# 14

PRESENT DAY
AMAZON RAINFOREST

AURORA

He led us through the doors silently, making sure that everyone filed into the small building. I looked around the inside, noticing that they'd changed the wall colors and rearranged the benches.

Still, I could almost remember like it had been yesterday when Druig and I had built this place.

The team sits on the benches, with Druig going to the front of the room, leaning against the desk that stands alone at the center.

He avoids my gaze, his eyes flitting over me, under me, and beside me, but never actually *at* me.

It felt like a stab in the heart. I did not know what I had been expecting, but this felt wrong. Foreign.

After all of those years, I'd grown used to his warmth; his laugh and the way he'd always need to be touching me. Not in a sexual manner, but it seemed like physical contact reassured him that I was there. That I was real.

I was the same with him. There never seemed to be a moment where we weren't holding hands, or where I wasn't touching his shoulder or hour knees touching beneath the table at dinners.

Right now, seeing him from the other side of the room, I wanted nothing more than to envelop him in my arms.

I take a seat at the back of the room, not wanting to be part of the explanation, rather more just witnessing what was happening.

"Go on, what is so important" He motions for someone to speak, and Sersi starts talking.

She explains everything. From the Deviant in London and the Deviant that attacked me, to Ajak and the sphere and Arishem. She went on to tell him about how we weren't actually real. How a Celestial was about to destroy earth and kill everyone in it.

For a second, when Sersi mentions humanity ending, his gaze falls on me. He knows how much I care about them. He knows how humans have been the only thing that kept me going insane some days.

At the end of the explanation she takes in a deep breath, turning to look at Druig to see his reaction.

He inhales slowly, arms crossing over his chest.

"You've given me a lot of bad news in one go, milady" His accent marks his words. I feel my heart skip a beat at the nickname he's given her.

That fucker knows how to make me jealous.

Still, I give him no reaction, only pursing my lips and leaning on the wall behind me.

"Will you help us?" She asks, her tone hopeful.

"I am glad–" He's interrupted by a loud ringtone coming from Sersi's backpocket. She scrambles for her phone, watching the caller ID before shutting it off as quickly as possible.

From the other side of the room, Kingo perks up, looking at her like he's just seen a miracle happen.

"Hey! What's your service" He whispers at her. "I'm not getting any bars"

There's a small moment of silence, and then Druig stands up from the desk, walking forward towards Gil and Thena.

"Do you all remember this forest?" He asks, looking at them. "It's the last place we all lived together" He points out. He puts his arms behind his back, pursing his lips.

"I–" He pauses, turning to me. "We." He corrects himself "Aurora and I, we protected these people for 20 generations from the outside world and from themselves."

At his words, my heart can't help but swell. A small spark of hope lights up inside me, the hope that maybe it's not too late to figure things out lighting up my entire heart within seconds.

I try not to keep my hopes up, but it's too late. They already are.

He walks towards the second bench, his walk confident and coy, to where Karun sits, his video camera held up in his arms as he records.

"Your kind, my friend" Druig leans forward, smirking at Karun "You will be responsible for your own extinction one day. Don't you think?" His smugness radiates in waves, and it's one thing that I have not missed over the years.

Of course, he'd never been that way with me. Not normally, but I didn't like it when he was like that with other people.

"I think we must learn from our mistakes and do better, sir" Karun looks up at Druig. I can sense his nervousness from here. I push myself away from the wall, watching the exchange with attention.

"You must not give up hop–" Karun doesn't finish as Druig's eyes flash gold, and in an instant, Karun is throwing the video camera against the wall with force, shattering it into a million pieces.

"Oh, no you didn't" Kingo stands up, walking straight to Druig. He holds up an index finger. "New rule, no more possessing people's valets."

Druig chuckles, turning to look back at him and scanning him from head to toe.

"Where is your sense of humor, Kingo?" He smirks.

"I'm sorry sir," Karun's voice comes out low and quiet from beside them.

Kingo turns to him, shaking his head.

"Don't apologize, it's not your fault." He looks back at Druig. "You are not a god. You know that, right?"

"How ironic! Kiiiingooo the movie star" He whispers, his tone mocking.

"I've directed some things too"

"Oh yeah, like what?"

"Some internet content."

There's a pause.

"How many views?"

"I don't do it for the views"

From my right I can see Ikaris stand up, huffing in annoyance at Druig.

I knew they hated each other. Druig–as well as I–shared the same opinion about Ikaris, but Druig had always shown it a lot more.

"Let's go. He's waisting our time" Ikaris motions to Sersi, making. a beeline for the door.

"Ikaris!" Druig's voice cuts through the quiet chatter. He turns from Kingo to him, an irritating smile adorning his face. " I've missed you"

He looks at Ikaris up and down in a half-glare, a bored tone on his face as he speaks.

"What? Are you gonna charm me? Or threaten me?"

Ikaris turns to him then, jaw tightening. I take this as my cue to tense up. The last thing I wanted was for them to break out into a fight.

"There's a third option if you prefer that" Ikaris proposes, glaring at Druig with the same intensity back and shrugging.

Druig feigns being scared before chuckling at Ikaris.

"Must be heartbreaking to find out you weren't mother's favorite"

Ikaris smirks, looking straight at him.

"Oh I'm sure she'd be real proud of you"

"Druig" Sersi stands up from her seat, turning to him. "This is serious"

I look back and forth at the bickering, my heart beating faster and faster as their voices rise with every word.

The palms of my hands are clammy with nerve, and I can feel a sort of ringing in my ears. I know that if they don't stop shouting I'm going to have too much energy built up inside me.

"Can you guys just stop?" My voice comes out small compared to the voices yelling. I'm sure no one heard me.

Ikaris and Sersi are arguing with Druig, who's shouting back at them.

From everywhere, conversations enter my ears; from whispers to full on shouting. I wince as I start to feel the energy inside me pent up even more, the voices starting to heighten my nerves.

"Guys" I warn, looking around, a wince on my face. Still, it's not loud enough.

They continue to fight, ignoring my pleads to stop until it's too late.

I cover my ears, snapping my eyes shut.

"**CAN YOU GUYS STOP!**" My yell comes out so loud the small window above the door shatters, and I can hear the people outside in the village stop what they're doing completely.

I open my eyes, already feeling the relief of letting out the energy pent up inside me.

I look at all of them, my eyes wide and pleading. All of them look back at me, stunned looks on all of their faces.

"Can you guys stop bickering like fucking children for one second and just *listen*?" My voice is hoarse and loud, filled with emotion.

"Ajak is dead! The world is fucking ending! Everyone in it will die if we don't do something about it and you're here arguing about breaking cameras and internet videos?" I rant, making motions with my hands as I speak.

"Aurora–" Sersi turns to me, starting to walk in my direction. I hold up a hand, making her stop mid-step.

"Don't come near me, please" I can feel my eyes watering. "Can't you guys just for this once put everything aside and see the bigger picture? God, you guys are so full of yourselves" I hope that Thena, Gil, Sprite and Sersi know that I'm mostly talking about Druig and Ikaris.

I can see Druig's face contort with regret and guilt almost instantly. He knows it hurt me to yell like that. It always took a toll on me physically and mentally when my energy pent up so much I had to release it in a scream.

"You know what? I'm fucking done with this shit. You guys figure it out." I brush them off, still breathing heavy as I head for the door. "I really can't be here right now"

I ignore Sersi and Gil calling out to me, brushing off the stray tear that has fallen down my cheek and going to find the one place here that's just mine.

The entire way there, there's just one thought on my mind: I hope Druig didn't take it down.

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"I knew I'd find you here"

His voice travels up the trees and into my ears. I sigh, his voice alone being able to calm me down even if we weren't on good terms.

I look down, watching as he climbs the ladder to meet me up here. I sniff, wiping my tears with the sleeves of my sweater.

He reaches the top, regaining his breath and looking around.

"It's been a while since I've been up here"

I look up, my brow creased in confusion.

"You kept it here after all these years. Why?" My tone comes out weak and fragile.

He takes a seat beside me, leaving enough space between us. I look at the space, never having hated something more than that small distance between us.

"I didn't have the heart to take it down" He shrugs, leaning back on his arms and putting his legs over the edge.

I roll my eyes, turning to look at the view before us. It was a small platform, resembling the one in Europe. This one was a little bigger though. It was built of wood and into the tallest tree of the village. From here, I could see the vast forest expand for thousands of miles, rising into mountains and sinking into rivers.

The sun was starting to set. I laughed bitterly to myself, in my mind, confused as to why Druig and I always seemed to wind up watching the sun.

"How have you been, Rory?" He finally asks, breaking the silence. I can hear birds chirping on the the trees around us. Below us, the village bustles with activity.

I'm surprised at the casual atmosphere of the conversation. Shockingly, the anger I'd been pushing for the last 50 years doesn't seem to rise.

Quite the opposite.

It seemed that no matter what he'd done, as long as I was in his presence, I couldn't be mad at him. Druig had always been my weak spot. He knew how to calm me like no one else did. Not even Ajak had been able to do what he could.

"I've been fine." I reply, my chin resting on one of my knees as I hug them to my chest. "I went to Africa, to volunteer. I've been living there these last couple decades"

He smiles warmly, shaking his head and chuckling before going to look at the horizon.

"My Aurora, as selfless as always"

I still for a moment at his words, my heart doing summersaults. I turn slightly to look at him, watching for his body language to see if it had slipped out or if he had meant it.

He was as easygoing as ever, looking out at the view before us, like he hadn't just called me his.

So it hadn't been a mistake, then.

I brush it off with a small chuckle, even if it doesn't sound genuine.

"Yeah, well, it helped me a lot." I purse my lips. "Helped me get distracted from things" My tone turns colder.

He knows what I'm talking about. I can see it on the way his face sinks. Sometimes I think we forget the we aren't strangers to the other. We can read our expressions and our thoughts like we are one.

We'd been together for two centuries. That didn't fade away just like that. Even if it had been 50 years since we'd been together.

At my comment he stills, his jaw tightening. He still isn't looking away from the view. I can feel his mind reeling. Coming up with millions of different excuses and explanations that might justify his sudden disappearance.

Finally, he turns to me, a look of defeat and regret on his face. "Look, I know you don't want to talk to me right now, given the circumstances"

"I don't" *I do* "Not in the slightest" *So fucking much.*

"Well, then it's good I don't care, because we need to talk" He sighs out, looking down at his hands.

I both curse and thank him at the same time for staying.

I turn my head, eyes watering as his eyes meet mine.

"I'm sorry." He finally says. "For leaving." His voice breaks at the end, his accent so thick I can barely make out the words.

I can do nothing but stare, processing what he'd just said.

I deflate slowly, letting out a weary breath, willing my emotions to get ahold of themselves before I say what I'm thinking.

"Do you know how it felt?" I finally speak. I can feel my voice cracking. So much for control. "To wake up and see that you were gone? I was completely shattered."

I turn to see him then, letting him see all the hurt. All the anger and sadness.

"You left me, Druig. You. Left. Me." I point to myself, my voice shaking.

I can see his eyes start to shine as well, my own vision blurring with unshed tears.

"Do you know what it felt like to wake up every day and know that you'd left me so easily? That everything we'd been through together had meant nothing to you?"

"It *did* mean something to me. Auror–"

"Well Druig, the way you left sure didn't show that" I'm trying my best to swallow the big ball of emotion that's rising up my throat as I speak.

He sighs, running a hand through his hair.

"I just–" I breathe out, shaking my head. "I just want to know why." I pause. "Did you even love me?" My voice is barely above a whisper.

He reels back at me like he's been slapped, his eyes widening.

"Love you? *Love you?* Aurora I *existed* for you. Every heart beat, every breath I took. It was for *you*" His tone leaves no room for questioning. "If you would have asked me to take over the world or to never control anyone at all I would have done it without question. Without a doubt. So don't tell me I never loved you. I've loved you since the first time I ever saw you" His voice is rising as he speaks, his accent thick.

"Then why did you leave?!" My tone is pleading, exhasperated as I blink through my tears to look at him.

"Because you deserved better! You deserved better than someone who'd spent the majority of your life treating you like you were nothing!"

"That's in the past, Druig! What mattered was the present. How we felt about each other, not what had happened before!"

He shakes his head, running a frustrated hand through his face. He turns to me.

"Every time I looked at you I was reminded of how bad I'd treated you. You deserved to find someone better. Someone that could give you what I couldn't"

Our tones drip with emotion. I know Druig is on the verge of tears, but I'm already crying so hard I can barely speak.

I sniff, wiping my tears on my sleeve. Then I shake my head, the energy leaving my body.

"I didn't need to find better, Druig. I wanted *you* to be better." My tone comes out defeated. Empty. It's like I have nothing more to give.

He stills. I know he wants to hug me. I know he wants to hug me with everything in his might.

"I know. And I wanted to. But by the time I realized that, it was too late." He looks away, his jaw tight. "Sprite told me you didn't want anything to do with me. That you'd moved on. She told me not to go looking for you."

My heart stops at his words. My face falls entirely and I'm so sure I'm going to faint. I turn to him slowly.

"What?"

He looks at me then, his eyes scanning every feature in my face, reading my thoughts. His face falls with realization at what Sprite had done.

" No"

I can't contain myself. I dig my face into my palms, sobbing so hard I can barely breathe. This time, he *does* touch me.

He closes the space between us, his arm going to my back, rubbing soothing circles.

I shake my head, sobbing even harder at his touch. He'd been the missing piece this last few years, and as he touched me I felt as everything clicked into place again.

I'd missed him so much.

So, so much.

I turn my body completely to him, my arms going around him. He accepts the embrace without protest, his arms reaching around me and enveloping me completely. He holds me tight, holding the back of my head as I sob into his chest.

He soothes me through teary words of his own. I'm almost sure he's crying.

I squeeze him so hard I know it's hurting him, but if it does, he doesn't complain.

It had been Sprite. It had been Sprite all along.

"I was so stupid" He mumbles to himself as he holds me. He leans down into my ear as I cry, comforting me as I let out years of pent up sadness that he himself had left behind.

He kisses the top of my head then, rocking me back and forth as I continue to sob, everything becoming too much to handle.

"I am so sorry, my beautiful, beautiful, Aurora. So, so sorry"

a/n i am sorry this took so long! I wasn't at home all day. You you guys enjoyed ;)

Alsooo happy one week anniversary to this story!!! Ily all and thank you sm for sticking by me <3

Continue reading next part