Excerpt from Aurora's Nightmare

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*Background: Clock Tower (Day)

It started long ago on a warm summer day…

Tia, Aurora, and I were at the clock tower as usual. We had been playing a game of some sort. Flying high and diving down to snatch objects from each other as we darted and weaved around the tower…

By the time it ended, we were sore and breathless but happy. Tia had won. She almost always did. But the game itself was only the beginning. We recounted our exploits in detail, congratulating each other on our best moves and laughing about our worst blunders. The commentary lasted far longer than the game itself. But then…

"Well, I gotta go." Tia jumps to her feet.

"But it's still early! We've got plenty of time left." disappointment fills me.

"Yeah, it's not fair!"

"Sorry... But I promised my mom I'd help her with the cleaning this afternoon."

Aurora and I nod sullenly. If that's the case, there isn't anything we can do to stop her.

"Bye, I'll see you tomorrow!" With a smile, she leaps from the tower and flies off in the direction of her home. I watch her wave back at us until she's no more than a tiny speck in the distance.

"Well, now what?" I sigh. Even back then, I felt like the world was a darker place whenever Tia wasn't there.

Aurora is sitting next to me, swinging her legs back and forth with a wistful look in her eyes.

"Ars and Aurora can play together."

She no longer sounds upset about Tia's early departure, but that's Aurora. She's always remarkably quick at recovering from things like sadness and disappointment.

"We could play that game again, the one we played earlier."

"Nah. It's not any fun with only two people."

"We could race. Aurora is getting a lot faster!"

"I don't feel like it."

With Tia gone, I find myself in a listless mood. She's the one who comes up with the best games, plans the hardest races, and is the fiercest competitor. I like spending time with Aurora, but Tia is the closest thing to a leader our little group has and things just aren't the same when she isn't around. And, for some reason, this day is worse than usual.

Aurora offers several more suggestions, all of which I reject. At last she drops silent, pouting, only to jump up again a moment later

"Ars." she bends down so that her head is just above mine.

"Yeah?"

For some reason, having her starring down at me like this is unnerving. I rise and stretch to my full height, a good several inches taller than hers.

*Background: The Question (Young) CG

Her gaze follows me and it only takes a moment for her eyes to lock onto my own. She no longer looks sullen or playful. Instead, she seems serious, far more serious than a ten-year-old should ever be. I feel like her eyes are drilling into mine, probing them for some sort of secret…

"What, what're you doing?"

"Ars…" her voice is soft and steady. There's no playfulness in it, no joy, and no grief, just curiosity and determination.

"What are you?"

The question catches me off-guard. What does she mean by that? We've been friends for practically our entire lives. She knows everything there is to know about me. Is this a new game of some kind? Her games are often a little odd, so that that must be it.

She's still staring up at me, waiting for an answer, so I give the first one that crosses my mind.

"I'm Tia's friend."

For a long moment, she continues to watch me, as if considering my answer. At last, she nods.

"At the gummy tree, Aurora waits."

*Background: Top of the Clock Tower (Day)

With those words, she flaps her wings and flies off, leaving me even more confused.

The gummy tree is a large tree in the park near her house. I've never been sure why we call it that, probably some slip of the tongue from when we were still babies. The three of us used to play there a lot before we found the clock tower and we still go there from time to time when the weather or other obligations prevent us from flying far from home.

But her sudden departure is puzzling. She waits there? Is this part of the game? Is there something she wants to do there? But if she wants me to follow her she wouldn't have just flown off like that. She'd be waiting in the air, waving and urging me on like she always does. And there's her strange question and attitude… What's she getting at?

*Background: Top of the clock tower (Night)

In the end, I stayed at the clock tower for the rest of the afternoon but Aurora never returned. As the days, months, and years passed, whenever the two of us found ourselves alone on the clock tower that odd scene would repeat itself. She would look into my eyes with a strange solemnness and ask that single question.

  "What are you?"

  My answers never varied much from that first response. I was Tia's friend, her boyfriend, her co-worker…

  Like mine, Aurora's response never changed. She would promise to wait at the gummy tree and then fly off alone.

  I never figured out what she meant by that exchange and I never followed her to the tree. I often wondered what would happen if I did go, but Aurora never urged me to follow or complained about my absence. Eventually, I came to see it as just another one of her quirks, a special game that only the two of us played.

*Background: The Question (Adult) CG

And now, here we are again. We're both older but the scene is repeating itself once more. The same place, the same question, and the same unreadable expression on Aurora's face… It's been years since the last time she asked me, but I guess some things will never change.

I give her a friendly smile and, once more, speak the first answer to come into my mind.

"I'm Tia's fiancé."

She nods slowly, her expression never changing, and repeats the same phrase she always has since that afternoon fifteen years ago.

"At the gummy tree, Aurora waits."

*Background: Top of the Clock Tower (Night)

And then she's gone, flying off into the night. No more questions, no goodbyes, just that one mysterious phrase…

I shake my head, this isn't the time to try and puzzle out the mysteries of Aurora's personality. Tia is waiting for me below.