7

PRESENT DAY

AURORA

I don't know how long I cried in Gil's arms. I remember him grabbing me and hoisting me up into his arms, carrying me back to my small hut as gently as he could.

I tried to stop crying, I really did, but it seemed like I was a waterfall that had no sight of ending. I cried and I cried until I finally fell asleep.

When I woke up two hours later, it was still night.

It all seemed to be fine until everything that had happened just a few hours came rushing back, and the wave of emotion hit me like a truck.

I forced it down though. I had had my time of grieving. I was sure that my crying had delayed whatever plan the team had, so as much as I wanted to crumple into the ground and disappear, I knew I needed to hold everything off – at least until the mission was over.

Strangely enough, it felt like I had no more sadness left to give. All the heartbreak and the pain–it had been replaced by anger.

That Deviant that had killed her was going to suffer for what it had done. It didn't know what was coming for him.

Ikaris might have been the strongest. The 'leader', but even he couldn't match me when I was angry.

Of course, it took a lot of pent up anger–years of it– to actually explode to that level, but it hadn't happened in a long time, and I was almost sure that the moment I saw that Deviant, I would lose my shit no matter how hard I tried not to.

Everyone knew that. They knew that I was stronger at my angriest, which was why most of the team tended not to get in my way when we were fighting.

I comb a hand through my hair, standing up from my bed and running to the small sink, washing my face before going into the main room, where everyone else was waiting.

As I walked in, the conversation immediately stopped, all heads turning to look at me.

I gave them a sniff, adjusting my posture and walking to take my seat at the head of the table, opposite Ikaris.

"So" I begin after a few moments. None of them say anything, all of them watching me as if I was going to explode. "What's the plan then?"

Ikaris clears his throat, turning to look at Sersi. She nods, pursing her lips before starting.

"Well, for starters, we need to kill the Deviants. I guess that's the main goal" she says, nodding from her seat and offering me a warm smile.

I nod in response, already thinking of ways that we could do that. Ways that we could find this Deviant and finally kill it.

"We forgot to mention," Kingo starts suddenly, leaning forward in his seat. "Ajak gave her magical sphere to Sersi, and not Ikaris" he pitches in from beside Sprite. "Can you believe that?! We all know Ikaris was supposed to lead this team" He halts, turning to Sersi. "No offense, Sersi"

My eyebrows rise in slight annoyance. As much as I liked Kingo, I had to admit he was a pain in the ass.

"I'm going to pretend you didn't just say that entire part about Ikaris being better than Sersi" I respond after a few beats of silence. I turn to Sersi, pride washing over me. "I think that if Ajak chose her it was for a reason,"

Part of me was glad that Ikaris hadn't been chosen to lead, and now, after everything that had happened with Sersi and him (Yes, I kept tabs on Sersi too over the years) I liked him even less than I had before.

"And where can we find the Deviant?" I ask, crossing my arms over my chest and returning back to the topic of conversation.

"It's going after us" Thena pitches in from beside me, a somber expression on her face. "It doesn't attack humans anymore, it seems to have a knack for Eternals"

I chuckle, shaking my head.

"That fucker won't know what hit it" I mumble under my breath.

"We think it's going after Druig next." It's Ikaris who speaks now. He looks straight at me, hands joined and resting on the table in front of him.

I halt at the mention of Druig, my entire demeanor changing from just the mention of his name. My small smile starts to fade away, and I find myself almost glaring at Ikaris.

"And how do you know that?" I ask, frowning.

He shrugs. "It's a pattern. It went after Sersi, then after Gil and Thena, then you, and now Druig." He explains, leaning back on his chair.

I squint, licking my lips.

"And what are we going to do about it then?" I finally ask, looking around the team in silence.

"We know Druig won't be easy to convince," Sersi starts carefully after a few seconds, hesitation on her tone. "We were hoping you could come with us and..."

"And what, Sersi?" My tone comes out a lot harsher than I intended. "You know we don't talk anymore"

"Yes, I know, but we–"

"But what?" I scoff, looking around at the team, meeting eyes with everyone individually. It seemed like they had all talked about it before while I had been asleep because they held the same level of understanding displayed on their features as Sersi.

"You're the only one that can convince him" She finishes, her brow creased with worry. "It doesn't matter if you don't talk anymore. If you go and talk to him he'll go, and you know that"

I stay quiet for a few moments, swallowing and considering what she just said.

I hadn't spoken to him in years. We hadn't left off on the best of terms, and both of us had been too proud to reach out for the other.

My heart skipped a beat at the thought of seeing him again.

What would I say? What would I do?

I shake my head slowly, my brow furrowing.

"I don't think I would be able to convince him," I tell them slowly, my voice coming out small.

I hated showing weakness, but Druig was a sore topic, one that always felt like a stab in the heart.

I turn to them, sighing deeply. Suddenly the thought of doing this doesn't sound as appealing anymore.

What if I went off on my own? Killed the Deviant by myself. I knew I was more than capable.

"Aurora, come on. You know we can't do this without you" It's Gil's pleading voice that makes my heart sink.

I see the team nod in agreement, and guilt spreads against my chest.

But I couldn't. I couldn't see him after everything that had happened. I wouldn't be able to look at him in the eye.

I stand up slowly, looking around the room.

"I just– I need to think about it. Just give me a few moments" I don't really give them the space to object or reply asi I make a beeline for the door, my head reeling with thoughts I couldn't even grasp.

As I head towards the woods, I realize that it's the second time in the span of a day that I've walked out on this team.

Fun.

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"Why do I always find you in such high places?" Thena's voice travels from under me and into my ears, making me look down.

I chuckle, shaking my head as I look down at her.

"I like to feel small" I answer, raising my voice so that she hears.

She smiles, shaking her head and grabbing onto one of the branches to climb up the small ladder I had made.

The first time I came to this village it was late 2000's. I'd discovered it by a chain of volunteers and the second I'd found out I had been on my way.

At first, I was a temporary volunteer, coming and going every couple of months, sightseeing other parts of Africa in between the volunteer program. It went on like that for a couple of years until one day I'd gotten a call from the head of the organization. They'd told me that the leader of the program was retiring and that they needed someone to fill in.

I hadn't even needed a second to accept the offer.

And then that had been it. I had moved here and I'd never left, only for the occasional trip to the nearest city to get essential things like medical kits or to pick up the newest set of volunteers from the nearing airports.

If the people of the village suspected something about me not aging as the years passed by, they didn't mention it. We kept this sort of unspoken agreement that whatever it was that I was, they had to keep it a secret.

I disappeared from the modern world. I trashed my phone and got a flip phone, only to call Ajak, Sersi, and Gil once in a while to check in on them.

Once, a very long time ago, I would have had Druig's address annotated there (since he didn't have a phone, he said those things were of the devil), but I had long erased it.

It didn't mean that I had forgotten it. I knew how to get there even with my eyes closed, and I knew that the moment the team asked me where he was I would not have to think twice before answering.

That's something I hated about it too. I hated that even though it had been years, I still thought about him almost daily.

I cursed him and myself for it. It made me feel like a fool for having fallen so hard. It was part of why I isolated myself in here. There were no traces of the life I'd left behind. No news, no internet or Eternals to remind me what I'd done wrong and how I was in love with someone who was likely not to love me back.

After I stayed here in Africa for a while, I realized I lacked a place to watch my sunsets, and so I got to building.

I searched for the nearest, tallest tree, making sure it was sturdy before building a ladder and placing a small platform between the branches.

It was my go-to place.

From here, everything was visible. The savannah in the distance, the mountains around us.

The best thing was the stars though. We were so far away from any form of city and artificial light that the stars here shone so bright.

The first time I saw them, I cried.

It had been so long since I had seen the stars so clearly; years of pollution had covered them away and I had spent so much time in big cities and not caring about the sky that as soon as I'd seen them I had broken down.

For me, they represented everything I had lost back in those days, including a part of myself.

I huddle closer to myself as a fresh breeze goes by, sliding to the side to make a place for Thena to sit on the platform. I hug my knees, looking up at the moon. It was fat and bright, illuminating the prairies below us.

She finishes climbing up the ladder, huffing for breath and removing her hair from her face before taking a look around in silence.

"Aurora, this sight..." She says breathily, eyes wide with wonder.

"It's wonderful, I know" I smile, resting my cheek against one of my knees

"I can see why you love this place... this peace it brings you" She gets comfortable, sitting crisis cross. and wrapping her arms around herself.

I nod, moving the hair out of my face as a small gust of wind passes by us.

"I think coming here gave me a sense of peace I hadn't felt in a long time" I explain. "It helped me heal, in a way"

She nods, her expression as somber as always.

I had always admired Thena. I knew mad wy'ry wasn't an easy thing to deal with, and I knew she lived with the fear of hurting one of us at all times.

She was brave and strong, and she was my every inspiration. It was her who had kept me going when my times starting out with the Eternals were the roughest.

"I know you don't want to," She begins after a moment of silence, pursing her lips.

I groan silently, resting my forehead against my knees.

"But, Aurora" Thena's voice makes me look up. She's looking straight at me, her eyes piercing and ever-knowing.

"You love him." She states, her tone not leaving room for debate. "So why won't you go?" She asks.

I shrug, looking away from her and into the wilderness, swallowing the big ball of emotion that has just risen in my throat.

"I'm scared, Thena" I clear my throat, my voice catching. "I know I do love him, and that's what scares me." I turn to her, my eyes watering.

"He left me," I continue. "He left me without a trace... how can I see him again after everything that happened?"

Thena sighs, reaching out and wiping away a tear from my cheek.

"Then that's even more of a reason to go" She smiles. "Aurora, you are one of the most resilient and determined people I have ever known. You fight for what you want. You fight for humanity" She motions to the small village below us "You fight for what you believe in, even if you know it won't have a good outcome"

"You love hard and strong, and I know you'd be willing to sacrifice yourself for every single person in this team." She pauses. "I am sure that Druig does not hate you. People have reasons and motivations to do what they do, and love sometimes scares people"

"He doesn–"

"You don't know that for sure" She looks at me pointedly. "And you won't know if you don't come with us. As much as you want to tell yourself that he wouldn't listen even if you came, we all know that's not true." She chuckles. "That boy has always had a weak spot for you. Even if he doesn't want to accept it, I'm certain he does"

I blink, taking in her words. Thena always knew what to say to make me feel better.

"We all know that if you don't come with us, he's a lost cause. He has never listened to anyone but you. He's as stubborn as a mule" she jokes.

I chuckle, sniffing and wiping away the stray tears that had slipped while she was talking.

She was right. I didn't lose anything by trying. And even if it hurt me, I had to know why it had been that he'd left. I needed to know why, at the end of the day, I hadn't mattered to him as much as I'd thought I had.

Also, I knew he really wouldn't give the team the light of day if I wasn't there, even if the Deviants were back.

Finally, I nodded, running a hand through my hair and letting out a breath I didn't know I was holding.

"Alright. I'll go with you, I'll convince him"

Thena breaks out into a smile, her hand going up to my cheek and holding it for a moment.

"That's my girl"

I couldn't help but swell with pride at her words.

Together we made our way back down from the tree, talking mindlessly about random stuff as we went back to my hut.

I was the first to enter, the smell of freshly brewed coffee hit me instantly.

"And they're back!" Kingo's voice bounces off the walls as he claps for our return. He motions to a shorter man who holds a videocamera on his shoulders. The man nods at Kingo's motion, standing up from his chair and putting the videocamera to his eye before pressing record.

Kingo walks towards me, making a motion with his hands and pointing at me, turning towards the camera and offering one of his million-dollar smiles.

"Behold, the great Aurora!" He yells out, looking at the camera.

I look around the room, confused.

"Come closer" Kingo whisper yells at the cameraman, and the man scrambles forward.

I turn from looking at the camera to Kingo, pointing at the short man in front of me.

"I'm sorry, who is this?"

"I am Karun, I am Sir Kingo's valet"

"What's a valet?"

"It's like an assistant–sh" Kingo responds quickly, putting on his smile again and motioning towards me. "Please Aurora, tell us about yourself!"

"Ummmm" I start, not really knowing what to say.

"Ugh. Cut!" Kingo motions to Karun, who immediately stops recording. He turns to me, huffing. "God, Aurora, could you be more boring?"

I laugh, not being able to take Kingo and his assistant seriously.

"My god, Kingo" I patted him on the shoulder before brushing past him and grabbing a cup of coffee "I missed you"

I take a sip, savoring the hot taste before swallowing. The rest of the Eternals are either on the couch, talking, or on the dining table.

"So?" Sprite calls out from the couch. "Are you going to do it?"

I purse my lips before nodding. "Yeah, I'll do it"

A series of shouts and hollers pass around the room, and everyone immediately springs into action, packing their bags and tidying up the place.

I head on to my room, grabbing a duffel and packing my bare necessities before going back to the main room.

"Do you have any idea where he might be?" Sersi asks, adjusting her clothing.

I nod, clearing my throat and scanning around at the team's clothing.

"Yeah, we're definitely gonna need raincoats"

a/n extra long chapter for you babes

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Continue reading next part ☐