak said you'd disappeared"

Druiq rolls his eyes at the mention of Ajak, clearly still not in good graces with her.

"I went back to the Amazon." He finally explains "I built a village and kept the forest safe" He looks around us, jaw tightening. "I wanted to come earlier—I did—it's just complications arose and I had to stay by my people" He explains.

I nod, staying silent for a few seconds.

"I'm sorry, Aurora" His tone sounds small, almost like a child that has been caught breaking something.

I shake my head, gripping his hand tighter as he takes a step back and gives me a swirl. I feel my dress span around me, swishing as I step back to him, his hand going immediately to my waist and my hand going to his shoulder.

It felt like we'd done this a million times before.

"It's alright" I clip out. "We all have our reasons, I understand" I o er a reassuring smile. "You're here now"

"You don't hate me?" he's taken aback by my response, a frown taking over his face.

I laugh, shaking my head.

"No, Druiq, I don't." I pause "and for the record, I've never hated you. Only mildly disliked you" I point out.

He smirks at me, the grip on my waist becoming stronger. Up close he's even more beautiful.

"Well, it doesn't matter anyway. We're here now, aren't we?"

I can't keep o my smile as I nod, my heels clicking below me with every step I take. We slow down to a stop as the song finally ends.

We step into the side of the room, Druiq grabbing some flutes of champagne for the both of us.

As the party goes on, I realize how much I'd missed out on not having his friendship.

He was nice when he wanted to, and snarky as well. He had the same sense of humor as me, and he'd made me laugh more tonight than I had in centuries.

That night he'd told me all about his adventures. How he'd fought some tribes and controlled them so that they wouldn't kill each other. How he'd kept the English and French from entering the Amazon and killing innocent tribes.

I had to admit I was impressed. In these past 200 years, he'd done a lot for humanity.

He asked about me then; about what I'd done these past years, and I told him.

I'd been focused on getting into royalty status (Hence the fancy balls and parties) My main mission was helping slaves get away. When I'd come to England and I'd found out what was happening I couldn't stay still and watch.

Over the years I'd created an organization that focused on helping them go and giving them shelter and a good life if they needed it. Sprite and Sersi had helped, but they'd lo the organization to me when Sersi had moved to Italy and Sprite had moved to Mumbai with Kingo.

That organization had been part of why I hadn't been able to leave England. There were times when I'd thought about going back to find him, but every time I thought about it something seemed to arise back here and I couldn't go.

We talked and talked and talked until we couldn't talk anymore, and I discovered how much Druiq and I were alike.

Of course, I didn't have the attitude of an ass, but there were a lot of similarities we'd never noticed.

But as the night went by, I found my resentment for myself growing. I regretted not having followed him that night in Tenochtitlan. I regretted not having spoken to him about our hatred to each other earlier.

I regretted having hated him for so long.

"What are you thinking about?" Druiq asks as we walk to the outside of the castle. The party had started to dim out, and we knew the both of us had things that we needed to talk about that couldn't be talked about in public.

I hrmn, my thoughts swirling together from the champagne we drank. I was definitely not drunk, but I could feel the effects of the alcohol warming my system.

"About everything, I guess." I turn to him, looping my arm through his. "Do you ever think about what would have happened if we hadn't fought for so long?" I finally ask.

He stares straight ahead as we walk forward, passing drunk people leaning on the railings, men and women stepping into their carriages to leave for the night. His jaw clenches, and I can see the wheels turning in his head.

"I think about it a lot, yeah" His tone is low and somber. He turns to look at me. "But I like to think that if we hadn't then we wouldn't have been able to a lot of other things. We needed to hate each other to be able to grow"

I hrmn in agreement, leaning my head on his shoulder as we continue to walk in silence.

I look around us, watching as the first rays of light start to show over the sky.

An idea pops into my head, and I can't keep myself from gasping.

"What is it?" Druiq asks.

I jump up, a smile adorning my face. I turn to him, both my hands clutching his shoulders.

"Come on! I have an idea" I take his hand, pulling him behind me as we start jogging back into the castle.

I push through the people exiting, hearing behind me as Druiq curses at how fast we're going.

"Can you slow down?!" He calls from behind me as we get into a stairwell.

"No! We'll miss it!" I call out over my shoulder, still holding his hand tight.

He grumbles but keeps silent.

I lead us through the castle, up flights of stairs and through doors I have memorized from my time here until we finally get to a small window. I turn the latch opening it. Outside, I can see the first rays of the sun coming through.

I climb through the window into a small platform, just big enough to fit the both of us. It's right on the top of the castle, a hidden safe place I had discovered one time while looking for an escape route if I ever needed one.

"What is it with you and your high places?" Druiq complains as he steps into the window and takes a seat beside me. We're almost squished together, given that my dress is pretty big. I do my best to move it out of the way, but it doesn't help much.

I had to admit, I liked sunsets a lot more. I liked the peace I felt of knowing the day was finally ending, but sunrises had a special place in my heart as well.

They meant a new beginning. When sunrise came, it didn't matter if the day before had been horrible. It didn't matter what you had done. What mattered was that it was a new day.

You were reborn.

"I like watching the cities" I explain. "I've done it since we first came to this planet"

Druiq nods, looking around the city below us. We watch as the lights start to come o one by one as the sun rises.

"I remember." He turns to me. "It's like Babylon"

I nod, unable to keep the smile o my face.

"Yeah, just like that"

We sit there in silence, the both of us looking at the city buildings below us.

Strangely enough, I didn't feel the need to talk. I'd been around him long enough—even with hate—that his presence was enough.

It was only now that I realize how much I'd really missed him.

"You know what I thought the first time I saw you?" It's finally Druiq's voice who breaks the silence.

I turn to him, tilting my head to the side.

"What did you think?"

He chuckles, looking in front of us. As the light became more and illuminated his face, I could see every single line and small scar that covered his face.

Without thinking my hand goes to touch the small scar on his lip, one I'd done in one of our big fights. I regretted having harmed him, but honestly, it looked good on him. He eyes me for a moment, his eyes flitting to my lips before continuing.

"I thought: This is the most beautiful girl I've ever seen" He shakes his head, turning to look at me.

I laugh, taking my hand o his scar and running a hand through my face.

"Yeah? You know what I thought?" I tease, smiling from ear to ear.

"What?"

"This is the most annoying and rude boy I have ever met"

He breaks into laughter, shaking his head. "I apologize for whatever it was that made you hate me" He o ers.

"Apology accepted" The conversation dwindles again, both of us deep in thought about everything.

I turn to the city, watching the chimneys let out smoke in the distance. To my le, a port was filled with ships, all of them bobbing from side to side with the waves of the water. I do my best to turn back to him. Finally ready to ask him what I'd been wondering for hundreds of years.

"That night?" I finally begin, taking advantage of the silence "In Tenochtitlan, before Gil interrupted us. What were you going to say?"

He looks down at his hands, playing with his rings. He wasn't nervous, no. He knew I would ask this, it had just been a matter of when.

"Back in Gupta, when you got into that fight with that man" He finally begins. "You passed out at first in the bar, and then you woke up as I was carrying you into my room"

"Wh—"

"Please let me finish, Aurora. I need to get it out before I regret it" I nod, staying silent as I look at him. He pauses for a few seconds before continuing.

"You were saying some things, about me hating you and the hate that we'd had over the last years. You were drunk o your ass of course" he licks his lips. Even in the dark, I can see his jaw tighten and unclench rapidly. "You started saying things about how you'd always liked me but you didn't know how to say it"

Embarrassment flushes over me. Heat rushes up into my cheeks and I'm sure I turn bright red at what he's saying. He turns to me, flashing a smile at my demeanor.

"I mean, it didn't matter because I told you I liked you too. And then you'd stared at me and you'd kissed me. I kissed you back of course, and then I popped back your shoulder and you'd passed out again"

I sit still at the new information.

I didn't remember.

I'd kissed him and I didn't remember.

For fucks sake, Aurora.

That's why he'd been so distant. That was why he'd stopped talking to me.

"But anyway that didn't matter because the next morning you couldn't remember." He sighs, lips pursing. "I knew I couldn't go back to hating you, so I stayed away. Kept my distance"

"Oh Druiq" I whisper, touching his shoulder. "You should have told me"

"It doesn't matter now anyway" He turns, smiling. "I'm here now, aren't I?"

I laugh out a breath.

"You are"

My hand goes to rest at the back of his head. I can feel the first rays of sun hitting my face as it rises, warming my face.

"Would you look at that?" Druiq tells me, leaning close to. "You're even more beautiful up close"

I chuckle, shaking my head.

"I'm going to kiss you now, Aurora" He tells me, his hand going to the side of my face.

I don't even give him time to do it because before I know it I'm closing my eyes and I'm meeting my lips to his.

It's like time stops. It's just us and the sunrise again. A sense of euphoria washes over me.

My hand goes to his shoulder as the kiss deepens.