16

PRESENT DAY
AMAZON RAINFOREST

AURORA

I hear them before I see them.

Below us, the snapping of twig branches catches my attention.

Above us, the low squawking of what seems to be a bird sounds in the distance.

I pull away from Druig, wiping my eyes and frowning. The energy shifts inside me, becoming more negative.

"Do you feel it too?" he asks, looking around with a frown.

I nod, sitting up straight.

"Something's wrong. We need to get to the team" I stand up, pulling my hair into a ponytail. Druig stands up beside me, adjusting his clothing. He looks up at me, about to speak when his eyes widen.

"Aurora, behind you" he panics, taking a step forward to push me away, but he's too late.

"What–"

I'm not able to finish the sentence as a pair of claws digs into my shoulders so hard I can feel them puncture through my skin. It pushes me away from the platform and into the air, the claws tightening as it carries me away. I look up, coming face to face with a winged Deviant. It swoops down into the trees, heading straight for the village.

I yell out in pain as I'm hit with branches around me, all of them leaving scratches on my arms and face. Then I finally extend my arms, aiming my hands at the body of the deviant and shooting energy blasts.

The Deviant squawks loudly, letting me go mid-air.

I fall into the ground, tucking into a roll to soften my fall. Still, I can feel the crack of my shoulder– the one I'd dislocated so many years ago– as I roll into a stop.

I yell out in pain, kneeling on all fours on the dirt.

" What the fuck is happening?" I wince out, looking around me at the middle of the village. I turn to my shoulder, seeing a bulge where it had popped out. I wince, knowing that I needed to pop it back into place.

This is going to hurt.

I rest back on my bent legs, grabbing my arm with my other hand and closing my eyes. And then I push forward with as much force as I can.

I hear a pop and immediately, a wave of pain takes over me. I scream through gritted teeth, biting my tongue so hard I taste iron. I pant for breaths and blink away the unshed tears before finally taking a good look around me.

There's chaos. Everywhere. In the distance, I can hear kids screaming, all of them running from place to place.

I curse at myself for having broken down the barrier.

How could I have forgotten? How could I have been so stupid?

I stand up straight, watching as from in front of me, another Deviant appears, headed straight to Sersi.

"Sersi!" I yell, holding out my hands and shooting energy at the Deviant. I swallow the jolt of pain I get every time I move my shoulder and my back. I'm sure the claw marks have to. be bleeding, because I feel my shirt stick to them.

Sersi turns to me, wide-eyed and panting.

"Where were you!!" She shouts, running to me. She eyes my shoulders, wincing in pain for me.

I pant for breath as I reach her, shaking my head.

"I was fixing some thing I should have fixed a long time ago"

I hear the growl of a Deviant, turning around just in time to see one lunging at us. I'm about to shoot an energy force at it when Kingo rushes forward.

"It's an ambush!" He shouts, shooting his blasts from his hands. "Get behind me!"

I watch as he continues to shoot, one of his balls missing and hitting a shed behind the Deviant, completely destroying it.

"Kingo!" I yell . Looking back at him. He turns to me apologetically, about to say something when his eye catches something behind me.

I don't wait for his warning. I turn around as fast as I can, reaching out my arms and pushing the biggest force of energy out of me. The Deviant is sent flying backward and into a tree. I keep the energy constant until I can no longer, gritting my teeth. When I think it's enough I finally stop, my posture falling at the lack of energy in my system.

"Very good Ma'am!" Karun's voice calls out behind me, holding up a small video recorder.

I pant for breath, my hands resting on my knees.

"Are you mental!?" Kingo shouts from beside me at Karun. He waves him away. "Hide!"

Karun motions around him in wonder.

"We need action sequences!"

Kingo turns to Sprite, motioning to Karun.

"Sprite, get him out of here!"

I don't pay any more attention, my gaze shifting to the houses around me.

I watch as another Deviant climbs one of the cabins, its needled tail sticking itself into the walls of the cabin and completely destroying them.

From inside the cabin, I hear a series of yells. All of them were enough to spark more energy into my system.

My eyes flash purple as I see the Deviant. I hold up my arms, gritting my teeth as I push my energy out of me. The Deviant is sent backward and into the ground, rolling away with a whimper of pain. I take advantage of the moment, rushing to the cabin and pulling out the people. One of them is Ana.

She looks up at me as I help her stand up, her frail hand enveloping in mine.

"Estás bien, Ana?" *Are you alright, Ana?* I ask. She nods, looking around the village in shock.

She sighs in relief, her eyes looking up at mine.

"Sí, gracias, Aurora." *Yes. Thank you, Aurora.* She thanks me, one of her hands going to touch the side of my face.

"No es nada, Ana. Todo por mi gente." *It's nothing, Ana. Anything for my people.* I smile comfortingly, glad to have been able to help, even if it had been a while since I'd been here.

"Va a ver, Dios le va–" *You'll see. God will–* She doesn't finish the sentence as a needle stabs her from behind and through the heart.

I watch in horror as the needle retreats, leaving a hole in the center of her body. Blood starts to spread through her white shirt, staining it deep red.

I stand still for a few moments, to stunned to speak. I look behind her. In the distance, the Deviant watches us, its tail extended and dug into Ana's back.

"No" I catch her in my arms as she falls, already the life dimming out of her. I go. to the cut on her chest, pressing it down for it to stop bleeding. My hands get covered in her blood, and I'm unsettled by the warmness of it.

"Aurora" She breathes out. She smiles, touching my face between struggles for breath. "He vivido una vida larga. Voy a estar bien." *I've lived a long life. I'll be fine.* She takes in a shaky breath. "Perdonalo. El te ama" *Forgive him. He loves you.*

I nod, sniffing away my tears as I try to keep myself from breaking out into a sob.

"Lo haré. Te lo prometo que lo haré" *I will. I promise you I will.* She nods weakly, exhaling one last breath before going still.

I shut her eyes slowly, rage building up inside me. I stand up straight, my eyes blazing more purple than ever.

Balls of energy build at my hands as the Deviant stares straight at me. I'm about to send the energy his way when the people beside me start shooting at the creature.

I look at them, stunned and confused for a moment until I notice their eyes blazing gold.

Druig.

He comes from the forest, running at full speed. His jacket is off, revealing the muscles that had been hiding underneath.

He ducks under the swinging needle of the Deviant while the villagers around me continue to shoot at it, sliding across the ground and picking up a gun before loading it and running up and into the Deviant's back and shooting it into's neck. The Deviant groans in pain, watching as Druig jumps off his back and rolls, standing up again and running until he's beside me.

I turn to him, my eyebrows high at what he just did.

Panting, he looks to me, gun in his arms.

"I'm not too late, am I?"

I shake my head, the energy balls on my hands brightening again as I turn back to the Deviant in front of us.

"Nope, you're just in time"

The Deviant lunges and I sent a blast its way while Druig continues to shoot. The Deviant is sent reeling back, the people of the village still shooting as well. I watch as its tail reaches to the side, sending several of the villagers flying backward and against trees or houses.

It turns to us, about to lunge when a big tree crashes, trapping it and gaining us some time. I look around, watching Sersi. We make eye contact and she nods, assuring me that it had been her doing that. I nod back, grateful for her help.

Then I turn to Druig, the shots of the guns still echoing behind me as they shoot at the trapped creature. It takes me a moment to realize he's still controlling them.

"Let them go, Druig" I yell at him over the sound of the yelling and the noise of the other Deviants attacking the different Eternals.

He looks back at our people, hesitation on his face.

"Auro–"

"Please. Just let them go" I plead

I don't have to tell him twice. He looks back, holding up one hand, eyes flashing golden.

Instantly, the people stop shooting, all of them gaining consciousness.

One of them turns to Druig, his eyes inked with confusion as he looks around.

"Druig! Qué está pasando?" *What is happening?* He asks.

Druig looks at all of them, his face blank of emotion.

"Go! Get to the river!" He then yells, his voice hoarse with emotion.

The people spring into action just as the Deviant that's trapped starts moving, getting lose from the tree.

I grab Druig, pulling him behind a tree.

"Alright. Here's the plan." I turn to Druig, gasping for air. "You're going to–" I feel a bite on my shoulder, shouting as the Deviant takes me in its mouth and swings me into a cabin.

I fall into it at full speed, breaking through the wooden wall as I roll into a stop.

I groan, pain rising on every inch of my body. I look around, my eyes catching as the Deviant runs towards me at full speed.

Oh god.

It lunges at me, and I manage to catch its jaw with my hands as it tries to bite my neck off.

I groan, fighting for the strength to keep the Deviant off.

"Druig" I yell out. "Now would be a good time to kill it!"

I shut my eyes, screaming through gritted teeth as the creature increases its strength. I'm about to give up when I hear a gunshot, and the animal falls limp on top of me.

I gasp in relief, a tear of frustration falling down my cheek as I lay between the rubble.

"Are you alright?" Druig's worried voice comes from beside me. He drops the gun to the side, pushing the Deviant so that it's no longer on top of me.

I shake my head, my vision blurring at the motion. I'm sure my hands are bleeding and my shoulder is pulsating with pain. It also doesn't help that I have claw marks all over my back and arms from where the first Deviant had carried me away.

"I can't–I" I stammer to form a sentence. I'd used too much of my energy in one day. The scream and then everything that had happened with Druig had exhausted me. Not to mention I'd literally been tossed in the air.

"Hey, hey, hey" Druig leans beside me, pushing away the debris covering me and hoisting me so that I'm sitting up. "You're alright. You're fine" He soothes.

I cough, the dust of the broken wood getting into my lungs.

"Is everyone alright?" I look out the hole in the wall, the one the Deviants had sent me flying through. In the distance, I can see Sersi and Ikaris on the small pond, a tall tree-like structure in front of them.

"Yeah, everyone's fine I think" He assures me, taking a look at the cuts around my body. "God, Aurora. You're bleeding so much" He notes.

At his words, I look down. I take a moment to really assess myself, not having noticed anything due to the adrenaline in my body.

My gray sweater was torn at the shoulders and the arms. The front of my shoulders had two-inch cuts from the claws, and my neck and face were filled with scratches from the branches. My jeans are torn and I can feel a bruise forming on my thigh.

As I stare at my body, the pain starts to sink in. My back pulsates with pain, the sting of the scratches resonating through my body.

I turn to the team, watching them for a moment, Ikaris seems to hear something in the distance. He pushes himself into the sky, leaving into the forest.

Confusion flashes through me like a wave, my brain feeling muddled from all the energy I've used.

"Come on. We need to get you out of here" Druig soothes. I nod, though I'm not sure I understood what he meant.

Exhaustion washes over me as he lifts me up, the majority of my weight being on him more than on my own two feet. I thank him for taking care of me, even after everything that had happened.

We walk carefully, Druig helping me catch up with the rest of the team as they follow Ikaris.

I look around the forest, still in a trance. I can feel Druig's worried gaze on me as we advance forward.

Druig sees it first. I'm not sure what it is that he sees, but he stops completely, stepping in front of me and acting like a shield as he turns to face me.

"Hey" He whispers, brushing a lock of hair that's fallen out of my ponytail. "Why don't we go back to the village so that you can rest."

I can hear someone's soft cries a couple of feet away from me.

I frown at him, tilting my head to the side. I grab his hand, leading it away from my face.

"No" I shake my head. "What's going on?" I push past him, struggling to walk forward.

That's when I see him.

Thena's crying over his body, holding him tight.

I can't do anything but watch. He lies there, so still. So unlike Gil.

My Gilgamesh. Dead.

The person who'd helped me through so much. The only one who'd been able to make me laugh on my darkest points. The man who'd helped me learn how to handle my pain and my anger when Druig left.

I can't breathe. I can't think. Thena's sobs echo in my ears, followed by loud ringing.

I look at the spots of blood in his body, watching as they spread and become bigger slowly. Watching how he lies there on the ground.

Emotion overwhelms me like a tidal wave, feeling so many things in so little time. Grief, sadness, defeat.

My vision blurs with unshed tears. My knees buckle.

I can feel Druig's strong arms hold me up, but I don't look away. I can't.

"It's my fault" I whisper. "It's my fault" I repeat, over and over again as tears fall down my cheeks.

It was my fault he was dead. I had taken down the protection field. I had let those Deviants in.

Ana was dead because of me.

And now Gil.

It's all I can think about as exhaustion falls over me, the pain finally catching up, and I find everything tilting to the side before it turns black.

a/n :(

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