

(**Warning:** This story contains female muscle, female muscle growth, minor action-oriented violence, muscle worship, and graphic sexual content)

It had been a couple of hours since they last communicated with Gudao. And the mood was tense, to say the least.

Helena watched as Gudako fidgeted from her spot on the ground, her fingers idly plucking a blade of grass and twirling it before finally snapping it in two, and then doing the same with another. The girl who always wore her heart on her sleeve did not bother hiding how much she worried for her brother.

Mordred was passing the time by doing one-handed push-ups. Her physique was toned and moderately muscular right now, but it was still enough to inspire envy in the young amazon.

Meanwhile, the legendary huntress stood at the side of their makeshift camp with her arms crossed and her eyes closed; the subtle twitch of her ears indicated she was keeping track of any potential threats by hearing alone.

Orna and her troupe had been vanquished by the powerful women. She disgraced amazon put up a fight against Mordred, but she ultimately retreated, leaving her companions to fend for themselves. It did not take long for them to spill the proverbial beans, as that weird saying went. It helped that Mordred could be *extremely* scary when she wanted to. The fact that she forced their 'boss' flee helped a lot.

This woman, Koyanskaya, the one responsible for all the potions that gave a quick way to strength, wanted Gudao for very particular reasons.

Now, what those reasons were, they did not know.

No longer of any use, the Heroic Spirits voted to execute the women, but Gudao overruled it. She didn't *get* that level of mercy for people who tried to kidnap her brother. Had she been in her shoes, Helena would have hung the bodies as a warning.

But it was not her choice... nor had she been able to provide anything remotely useful in the battle. She had been knocked out with just one punch, swatted away like she was a mere fly...

Her pride was far more wounded than her body. So much training, so much effort to discover herself, to open her heart to the Amazon Spirit... and there she was, just a noodle-limbed waif, a weak excuse for an amazon.

Helena shook her head, trying to dispel those dark thoughts. She walked up to Gudako, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. "You okay?"

The orange-haired girl pursed her lips. "He should be here by now. Medea would have no issue taking him here. So where is he?" She sounded so lost.

Helena wasn't comfortable placing their trust in the Witch of Betrayal, but that was none of her business.

"Medea is a reliable ally." Said the woman who was part of the Argonauts with the witch. "Reputation aside, you know she would not fail you or your brother."

"I know, just-!" She sighed. "Why haven't they reached out again?"

Mordred huffed as she finished her set, baling her fists between her legs as she crossed them. "Your brother's a smart guy; if something happened, he most likely figured a way out of it. You don't have to worry."

"I don't *have* to, but I *will*. Thank you very much."

"Honestly, we should be focusing on why they wanted him in the first place." The knight said.

Atalanta looked oddly pensive. "It could be because he is a Master."

"So is red here," Mordred pointed out, waving her hand at the other master in the party. "But he was the target. They got a wyvern to kidnap him and everything."

Gudako *snarled* as she stood up. "I don't care why they wanted him; nobody is gonna hurt my brother if I have anything to say about it!"

"I understand, Master." The Huntress said placatingly. "But we should consider our next move. If he has yet to communicate with us, we should consider moving on-"

"Moving on?!" She hissed through her teeth. "Like hell we're moving on until we know he's okay!"

That sort of devotion to her kin carried a great fire within her, which seemed to burn like an outside force... It reminded Helena of amazons who would call upon the Amazon Spirit. A sort of supernatural sense that made one's instincts pay attention and marvel in awe at the display of power.

It gathered around Gudako like a cloak of energy. Almost invisible to the naked eye, but to those more spiritually attuned, it was unmistakable.

Atalanta and Mordred looked sharply at the young Master, who softly growled and snarled through clenched teeth. Her fists quivered at her sides as she clenched them very tightly, fighting back the surge of anger she felt. The pulses that emanated from here were slow but wild...

The most visible parts of her body, her forearms and the upper part of her thighs, looked firmer than before. A touch more... toned.

Helena's breath hitched. Amazon Spirit? On a newcomer? She was no amazon, no native of these lands, no Heroic Spirit. How could she even display hints of the great power already?

Atalanta uncrossed her arms and approached her, her lips parted slightly as she pondered what to say. "Master, your mana..."

"Holy shit, it rose like a LOT!" Mordred was far more blunt about what they felt. "I think you're channeling Amazon Spirit!"

The young woman gasped, letting the energy ebb out of her in slow waves. "I... what? No, that can't be, I wasn't... I don't know what was happening." She muttered, looking very wary and confused as she nursed her head in her hands.

"You're not in the best state of mind, Master." Atalanta patiently said. "Please, take a rest. We'll keep waiting for word of Gudao. If nothing comes, we'll decide what to do later, okay?"

“...Ok.” She softly muttered. The idea of proceeding without her brother went against every single fiber of her being. But right now, they were out of options and still full of questions.

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Gudako had only grown more restless throughout the day. Helena watched as the young girl these powerful women called ‘Master’ did everything in her power to take her mind off things. Mordred constantly tried to provide any sort of distraction; Helena regaled her with tales of famous amazons from her village. Meanwhile, Atalanta remained ever-vigilant, focused on the task ahead.

When their attempts at levity proved futile, Mordred just gave up and went for a more direct approach that Helana approved of. That of punching your problems away.

Mordred goaded the Master to hit her, beckoning her with a grin and a ‘come at me’ gesture. Gudako seemed rather excited at the prospect of brawling with the woman who could punch boulders. She removed her jacket, showing a decent level of firmness in her flesh that Helena suspected wasn’t there before. The sports bra allowed Helena to see the way faint muscles shifted under her skin with the movements of her back, her stomach coiling with each controlled breath.

“Let me have it.” Mordred grinned in that wild way of hers. “Come on!”

Gudako’s hands glowed with lines, shouting as she charged at the knight. Her fist solidly collided with Mordred’s cheek, and the blonde’s head only slightly moved from the punch. Helena had no doubt she herself would not have fared so well under a blow like that, feeling the sheer strength and passion behind Gudako’s fist. But Mordred was on another level, she was already a warrior woman who had achieved an elevated Amazon State. And even before then, she knew spirit warriors like Mordred were simply too much for mere mortals to face.

This wasn’t training in the conventional sense; Mordred was giving Gudako an outlet. The orange-haired girl grunted as she delivered punch after punch upon the knight, barely even leaving a mark on her, much less causing any sort of physical discomfort.

“That’s it, let it all out!” Mordred laughed, not mocking, but truly happy to see her Master let loose. “Come on, give it to me!”

Gudako managed to grin even as she panted, swiping the sweat off her forehead. "You're really a masochist, aren't you?"

Mordred winked. "Then I guess we're both getting something out of this."

Atalanta rolled her eyes, yet the corners of her mouth curled upward ever so slightly.

Helena lost count of how long they kept at it. Gudako truly had a lot of frustration to let out, but most importantly, Helena took notice of her stamina; whenever she seemed to be on her last legs, she hit a second wind. She had seen it before in women who were tapping into the Amazon Spirit without going into the full state. A sign of progress in their training.

She had only ever touched a small puddle of the great ocean that was the Amazon Spirit, unable to reach further into the depths. But Gudako... here was this novice, already displaying signs by instinct alone.

It made her feel something ugly and rotten inside. It wasn't the longing she often felt when looking at her peers, no, this... was a very awful feeling. More than envy, this was *jealousy*.

Yes, she was jealous of Gudako. She had started this travel as their guide, hoping to advance in her own training, believing that facing all sorts of challenges and meeting many powerful women would help her advance. But at every corner she had faced opposition she could not fight, she had been useless, a *burden*.

Her pride was slowly breaking, and Helena feared there was no fixing it.

"That's enough, you two," Atalanta said with that teaching voice of hers. The one she often used to guide Mordred in her training.

"But I can keep going!" The way she was drenched in sweat, shoulders rising and falling with her heavy breath, showed she really was at her limit. Her spirit was willing, but her body decided she had enough.

"You cannot," Atalanta replied bluntly. "You have potential, Gudako, but burning away all your energy will be detrimental in the long run. Trust me."

She took a deep breath and let out another long pant. "Okay..."

"No, go bathe at the lake. Mordred, keep her safe. I'll stay here in case we have more news from Medea."

"Got it."

"You'll need this, then." Gudako took off the device from her wrist and threw it at the huntress, who caught it easily. "Let me know if you hear anything."

"Give a shout if you need help."

Mordred snorted, "Think I can't keep her safe?"

"No, but you two always get into trouble." She spoke from experience, given by the tired tone in her voice.

"Yeah, yeah," Mordred waved her off. Turning around, she made for the woods. "Come on, Master. You're starting to reek."

"Coming!" Gudako said, picking up her jacket and following after the knight.

Helena realized she was suddenly alone with Atalanta. THE Atalanta. Oh, gods, she hadn't really spoken to her at length, had she? What could she even say? She was a small, young amazon barely growing into her own, and this was the woman who killed giant boars for sport! A hero so fast she only lost once because of cheating!

It was literally meeting a childhood icon.

"You know, I've always looked up to you. A lot of amazons do growing up." She spoke up now that Mordred and Gudako were out of earshot. "We tell stories of all the great women, your name pops up a lot."

"Does it now?" She let out a small grin. "And what do they say about me?"

"Oh, that you're just amazing!" Helena pretty much jumped to Atalanta's side, noting how they were about the same height. Though she knew that could easily change if Atalanta were to use her power. The thought of the great woman empowering herself, growing large and mighty... it was an invigorating thought. "The Calydonian Boar hunt! The travels in the Argos!"

"Zeus turning me into a lion?" She added with a humorous tone, purposely flicking the feline ears in her head, showing she did not mind them.

"Ehe, well..." Helena awkwardly rubbed her arm. "Happens to a lot of people when Lord Zeus is involved."

"Too true."

"Oh, but everyone knows you're one of the strongest women! Courageous, powerful! You're just... so amazing!"

"I did not do any of that for fame, but it's nice to have one's achievements acknowledged"

"I'd be lucky if I could be even a quarter of the woman you are." She said, opening up in a rare moment of vulnerability. Mentally kicking herself for showing such a display in front of Atalanta. "I've... not had much progress in my training."

"You've been having trouble accessing the Amazon Spirit, have you?"

"It's just so frustrating!" She hissed. "I can feel it, right in my fingertips, and then it slips away! I train, and train, and train! I keep seeing other women achieve greatness, and yet I remain the same... I don't know what I'm doing wrong."

The huntress mused. "Every warrior grows in their own way. You cannot force yourself to grow. The Amazon Spirit is partly training, and partly willpower."

"So, my willpower is not enough?" She muttered despondently.

"I did not say that." The huntress quickly assured her. "Your strength will come when you *feel* ready. Not because you *think* you should be. Do you understand?"

"I... think I do." Not fully, but she could grasp some of the wisdom in her words.

"You're a brave young woman, Helena." The huntress smiled oh so kindly at her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Fierce, beautiful, you'll do great things in time. You just need to be patient."

Atalanta herself believed in her. It was almost enough to make her want to cry. To have such a brave hero say those words to her meant the world.

Gods, what an inspiration she was. The amazon ideal even without being an amazon. Mighty, ferocious, a warrior true...

She was always very beautiful.

The way she was smiling at her. The physical contact. Was she... dropping hints?

A very lewd idea popped into her head. Should she dare? Amazons were not prudish when it came to intimacy. If they wanted sex, they just went for it. But Atalanta perhaps was a bit more subtle in her approach. Testing the waters to see if Helena was willing.

It had been a stressful few days for everyone. Surely that's what she wanted.

And Helena definitely did.

She slowly closed the gap, closing her eyes and puckering her lips... only to meet a finger instead.

Helena opened her eyes to see a very flustered and apologetic Atalanta. "I... do not believe this is wise?"

"You didn't...?" Helena backed away, quickly feeling mortified. "Oh gods, I thought you-!"

"I apologize." The huntress quickly said. "I did not want to give you the wrong impression."

"No no no no! I am sorry! I just... I mean, I don't know why I thought you would-!" She grabbed her head and roughly ruffled her hair. "UGH! I'm such an idiot!"

"Hey now, it's okay," Atalanta said. "It was just a misunderstanding, nothing to be embarrassed about."

Easy for her to say, she didn't just try to kiss her hero and be rejected immediately...

Gods, please open the Earth so it may swallow her.

She had never felt so embarrassed in her life. All the previous encouragement from the huntress washed away like rain droplets; the rejection stung almost as much as any defeat Helena had suffered.

Why did she ever think she had a chance with Atalanta? ...Why did she think she had a chance at succeeding in *anything*?

"We good?" Atalanta muttered.

"...Yeah," Helena weakly replied. Right now, she just wanted to get as much distance from her idol as possible. "I'm... gonna pick some berries or something, get something for dinner."

Atalanta chose not to mention that they still had meat from the boar they killed. They both knew this wasn't about a meal. "It's getting dark."

"I'll be okay. You just... watch over the camp."

Atalanta pursed her lips, looking like she wanted to say something but held her silence. "Alright."

Helena left the camp as fast as she could without running in a futile attempt to leave the shame behind.