Chapter XVI

"...**home**."

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"Sprite!"
The redhead pushed her tired eyes out of the door of a tavern, leaning against the wood.

Her eyes were flushed, too worn out to keep her back straight.
"What is it?"

Persia was out of breath, pushed the door open and stepped into the tavern.
Kingo was there too.
But Maya wasn't.
"Have either of you seen Maya?"

Sprite blinked a couple times, brows knitting together as a worried expression started showing.
"She- I haven't seen her since the attack. Maya was with us before, but I-"

"She was out of my sight when I started fighting the Deviants." Kingo added, getting up from his chair.

A knot formed in her chest where her heart was supposed to sit, dully pounding against her rips.
Her breathing suddenly felt choked off, fighting the urge to scratch at her throat.

"Alright," she started, then shook her head, "no, not alright. I don't know where she is."

Sprite closed her mouth, pulled back a little. She was about to say something, when Persia ran out of the hut quickly.
"Maya!" she yelled, almost tripping over the broken panels. The whole village smelled like smoke, fire.

She could still hear how the wood creaked and broke apart.

Sprite caught up to her, Kingo close behind.
"We will search the east side."

Persias teeth were chattering from the fear which built inside her. "I will check the river."

"We will also get the others to help." Kingo let his hand quickly run across Persias back, before she headed across the path down the river.

"Maya!"
She kept calling her name, over and over again.
Checked under the collapsed buildings for any clue to where she was.

It hurt her shoulder so much until she felt the warm blood leak down her arm again.

"Maya please, where are you?" her voice got more and more desperate, fluctuating in tone until it left her mouth without even thinking.

At some point, she sprinted across a destroyed fountain, didn't watch her step.
She stumbled and fell to the ground, a small groan escaping her lips.
By then, tears were forming in the corners of her eyes.

"Please Maya," her voice airy, unable to keep her content within her.

She was supposed to keep her safe.
And couldn't even do that

" Pear?"

The voice was so quiet, it could have flown by her notice.
But she was sure that it wasn't just her imagination.

"Maya?" Persia whined, pushing herself from the ground.
The voice was swallowed by the wind, leaving her standing helplessly.

A long breath was picked up by her ears, barely audible.
But Persia finally got a direction from where it came from.

She dragged her feet across the soil, a ruin of a collapsed small building coming in sight.

Her teeth gritted shut, pushing her body against the broken wall and shoving it to the side.

Dust whirled up, dragging down her lungs and made her cough.
It smelled like the stuffing smoke which carried itself throughout the entire village.

Blood spilled down her fingers.

Then she spotted her, eyes darting right through the little opening back at her body.

She gave the panels another push, ignored the pain which caused her injured shoulder to numb.

" Oh god" she breathed, lower lip starting to tremble as she got down on her knees next to Maya.

Her face was covered in dust and dirt, scratches running along her chin and cheeks.
The skin on her lips was cut, dried blood sticking to them.

Persia lifted her hand to brush a piece of hair off her forehead, then placed it against her cheek.

She was so cold.

"Can you hear me?" she whispered, tears pathing down her face.

Her other hand searched down the girl's body for more injuries, but there were none.

"You look stupid."

Persias gaze rushed up again, Maya's eyes slightly open.
She could see how flushed they were, glassy and the red vessels pushing past the white.

"No joking right now, can you get up?"

Maya took a whistling breath, her body sinking a little lower.
It hurt Persia so bad to see her like that.

A small smile pulled at the bloody corners of the girl's lips, her lids falling shut again.
"Do you-" she started, but fell into a long breath, too weak to speak.

"I'm listening, Maya. I'm here"

The girl's head fell against Persia's hand, who had her thumb running across her cheek.
Her hand twitched next to her body.

"Do you remember when we used to sneak out the dorm to watch the sunrise?"

Persias eyes widened, scooting closer to Maya.
"No, Maya, don't do this to me"

The girl parted her lips softly, puffing.
"You called it, watching the heavens fade"

Persia started panicking, sobs causing her body to throb.

"I watched the sunrise for both of us today." Maya mumbled, raising her hand and putting it to Persia's face.

The tips of her fingers didn't feel like the touch of her bestfriend at all.

She remembered how they always sat next to each other, a blanket resting over their bodies.
Persia would point to the stars and explain the constellations, May would nod, but not memorize them at all.

Just so Persia would explain them all again to her.

"No," Persia cried, grabbing onto her hand and holding it tightly.
"No, you don't get to die on me."

Maya lifted her face slowly, no matter how exhausted she was.
"I told you, I'd go down beside you"

Persias breathing was so heavy, she held it, fearing she would take the oxygen from Maya.

She wished she could breathe for both of them.

"Then go down beside me, with me. Not without me." she called desperately, pressing her lips on top of each other.
"Don't go, please don't leave"

How long had she been laying there, waiting?

"You need to get up, I will carry you. We need to get to Aja-" she stopped, held her breath, then exhaled.

"Come on Maya-"

"I can't Persia."
the girl formed with her lips, her chest barely rising anymore.
"Let me rest here, next to you."

"I told you, you are not dying!" Persia sniveled, caressing the soft skin across the girl's face.

She tried loosening it to pick her up from the ground, when Maya's other hand enclosed hers.
The girl chuckled a small laugh, then panted.
Her eyes fluttered open, pupils shrinking, reflecting a fatigue glance.

"Save the world for me, Persia."

"I should have protected you." Persia mumbled, lowering her forehead until it touched against Maya's.
"I should have never left your side."

"You never did." Maya replied, her words slurring into a mess.
"I love you, Pear."

Persia lifted her face, heavy sobs making her whole chest tremor.
She watched as Maya's eyes fell shut, both her hands limping.

Persia gasped for air, grabbed the girl's face.
"Maya?"

She shook her body, one of her hands rushing down to her chest, fingers brushing the fabric to the side.

Persia tried finding a heartbeat, even the faintest pulse.
Her ear lowered to her mouth, praying to feel an exhale of warmth against her skin.

None.
Cold, motionless.

"No no no, please." she begged, the salty tears dropping without an end in sight.

How could she have let this happen?
How could she have forgotten?

She rested her palm against the girl's heart, imploring to hear her voice again.

Her body collapsed on top of hers, resting her head below her chin.
"Come back to me."

The cries turned into grating heaves, until she was almost screaming her soul out.
"Why?", the word kept leaving her mouth.

This was all her fault.

If she had stayed, and didn't throw her tantrum, Maya wouldn't have to endure any of this.

She would never forgive herself for this.

For leaving her behind, for being ignorant enough to not ensure her safety.
Hours, that's how long she must have been left all alone.

"Maya."

Maya probably believed she had been forgotten.

Energy coursed through her veins, with each breath it started boiling over.

She felt how the threats crept from her grip, flooding out of her body without stopping.
Her body drained of it, Persia allowing it to.
It pooled and densified until she couldn't even hear herself anymore.

The last bit of warmth faded from Maya's body, Persia feeling as if she was resting against concrete.

She could feel the energy from her bestfriend slip, like an endless blade being pierced through her heart.

But Persia didn't want it to run out, she held onto it.

The sharp blade only hurt even worse as her fingers enclosing it.
She felt her own energy contracting, how it wrapped around the blade.
How it slowly dissolved the metal, liquified it.

Her grasp tightened, the shank no longer cutting her. Her energy flowed into it, made it solid again.
It wounded her no longer, but made a pain expand in her chest.
Persia didn't care.

She kept holding on, pulled it towards her.

It brought her closer to Maya again, until she could almost feel the warmth come back.

She needed the warmth to come back.

Her eyes opened, she didn't know when she closed them.
Persia sent her blurry sight down to Maya, still unable to stop herself from crying.
A light formed right below her hands, between the tips of her fingers.

It wasn't her magic at all, it wasn't that deep black, which stung in her lungs.
It shone like the ichor of a god, shimmering against the light like gold.

The color grew and grew, with each second Persia coughed as a piece of her own energy chip off.

Then she felt it, a beat

So faint, it could have been her own.
But then again, resounding from her fingers up to her ears.

With each beat that followed, the pain got worse, her beloved energy flooding out of her hands, like a snake slithering across land.

With each beat, the sparks of hope in Persias eyes got brighter, while her eyelids weighed down more and more.

A smile got wider, skin growing more pale.

With each beat, Persia's own heartbeat slowed a little.

The magic poured until it was so much that Persia could feel it drone in her ears, shaking against her fingers.
"Please, take it all. Just come back."
She pushed it into the girl's chest, until she could hardly endure the pounding in her head.
" Get back to me"

Then, it was all gone.
Persia puffed, as if she had just come back to consciousness.
All her limbs felt so heavy, as if gravity had increased on her.

She put both hands on the girl's chest, lowering her face down.
Tears burned against her skin, wet the entire shirt of Maya, as she held her ear against her heart.

There was nothing, for at least a few seconds.

Then, it started beating.
Her heart started beating.

Chest slowly started rising.

Persia got up and shook her shoulders, trying to wake her.

Maya whimpered softly, causing Persia to paralyze. The girl choked on air, then fell into an exhale.
She was breathing.

"Maya." Persia breathed, the tears enabling her from speaking clearly.

Persia felt incredibly vulnerable, never had she felt so much weakness crash into her body before.
Strength was out of her reach, yet, she couldn't have cared less.

Her hand lifted to the girl's face, brushing softly back and forth.
"Maya, can you hear me?"

"Pear." the girl replied faintly, her eyes fluttering open by just a tiny bit.

Persia almost cried again, but held herself back from it.
"You're alive."

Her other hand was still placed on her heart, sinking into the comfort of feeling it vibrate in a rhythmic pattern.
Persia felt how the corners of her vision blackened, slowly sinking to the ground.
A cramp expanded in her stomach.

"I told you, you won't die on me." she murmured, having to steady her body.

Maya put a hand on top of hers, cold yet so much more to it.
Persia consequently collapsed down, a small puff of air escaping her lips.

"Persia."

"I love you Maya." she squeezed, "I didn't get to tell you that."

The girl was breathing.
The last thing she felt was the beat of her heart.

Then she passed out right next to Maya.

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" The time has come, my child."

"I am no child.
"I am not yours either."

" That is right, yet none comes as close as those words."

"I don't understand."

" Understanding is a privilege which is not granted at this moment in time."

"You made us all, we are your creations."

" Eternals, Deviants. I shaped them. I gave them all they have, all they will ever have.
But I have never shaped a creature like you."

"Then who am I.
Tell me, what am I?"

"I could not tell you if I desired to."

"Tell me, Arishem. Do you know anything about me?"

"I wished I did."

"And yet, all those millions of years, you decided to keep everything hidden from me."

" You are like a blade against my throat, threatening to-"

"Do you fear me, Arishem?"

"I create with the aim for balance, not perfection.
Your balance is unpredictable.
I do not fear you, but I do fear your capability."

"How do you fear power?"

" I am simply unliking of being unable to control it."

" That's it. You don't fear either me or my power. You're scared of my inability to control."

" Your being was not created-"

"Do not act like you know any for certainty. You know me by watching me, slipping into my mind.
It was you all that time, wasn't it?"

" The boy was foolish, he could not set an end to your threat to the mission."

"You made me fall into hatred, lose myself to it.
He was the only one who truly cared"

" Persia, your energy has reached its bounds and you have broken free.
Your power is no longer mine to give out, neither mine to hold."

"I have outreached your predictability, am I right?"

" You have.
But you are still in my hand to control to an extent.
If I wished to take your memory, I can.
And I will."

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A/N: honestly, i hurt myself a lot more than i thought by writing this chapter. I was balling, and i wish that was a joke😭

thank u so much for 11k, all the votes and incredibly lovely comments.
i couldn't be more grateful !!

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