

37 ABY

Unknown location

Obsidian hair blew wildly in the direction of the wind. Hands and knees were planted firmly in the sand, her dark eyes scanning the surrounding area. To her left was a shore, waves crashing onto the wet sand, and to her right was a densely forested jungle. Overhead, a sun was shining brightly, illuminating the sky, not a single cloud in sight.

Pushing herself up off of the sand, she dusted the particles off of herself as best she could, cursing the fact that it'd probably end up places she didn't want later, which also led her to another question: where the hell was she? And how did she end up here?

Emere Galo squinted across the landscape in an attempt to find any notable landmarks that may help her get an idea of her location. Nothing. There was nothing.

"Huh," she murmured to herself. Was she dead? In a coma? Dreaming? Whatever it was, it was beautiful as hell and she didn't want to go back. Well. That wasn't entirely true. Her daughter would be without a mother. Eevie without a lover. Tane... the wolf pup was attached to her damn hip and would probably die from the stress of knowing Emere was no longer alive.

The view reminded her of the beaches her and her family visited when she was younger. Reminded her of... home. The nostalgia set in like a pair of weights on her ankles out at sea. It caused her to simply take a seat in the sand, her forearms draped over her knees.

The tattooed woman let out a sigh, pushing some of her hair behind her ear, still looking around for signs of life beyond the breeze and waves. As much as she enjoyed solitude, this felt *off*...

"Room for one more?"

The voice cut through her innermost thoughts like a hot knife, startling her to the core. It was recognizable and definitely unmistakable but that didn't stop her from turning to the source and asking, "*Tama?*"

In her view was a man, six-foot-three, a streak of silver in dark hair and a grey patch to match in his short length beard. A smile pushed into his brown eyes, with hints of crow's feet showing at the corners. His body was built like a small tank and tribal tattoos covered both arms— a Galo family tradition that would probably die with Emere herself. They never minded showing that part of themselves and Ezra Galo was no exception, as that was the only thing uncovered on his body.

"Most people call me Ezra, *T'iené*," he called her by the nickname he coined for her, meaning 'girl'. His smile never faded from his own joke as Emere scrambled to her feet and ran into his embrace,

like a child, hugging her father vigorously. He returned the hug tenderly so as not to crush Emere's smaller form.

"My God, my *itiiti* one is no longer *itiiti*." It meant 'little' in their native language. He drew back from her, getting a good look of her. "Time has done good things for you, I was afraid you'd never fill out. So skinny when I last saw you, now you look like you can kick *my* ass."

Her eyes welled with tears as she looked up into his eyes. "*Tama*... I'm so, so... sorry. I should have listened to you...I should have stayed home—"

"Hey, you couldn't have known, my daughter. I don't blame you for my death... or your mother's for that matter. We all have made mistakes, Emere. Some consequences are more severe than others. You have learned from that, I hope?"

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked at the sand and solemnly nodded. She wasn't the only one who had paid the price for her past. Her daughter was dragged into slavery for most of her childhood. Even after rescuing her, things would never be the same. Again a price she didn't want her own daughter to pay. For a moment she returned her father's embrace, sobbing into his chest as he comforted her gently.

"Hey, *T'iené*, you're not alone, alright? We live. We learn. We die."

"Yeah..." She nodded, staring at the wet stains in his shirt. "Shit. Sorry, Dad."

"Bah! You worry for nothing. It's going to dry."

This was some weird limbo or something but that didn't change the fact she had so many questions for him.

"So the Galo curse follows!" The man beamed as he stared at the top of her scalp, shifting the tone of the conversation. Though it wasn't because he was uncomfortable; it was simply because he didn't see a need to carry the conversation further. Emere always admired that about her father. Reaching over, he yanked a white strand from her scalp, causing her to wince. "Aha! You're only thirty-three and you have the white strands of wisdom shining through."

"What...?" She rubbed the top of her head, sniffing a bit.

He displayed the silver strand in front of her eyes. "Not a bad thing."

She let out a humorless laugh, plopping down into the sand. She was then reminded that if a bullet or explosion didn't kill her, age or illness certainly would. "So much has happened since..."

“Don’t worry, sweetheart, I know.” Ezra took a seat next to his daughter, also taking in the view. “How’s... Morra is it?”

“Yeah... and she’s the best daughter with the worst mother. I don’t have to tell her to do certain things... she just *does* them. Probably because of that goddamn place. I think I’d prefer it if she was angry with me... rebellious even...”

“There’s not much in the way of wisdom I can offer except just to keep loving her. Because when she does, and she will, rebel, she still feels like you’re in her corner,” he said and gave her a reassuring smile. “I’m not angry with you for being *you*. As a parent, you learn there a lot of things out of your control. You’re going to fail. You’re going to feel like she hates you—“

“What if she does? I failed... in so many ways. She witnessed me at my lowest point. Hell, she opens up more to her father and I hear more from him about her than from her.”

“Did you hate your mother?”

Emere gave her father a look. “Of course not! We just never saw eye-to-eye...” She trailed off, frowning, pushing her hands into her hair. The last thing she wanted was the same relationship she had with her own mother. Fortunately, rather, unfortunately for her, that seemed not to be coming true... it was going down a worse route. Morra had witnessed her mother at her lowest low and ‘regret’ didn’t begin to cover how she felt.

“Remember what I always told you, *T’iené*? You can’t blame the—“

“—ocean for being the ocean. It just is,” she finished his sentence.

“Correct.” He looked out over the view, parting his lips to speak again. “Morgan seems nice. Great attitude, that man.”

“You would have loved him... he’s a lot like you.” She quietly reminisced on the time she and Morgan spent together before he ‘died’.

“Aha! Yeah, maybe so.” He let out a laugh, rolling his neck, and reaching into his pocket. “Well, Eevie is also very sweet it seems... she cares for Morra a great deal. Cares for you very much as well. Quirky, yeah, but you need to loosen up, *T’iené*. Eevie is an energy that can’t be contained or controlled.”

Emere let out a laugh. “I have *subtle* ways I subdue her...”

“And those are details I do not wish to know,” he grinned, laughing softly, holding up his hands in a ‘please don’t share’ kind of way, a cigarra in his right hand, lighter in the other.

"It's... refreshing. She cooks breakfast everyday... she's surprisingly mindful and she calls me out on my shit. God, I love her..."

"Which are all things you should thank *her* for. You're terrible at being vocal so I'm sure she'll appreciate it when you do tell her." He stuck the cigarra between his lips before lighting it.

Giving her father a shocked stare, she scoffed, "I say what needs to be said."

Inhaling a puff of smoke, he nearly choked, blowing out the smoke. "I'm sorry, Emere. I won't sugar coat it, your communication skills have been shit. It's gotten worse with age it seems."

She stared at the ocean again, silent. He was right, as usual.

"Sometimes less is more, yes, though in your relationships you should definitely never hold anything back. Be raw. That's where all the passion comes from. Your loyalty and devotion are absolutely unquestionable. Just don't close off the ones you love most." He held out the cigarra to her.

She nodded, taking the offered vice, placing it between her lips.

"What's this I hear about a wolf pup you named after your brother?"

Smoke exiting her nose, she chuckled and shrugged. "I dunno. He just reminded me of Tane... like some kind of kindred spirits, he and I. I can't explain it. He looks after Morra and Eevie like his life depends on it... anyone else, he's very aggressive."

"Heh, that's uh... sounds like you and your brother."

Emere felt her heart sink. She and Morra were the only Galos she knew that were left.

"Family is more than just blood, *T'iené*," he said as though he read her thoughts. "You seem to have a small, but nice one right now. Don't get hung up over names or status. You're above all of that anyway." He held out his hand for the cigarra, Emere passing it back to him. "Let me ask you something."

"Shoot."

"Are you afraid of death?"

Emere shook her head. "No. Especially if it's anything like this."

"Heh. Well, I won't spoil it for you then. And speaking of spoil," he squinted towards the beautiful landscape. "Our time is ending, *T'iené*."

"I know... Just wish it wasn't. You were my bloody hero... didn't think there was anyone like you until Morgan," her voice cracked, her jaw tightening. "He... taught me how to survive... to love without judgment. And just like that, he was gone... Of course, he came back, but he's not the man I once knew..."

Her vision blurred as she waited for her father to chime in but was only met with silence. "*Tama?*" She looked around to see if the man was still around. Nothing. Not even an imprint on the sand where he was sitting next to her. The cigarra was still burning as though a ghost had been smoking next to her.