## xvii - Sweet little nightmares



## The Amazon, 19th century

**THE DEVIANTS WERE BACK**It shouldn't have been possible. They'd killed them all a long time ago. Yet, in front of him, stood one of them, bloodthirsty as ever and ready to tear him from limbs to limbs. He could faintly see the light of his ropes falling from his palms, which were closed in fists, ready to fight. He knew this would happen. He had a faint memory of it. And shetold him they would probably have to fight one. Why wasn't he surprised? As he was about to lunge towards it, a terrifying realization dawned on him. He wasn't alone.

He could feel their presence and though he wanted to turn his head to see who they were, he found himself unable to do so. He couldn't move his head. But then again, it must not have just been his head. So he tried to move his arms. Try to let down his guard. He didn't manage to do it. If at least he'd struggled, if at least he'd trembled, it would've seemed like he'd fought back. And though he wanted to, his body didn't even flinch. It didn't even tire him out to try to move and his face wouldn't let show his fear either. It was like his mind and his body were two separate things. He was living outside of himself.

But he was still in the village. That was clear. It hadn't changed a bit, though it wasn't night anymore. It was getting a bit darker, yes, however the moon should already have been in the sky by now, surrounded by the stars. Something was wrong. Of course, there was the matter of the Deviant. But something worse was happening. He could feel it in his heart, as though it was already in his knowledge that the Deviant in front of him wasn't his biggest threat. Yet one of the only things he knew as an Eternal was that there was nothing worse than a Deviant.

He attacked. He hadn't even thought of doing it or felt his body tense up as he got ready for a fight. Was this how Druig felt when he used a human's body to look at something? Disconnected? He threw the ropes towards the Deviants, successfully managing to wrap it around one of its leg. Still, something about it was... di erent. Its eyes were almost... not human, but familiar. He didn't have time to attack another time before somebody else did it for him. A ball of energy shot it, seemingly coming out of nowhere. The action made him snap his head toward as the person who'd helped, and though it was what he'd wanted to do anyway, he didn't even hear himself thinking of doing it.

Kingo. He was here, his hands placed in finger guns to channel the cosmic energy he used as a weapon. He shouldn't have been here. He was supposed to be mad at Pollo, not be here protecting his life. And how did he even know where Druig's village was? Only people who'd been there once knew where it was. And Druig sure wouldn't have told Kingo out of all Eternals. And though it was undoubtedly Kingo that stood in front of him, something about him had changed. It's not that he'd aged up or anything, it was just his clothes that were... di erent. It was nothing he'd ever seen before. His pants were made of a tissue he didn't quite recognize, and though he couldn't touch this, the texture still seemed weird. He was still wearing his trademark colour, purple, it's just that he wasn't wearing his armour. Then again, it wasn't strange for him to wear human clothes. It was strange that he would wear clothes that Pollo had never seen any human wearing. It might have just been Kingo trying to be unique or something of the sort, still it bothered him.

Not as much as the fact that he couldn't turn his head a bit more to see who else. There were more people around them, he could feel it. And there was a perfume in the air... A perfume that would've been unlike any other had it existed. It was simply a smell, the smell of something he'd almost forgotten about before that night, or day. Fear. His time in Druig's village had been so blissful, he'd forgotten what it felt like, smelt like, to face death on a daily basis. He hadn't missed it. Just like he hadn't missed Ikaris. Who was here, there was no doubt. There were very few chances that Kingo would be here without Ikaris, a er all. They were what humans would call 'best friends'. And wherever Ikaris go, Sprite and Sersi were bound to follow. So they must've been here as well. He couldn't spot them at the moment, nonetheless he knew they were here. He couldn't exactly feel them, but had he been given any more time, he would have. For once in his eternal life, he ran out of time.

It's a terrifying realization that made the light of his ropes flicker. It was something of a déjà vue, yet he couldn't remember what was the déjà vue from. It was right there in his mind, the answer. He could almost caress it with the tips of his fingers. He might have done it had it not been out of reach. With him, things o en seemed to be, only this time it was for real. He had one body, but two minds. One of them was older, but none the wiser, holding knowledge of horrors the younger mind couldn't even phantom. The second one was happier, lighter, much more naive, yet wiser when it came to matters of the heart. He was far from knowing that this knowledge would soon be gone. He wished together they'd been united, formed some kind of Uni-Mind, but they were separated things, barely lingering next to each other. Though he was unable to connect them together, it was the fact that those minds were close that helped him figure out that it was the older mind which had the realization. He would not get that knowledge of a déjà vue until years, maybe more, to come.

The realization must've really shaken up the older Pollo, as it was enough for him to lose control of his powers for a second. A second that the Deviant didn't miss. As soon as the ropes were no longer entwined around its leg, it attacked him. Shocked but not stupid, he made the rope reappear in his hand, snapping it towards the Deviant, which did made it hiss but nothing else. And though there were two minds in his body, they still shared its eternal mortality, so though he couldn't control his action, Pollo could still feel the pain that followed as the Deviant dug its claws into his chest. And at that moment...

## He woke up.

His shirt was sticking to his skin as he lost control of his temperature one too many times, waves of heat and cold hitting all at once. He could barely breathe, though to be perfectly honest that was the last of his worry. He'd shot up in a sitting position as soon as his eyes had opened, throwing the cover on the other side of the room, not that it'd been covering much of his body at this point. He could feel his hair on his forehead, which was now wet due to sweat. His eyes couldn't focus on anything, nor could his mind, as he tried to understand what was happening, his body trembling, ready to be shattered like thin glass. Feelings had been tattooed on his skin, burning his skin as he was only aware of one thing: he was in danger.

He looked down at his abdomen, a fearful gasp barely passing his lips as he noticed the specks of blood on it. His whole body was aching, whether it was his muscles which seemed much too tense or his skin that was burning up, itching him as though it wasn't his own. Words and sobs were caught in his throat as he was le with the horrible impression that he was not in the right body any more. Something about it was wrong. He wanted to use his nails as claws and tear o his skin, hoping he'd find something more than just blood under it. Something was very wrong, not just about him but about everything. He wasn't at the right place or at the right time. He needed to do something, to help them, to save himself. But who did he need to save? Why did he need to save himself? What was happening?

With no thoughts in his mind but panic living under his skin, he rushed o his cabin. But the darkness outside made it worse. It was strange to see that night had long fallen when only moments ago he'd felt like it was still daylight. He'd half expected to see a Deviant jump out of nowhere, trying to kill him once more. He wished the darkness would've wrapped itself around him becoming a velvet blanket which hugged him as it murmured promises of safety into his ear. However, that wasn't the case. Though he would never admit it, he'd never been really found of darkness. He'd always preferred the way sunlight caressed his skin and reassured him to the secrets hidden in the night. Now more than ever he feared it. If the sun had been out, at least he might have had a chance at seeing the monster arrive. He hated not being able to know what would happen and why he felt like danger was all around him. And because he was desperate, he did something that only someone who's desperate could've done. He walked towards Druig's cabin and knocked on his door.

Obviously, Pollo had never really been to ask for help. He didn't know why, he just never did. But if he'd ever decided to ask for someone's help, Druig would have been at the bottom of that list. Scratch that, Druig wouldn't even have been on the list. Now, it was dierent. Not just because Druig was the only person around he actually knew. Their relationship had changed, evolved. He trusted him more than he used to. And though they still fought a bit from time to time, he would've trusted him with his life. He knew Druig would never try to hurt him. Not intentionally, that is. Though he knew that the chances of the mind controller being bitter about being woken up were high, he didn't stop from knocking repeatedly on his door. He needed help.

And at that moment, Druig really was the only one who could help him.

It must've taken at least two minutes before the door was opened. He didn't doubt that Druig already knew who would be on the other side, as no villager would ever dare to wake him up in the middle of the night. Still, though it was most likely that he'd known who he would have to face, his still sleepy expression showed that he was confused as to why Pollo hadn't let him sleep. His eyes were only half open, a blank expression, di erent to his normally neutral yet cold one, having taken over. He opened his mouth to say something, but the taller man didn't even let him start his sentence as he took his arm and tried to pull him away from the cabin.

"Come on, we have to leave," he spoke quickly, eyeing his surroundings like he feared one of the trees might transform into a Deviant. "It's coming."

"What? Polly, what's coming? Why are you still awake?" He stifled a yawn, his voice groggy from the sudden awakening. He pushed Pollo away a bit, taking back his arm but still not doing any of it as harshly as he might've done if he hadn't been so tired.

He knew that he owed him an explanation, but they didn't have time. If they stayed any longer, they would die. "The Deviant. It found us. It's going to kill me."

Though that seemed to e iciently wake him up, it didn't chase away the confusion in his eyes. "Why don't you come inside, Polly? You look terrified."

"No, we have to go," he pleaded. "Please Druig, I don't want to die."

It seemed that Druig was so tired he didn't even have the strength to try and hide his emotions, which, Pollo, had to admit, he was glad for. It was much easier to read him that way and knowing how he felt did actually help him calm down a bit. His worry was clear as he let his fingers linger on Pollo's shoulder, so ly trying to get him to come inside the cabin. That was the last thing he wanted to do, but if it was what it took for Druig to listen to him, then he would simply have to do it.

Inside, a candle was burning, barely lighting the room. Strange shadows were cast on the walls, which in no way helped Pollo with his nervousness. Druig tried to make him sit down on the bed but he didn't succeed in doing so, as Pollo found himself unable to stop movement, fiddling with the bloodied part of his shirt as he decided to stay on his feet.

"I don't know why you think you're going to die, Polly, but you won't," said Druig in a way that was so solemn that it almost sounded like a promise. "We killed the last Deviant a long time ago."

"No, no. There's at least one le . We must have been wrong. I saw it. It's coming. I'll fight it and I'll try to save you, but I'm sorry. It'll kill me. It might... It might have already done it."

The smaller Eternal frowned as he rubbed his eyes to try and wake himself up. "What do you mean? And you've seen it? How?"

"Well..." he hesitated, avoiding Druig's gaze. "I dreamt it. I think. But this was dierent than just a dream! It was like I was there but I wasn't. It's going to happen, I know it. You have to trust me. If we stay here, we'll be in mortal danger. This Deviant, it seemed... dierent. More dangerous. We can still evacuate the village, please."

Druig let out a sigh as he tried once more to get Pollo to sit down, which worked this time. "Look, I'm sure it felt like it was really happening, but you said it yourself. It was a dream. Why don't you go back to sleep? I'll even stay with you if you want."

"You don't believe me," uttered the man, gaping at him as betrayal washed over him. "But... you should believe me. You always believe me..."

"I do believe you, Polly. I believe that you had a horrible but realistic nightmare," tried to reason with the mind controller. "And it's okay that you're scared."

"Fine!" He exclaimed, placing his hands into fists, and trying to stand up before Druig stopped him from doing so. "Don't believe me! But I have proof that it was real! The Deviant killed me. It dug its claws into my chest. And the proof that it happened is right there. Look at my shirt! There's blood on it!"

Carefully, Druig approached him, his eyes narrows as he so ly took the fabric of the shirt into his hand. He analyzed the blood that had stained it, his head just a bit too close to Pollo's lips for his liking. They both stayed silent, refusing to acknowledge the way Pollo's breath had quake ever so slightly when he'd Druig's fingers had accidentally touched his skin. Still not saying anything to each other, Druig started li ing his shirt to inspect the skin that should've been torn apart by the Deviant's claws. However, there were no traces of such a thing ever happening, not even a scar from a previous battle, as they'd all been healed by Ajak. The only reminder of his nightmare was the way his skin glistened under the light of the candle, a result of the sweat.

"There's nothing there, Polly," stated Druig, trying to keep a reassuring voice even if that wasn't really one of his specialities.

"That doesn't mean anything. How do you explain the blood if it wasn't the Deviant, uh?"

He took Pollo's arm in his hand, showing him long scratches on his skin, still bloodied. As he looked at his arm, he also let him see the blood under Pollo's nails. "You must've dug your nails into your arms while you were sleeping. The nightmare scared you so much that you didn't even notice. When you woke up, you probably scratched yourself by accident. See? I told you, there's nothing to fear. There are no more deviants on Earth. We killed them all."

"No, that can't be true... It can't be... It was real, I swear. Kingo, he... Please, you have to believe me, Druig. I would never lie to you," he pleaded, trying not to let him see the tears that were slowly forming in his eyes.

The other Eternal hesitated slightly before giving him an uneasy smile and helping him lie down in his bed. "I do. But you're tired and terrified. Get some rest and we'll talk about it tomorrow, when you're feeling better. I promise you that we will find an explanation. Okay?"

He nodded, still he seemed nowhere near ready to sleep. He was glancing at everything in the room, as though he was expecting it suddenly attack him. So, wishing to help him, Druig placed his hand on his forehead, his eyes flashing yellow before Pollo almost immediately falling asleep. But that small action had caused more damage than Druig would've expected. In that second where he entered his friend's mind, he'd gotten a glimpse of the horror in his head, the fear that plagued him a er his nightmare. Never before had he ever seen Pollo be so afraid of something. And so, barely hesitating before reacting, he let his eyes change colour one more time as he sighed, almost regretting what he was about to do. Almost. When Pollo would wake up the next morning, he would have no memory of this nightmare.

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