

Chapter 9

"IRIS! WAKE UP!"

My upper body flew up as I sat up. My head whipped around. The room wasn't on fire, and Samantha wasn't asleep. Instead, she was next to my bed.

"Are you okay? You were having a nightmare." She looked at me, concerned.

"Oh." I look around more, before realizing I'm sweating.

"I'm fine, sorry. I'm going to go take a shower."

I get out of the shower and put on clean clothes. I sneak out of the bathroom and out the door of our room to try to avoid Samantha. Luckily, me and Samantha get posts away from each other, I don't want her worrying and asking me a bunch of questions. But I can't avoid her during our learning unit. I walk into the room and she's already there. I sit in my seat in front of her. I hear her start to ask a question, but the teacher walks in and cuts her o .

"Today we will be training with our sources. Those of you who do not have a source yet will stay here with Mrs. Sux. Follow me.

About half the class gets up and follows the balding man outside.

"Are ya' avoidin' me?" Samantha asks while we are standing waiting for directions.

"No." I lie. She starts to say something when the teacher cuts her o again.

"Iris, you're going first."

"Fine." I say annoyed. I walk over to him and wait for directions.

"Light that tree on fire." He points to one of the trees. I look at it, then turn my body to face it. I li up my arm and snap my fingers. The tree lights on fire. The teacher gives me some advice, and then calls the next kid up to go. The rest of the class flies by. I go to Dante's o ice a er. We go to the garden and I ask him if we could talk.

"What did you want to talk about?" He asks me.

"I've just been having nightmares since... Since Avia..." I mumble.

"That's okay, it's normal. I'm so sorry. Are you okay? Can I do anything to help you?"

"I'm not sure..." I look at the ground.

"I'm sorry." He says.

"I also just wanted to talk about what happened." I pause. "I feel like I should have done something... Like it's my fault. I mean, it was my idea in the first place. Lyvah says it's not my fault, but I'm not sure..." I don't look up from the ground.

"He's right. It definitely isn't your fault. If anything, it's mine. I had the power to do something if I had known. I should have been paying closer attention to what was going on in my base. There was nothing you could have done." He reassures me.

"Thank you for being here for me. I think you're the closest thing to a father figure I've ever had." I smile at him.

"Thank you, I try to be kind to everyone, but you're special to me, Avia was too... I care about you dearly. You are so brave and kind despite the bad hand you've been delt." He smiles sadly at me.

"It's okay. Life goes on, right?" I smile brightly back at him. A guard comes out and tells us break is over. The rest of the day flies by, just like the learning unit, actually, the rest of the daysfly by. Basically all of them go like this. Me and Lyvah meeting in the garden, then me and Dante meeting there later, Samantha waking me up from nightmares, us practicing sources, etcetera.

It's a year later, I'm almost 15 now. The president is still like a father to me, me and Samantha are closer than ever, and Lyvah and me are still going out. I'm sitting in the garden and eating lunch with Samantha and Lyvah.

"Iris, why didn't ya' tell me your birthday was comin' up?" Samantha asks.

"How-" I'm cut o by Lyvah.

"It's almost your birthday?"

"How did you know that Samantha?" I look at her confused.

"Don't change the subject!" Samantha puts her hands on her hips.

"I'm not. I-"

"Let's celebrate your birthday! We can get ya' presents and celebrate in the cafeteria a er guard rotation!" Samantha says excitedly.

"No, it's okay. I don't want to celebrate anyways." I shake my head.

"Fine! Be that way!" Samantha looks away and pouts. Something about how she gave up so easily makes me suspicious...

A guard comes out and tells us lunch is over. Me, Lyvah, and Samantha separate and all go to our posts. I'm in the presidents room. He's trying to hang something.

"Need help?" I ask, walking over to him.

"Oh, yes please!" He steps o the stool he's standing on. "Can I pick you up and you hang it?"

"Sure." I stop in front of him. He turns around to face the wall, and I get in front of him. He picks me up and I hang the painting on a nail he put there previously.

"Thank you." He says putting me down.

"No problem." I turn walk back over to my post.

"Iris?" He calls.

"Yes?" I look back at him.

"There's something I want you to remember." He pauses, walking over to me and placing his hands on my shoulders, pressing lightly.

"Be strong for those who aren't, fight for those who can't, and struggle so others don't need to. You are strong, life will throw many struggles at you, but you can get through it. There are many who can't, be strong for them, fight for them, struggle for them. Life is hard, make it easier for others when you can."

"Okay." I nod.

"Promise?" He asks, letting go of my shoulders.

"Promise." I swear.

"Want to go to the garden now?" He asks, lightening the mood. I smile and nod my head excitedly.

We go to the garden and I walk around, looking at all the flowers. Dante sits at a bench reading. We are talking about random things.

"So, how did you become president?" I pick an Arctic Flora.

"Oh, I just climbed the ranks easily. Back in my day, Alpha suits were new and still being tested. I was really good at using them, and came from a richer family, so I got the first prototypes. So basically I was just ahead of everyone else my age. I was also very good at hand to hand combat. When I was commander, the old president, Aspen, got too old to keep being the president. So I became the next one." He explains, putting down the book he was reading.

"Oh, that makes sense." I say, distracted by all the flowers.

"Iris! Guard rotation! Let's go do somethin'!" Samantha runs outside and drags me away. I wave to Dante and let her drag me to our room. There's a blanket tied up, something inside of it and a cake made out of stale bread and some poorly made icing.

"Surprise!" Samantha and Lyvah shout as I walk in.

"Oh," I pause. I didn't want this, but they went through all the trouble... "thank you!" I hug them. I open the blanket. It's a dagger.

"Where did you get it?" I ask.

"Dante took us to the shops n' helped us pick one out for ya'!"

Samantha beams.

"Yeah, I liked the sheath, and I thought you would too." Lyvah smiles at me. I pick up the dagger, looking at the sheath.

"It is cool." I smile a little bit.

"See! I knew you'd like it!" Samantha says excitedly.

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