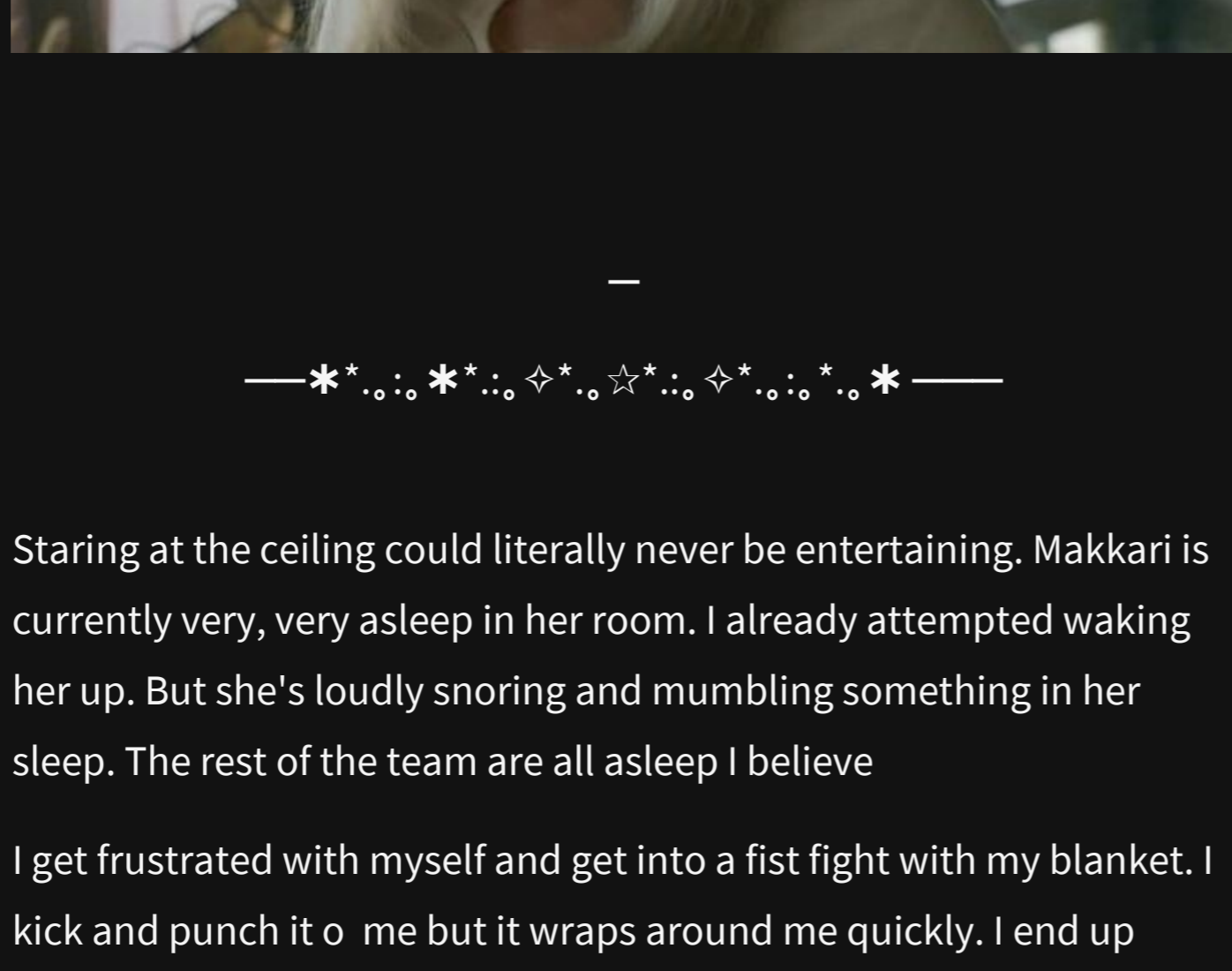


## natural born leader

"Do it because they  
said you couldn't."



Staring at the ceiling could literally never be entertaining. Makkari is currently very, very asleep in her room. I already attempted waking her up. But she's loudly snoring and mumbling something in her sleep. The rest of the team are all asleep I believe

I get frustrated with myself and get into a fist fight with my blanket. I kick and punch it o me but it wraps around me quickly. I end up knotting myself up into it and I hu angrily chucking it across the room at the door. I hu and god it's cold in here

I'm not getting up to just get my blanket. I lean o the bed attempting to reach the blanket without leaving the bed. I reach farther leaving the bed a little more. My foot remains on the bed and I still can't reach the blanket.

I groan and literally keep my pinky toe on the sheets of the bed as I reach for the blanket

Why am I like this?

I collapse and groan as my foot slides o the bed. I sigh and my door opens. Thena looks down at me laying like a starfish on the ground defeated.

She smiles confusedly and says "Did you just fall out of bed?"

I sigh and say completely straight faced "No."

She nods and says "Why are you awake? It's 4:30 am. No one is ever up at this time."

"I couldn't sleep."

She nods and says "Well, I was just about to have my first cup of co ee of the morning if you'd like to join me." I nod and say "Sure. I think I'm going to need it a er not getting a wink of sleep. I don't know how you look so pretty this early in the morning."

She smiles and looks to me warily. My face falls as embarrassment sets in

Oh my GOD Gaia pull yourself together. We get it! She's stunning. Yada yada. No need to creep her out.

"I'm just meaning that I look like I should live in a cave with wild animals when I wake up and you look like you just ascended from heaven-

Thena arches an eyebrow and says bluntly "Stop talking."

My eyes widen and I nod "Okay. Yeah. Sorry."

She extends a hand to me and I take it to get up. She pulls me to my feet and I follow her to the kitchen and dining area. She walks to the advanced co ee maker Phastos upgrades way too o en. I remember last time he updated it Kingo and Ikaris couldn't figure it out. So they start taking things o it and shaking it and ended up breaking it.

This new machine has detailed directions taped above it and it's now Ikaris and Kingo proof.

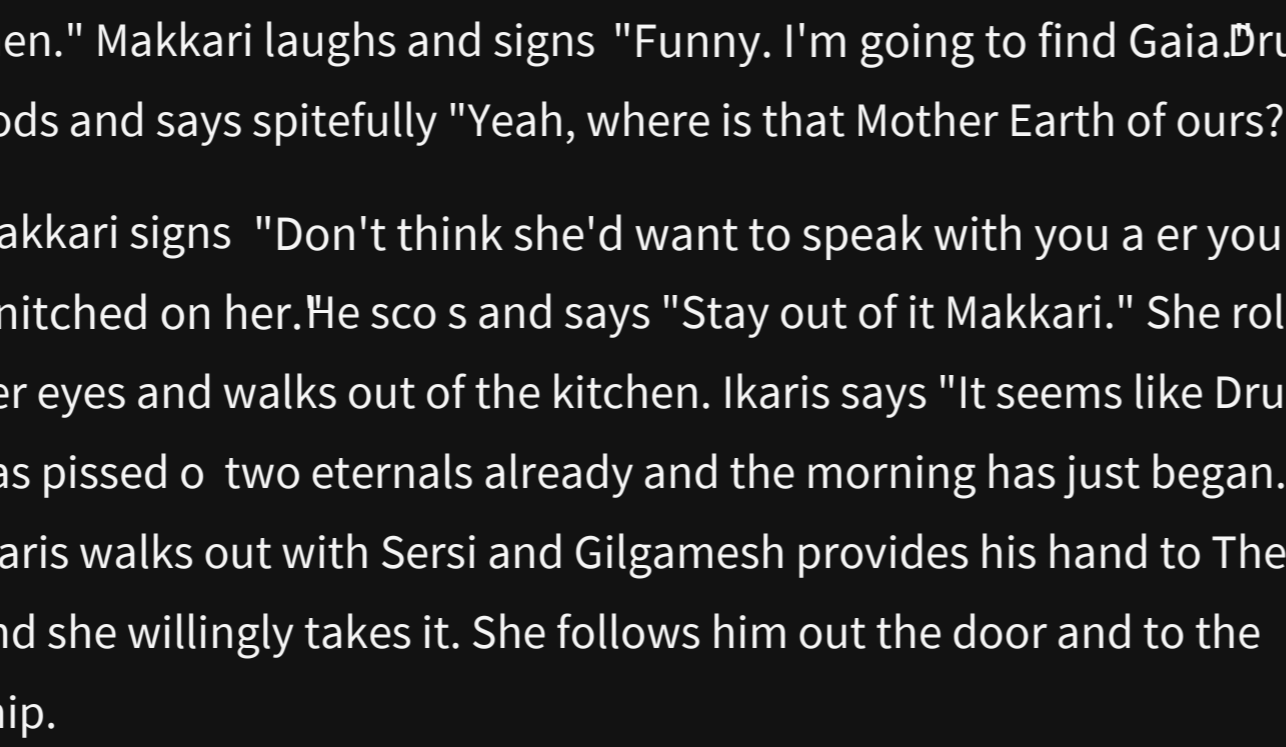
She sets a cup of co ee in front of me and says "So, how are things going?"

I look to her and say "Well, it depends on what things you are referring to." She nods and leans back in her chair. "Are you still speaking with that Asgardian?" I smile and say "No." She looks to her le at the sun rising and says "What a shame. He was handsome. But not really your type."

I scrunch up my nose and furrow my eyebrows "What's my type?" She slides her hair back over her shoulder and says nonchalantly "Hm, well, a blue eyed, dark brown haired, powerful mind controller." I sco and shake my head "He is not my type. I don't have a type." She nods unconvincingly and says "Oh don't forget, raging attitude of a hormonal teenager, mysterious, and taunting."

I sco and say "He isn't even the littlest bit mysterious. He's just boring."

She smiles down into her cup as she sips at it. She mumbles an agreement and chuckles looking at the ceiling. She shakes her head and says "Denial. Yup."



I shake my head and say "What? No. He literally eats and controls people's minds. That's all." Thena says "And the other 16 hours a day he's staring at you." I laugh and say "You're so funny Thena. Knock it o." She purses her lips and says "I'm only speaking the honest truth. You watch him too. You know his favorite breakfast. You know his emotions. For christ sake you two meet eyes and both of your cheeks redden on site."

I clear my throat and say "That's not true."

She sighs and says "Then you have a crush on Kingo."

I laugh and say "Thena listen to yourself." She nods and says "I am listening to myself. You're blind. You both are." I finish my cup of co ee and say "Well, thanks for the cup of co ee. I'm gonna go slam my head in my bedroom door before I get ready for the mission."

Thena smiles and says "Try not to wake up Kingo. I don't need to hear his singing at 5:30 am." I nod and say "Alright. I'll scream silently."

I walk away and I bump into Ajak in the hall. She grabs ahold of my shoulders and says "What are you doing up at this time of day?" I look to the kitchen and say "I was just having a cup of co ee with Thena and talking with her." Ajak nods and says "Is that all? You seem distressed."

"I'm fine. I have to go get ready for the mission."

Pushing her hands o my shoulders I enter my bedroom getting into the shower to wake myself up before we leave. I sit at my vanity a er my shower and get ready. I exit my room and walk past the kitchen not even giving anyone in the room a glance. Thena and Ajak sigh. I exit the front door and head towards the ship

Sprite says "Why's she grouchy?"

Gilgamesh says "Thena was being invasive again." Thena chuckles and says "I was not. She's just tired." Ajak says "We leave in 20. Somebody go wake Druig up." Kingo says "Have his girlfriend do it." Makkari enters the room yawning. She looks around and signs "Where's Gaia?"

Druig enters the room going straight to the fridge. His bed head is bad today. Kingo signs and says "She boarded the ship already.Makkari signs "When do we leave?"

Ajak says and signs " As soon as Druig is ready."

"Don't wait on me. By all means, I'll leave like this as long as I get my bacon and co ee."

Ajak shakes her head and sighs "We leave once Druig has finished eating then." Sprite groans and says "We're never going to leave then." Makkari laughs and signs "Funny. I'm going to find Gaia.Druig nods and says spitefully "Yeah, where is that Mother Earth of ours?"

Makkari signs "Don't think she'd want to speak with you a er you snitched on her.He sco s and says "Stay out of it Makkari." She rolls her eyes and walks out of the kitchen. Ikaris says "It seems like Druig has pissed o two eternals already and the morning has just began." Ikaris walks out with Sersi and Gilgamesh provides his hand to Thena and she willingly takes it. She follows him out the door and to the ship.

Sprite says "I can already tell Druig is gonna get on my nerves today."

Ajak says "Sprite!"

Sprite shrugs and says "It's the truth."

Phastos walks out with Sprite and Kingo says "Just stay away from the two peas in a pod and sprite and you'll be fine buddy." Kingo pats Druig's shoulder and heads out. Ajak looks to Druig as he pours a cup of co ee. Druig says "Should be an interesting day." Ajak nods and says "Especially since I'm letting Gaia lead the mission."

Druig chokes on his co ee and goes into a coughing fit. She pats his back and he coughs out "What? Gaia?"

Ajak says "Yes."

He shakes his head and says "She isn't ready." Ajak shrugs and says "Then she has her team to support her and protect her." Ajak walks out and Druig quickly follows. I stand in my position on the ship getting my suit on as the golden tendrils cover my body displaying the black mission suit around me. Druig enters last and I avoid his gaze. Just staring ahead.

Ajak clears her throat as everyone gets in their positions and says and signs "Gaia will be leading this mission.Karis looks at her confused and says "What?" Ajak says "It's already decided. I don't want to hear it." My eyes widen and I stare at Ajak bewildered.

But she just said she was disappointed in me. That I let her down. She exits the room and everyone looks to me semi angrily. I gulp and attempt to hide my fear. Makkari smiles and gives me a thumbs up. I clear my throat and say and sign "Once we land we'll deploy Kari. She will scan the area and get a count on the amount of deviants in the area. Ikaris and Sprite will head out next. Sprite will project illusions to get the humans to safety while Ikaris attacks anything approaching them. Kingo, Gilgamesh, Sersi, and Thena will then enter and get the coordinates from Makkari on where the deviants are and take them down."

They nod and I continue on " I'll exit the ship with Ajak and Phastos last and Druig will mind control whoevers needed and will leave with Ikaris and Sprite.I avoid making eye contact with him and he sco s Hehe. He just adores those two.

Ikaris says "Why are you in charge? And why am I not with Sersi? If she gets injured I am blaming you." I sigh and say "I don't know why I was directed to be the leader of this mission alright? But I am, so get your whitey tighties out of a twist and get over yourself."

Kingo and Makkari smile to me. I just totally put Ikaris in his place. Gilgamesh says "I like the plan. Good job Gaia."

I nod and say "Thank you."

I exit the room and immediately I hear everyone have doubts about me. Ikaris, Phastos, and Druig are incredibly vocal about not believing I should have this role. Thena is just excited to go fight and Gilgamesh is so easygoing he doesn't mind. Makkari is probably signing to Druig calling him an idiot. Hence why she's my best friend. Kingo and even Sersi have doubts too. That's not exactly confidence boosting. I stand by the door rubbing my temples getting increasingly nervous

"That feeling will pass."

I look up to meet Ajak's eyes and she rests a hand on my shoulder. I sigh heavily and say "Why did you choose me out of everyone in there?" She touches my cheek and pushes the stray strand of hair behind my ear. She says "Because you're most like me but di erent in the best ways."

I look to her confused and she says "Your a natural born leader more than anyone in that room. Even Arishem agreed when we first formed."

"...What?"

"He saw your potential immediately, Gaia."



Q&A: Least favorite marvel character?

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