xii - A quick resume of Pollo's identity crisis

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The Amazon, 18th century

"SO WHAT HAPPENED AFTER I LEFT?"

Pollo was better now. The fever had dropped and while he hadn't came out of Druig's cabin yet, he knew that he would soon have to leave. But how could he? When he knew where Druig was, how he was. His deepest desire was to stay here, just a bit longer, still he was running out of excuses. And he knew that Druig was waiting impatiently for him to leave. He did think what he'd said, as he often did. He had missed him. And he was glad to see him again. Actually, he'd missed all the Eternals. He could see it now. Feel it. He would try to find them so he could apologize but until then... he liked being here. Not just because it was the Amazon but because... because it was Druig.

"You mean after you did that whole speech about us being stupidly loyal?" Teased Pollo, leaning a bit onto the other Eternal.

He huffed, rolling his eyes at his friend's comment. "When you say it like that, it sounds like I threw a tantrum. It was a very moving speech! I even cried while saying it."

"I know, I was there. And I cried too." He frowned, looking down at his hands. "Not because of the speech, though."

Druig hadn't lied when he said that he'd missed Pollo as well. He had. The way he smiled, the way he spoke. He'd missed it all. However, the ugly thoughts that would crawl out of Pollo' mind and crawl into his might have been the one thing he wished never to see again. He wasn't quite sure how the taller man had survived all these years with those dark thoughts always looming around. He was afraid of letting him go, alone with those thoughts, so loud and heavy. He wanted him to stay here, just for a moment, just until he could figure out a way for him to be better, feel better. Still, he was running out of excuses.

His eyes turned yellow, Pollo's doing the same thing and the tears that had been threatening to fall disappeared almost as quickly. His sad expression turned into a neutral smile before an awkward smile danced on his lips. Pollo looked at him in confusion for a few seconds and while he didn't particularly like erasing his mind, Druig preferred seeing him like that. Happy.

"I'm sorry I think I forgot what I was saying," he chuckled, passing a hand in his hair. "Did you ask me something?"

"Yes, you were just about to tell me what happened after I left," he replied, letting his hand caress Pollo's shoulder and pushing the guilt away from him.

He grinned madly, a spark of amusement in his eyes. "You mean after you did that whole speech about us being stupidly loyal?"

He hesitated before answering, not wanting to make the same mistake from before and make him lose his smile, so he simply hummed in agreement, not letting a word pass through his lips.

"Well, Gilgamesh agreed to protect Thena. I think I heard them say something about Australia. Then Ajak snapped at Ikaris, which was really funny. You would've liked that. Then she told us... she told us..." It was impossible to keep the melancholy away from Pollo. That's what Druig realized as he saw his smile fading away for the second time. That wouldn't stop him, of course. Still, before he could erase his mind again, the taller man spoke up again. "She told us that we needed to explore the world and I got... I got so mad. I... I think I yelled. I might've cried. I told her that she was a liar, if I recall correctly. That we should've been going back to Olympia instead of staying here. I... I also told them that you'd had the right idea to leave. Then... I told them to never come near me again and... I haven't seen them since then. I guess Sersi and Ikaris are still together. Maybe Kingo and Sprite as well? I'm not... I'm not quite sure."

Druig had heard his thoughts that night. He'd heard him agree with him when he'd told Ajak that he couldn't expect Thena to trust her to erase his mind, which truly was kind of ironic. But anyway, he still hadn't expected him to actually follow in his footsteps in leave. There was still one thing that bugged him, though. If he was going to leave, then why hadn't Pollo left with him? Because he still thought he might get a chance to see his family. He knew that. It didn't stop him from wandering. Would Pollo had considered coming with him, had it not been for their return to Olympia? He wished he could've read his mind at that moment, but he'd already taken control of the humans and taking over an Eternal's mind as well would have only led to failure. And anyway he already knew the answer. Pollo would never have left with him. He would either had done so on his own, which is what had really happened, or simply stayed with the other Eternals, his new family.

"Then what did you do?" He continued to ask, which seemed to bring Pollo back to a slightly better mood.

"Everything," he let out, smiling at Druig like he, out of everybody, would understand how little 'everything' really was. "I travelled everywhere. I met everyone. I wanted to see everything I hadn't had time to see when we were at war. And I did. Mostly. Also... also, I guess I was kind of looking for you."

The mind controller frowned, pulling away from Pollo for a second so that they could face each other. "You were? Why?"

Pollo let out a nervous chuckle, avoiding his friend's gaze. "Why not? You'd gone missing. And I'd seen everyone. Everyone but you. Maybe I wanted to prove to myself that I could find you, wherever you were. Or maybe I wanted to prove it to you. I might've just been bored, though."

Of course. Pollo rarely did anything for which the reason wasn't that he'd been bored. And while the explanation was less perfect, Druig decided to take it anyway. Polllo had gone looking for him. That's all he needed to know for his mind to be at peace once again. But it wasn't enough for Pollo himself to be at peace with his thoughts and questions.

"What happened to you?" He wondered, clearing his throat when he noticed how the question sounded. "I mean, after you left. You just... stayed here?"

"Basically. We built a village that no one would ever be able to find. Since then, I've been making sure that each generation was safe from the dangers that humans are to themselves," he recounted.

"So you're just going to stay here forever?" He continued to ask, trying not to sound like he was accusing him of something. "What about when we go back to Olympia? Will you come back with us?"

And though he knew it wasn't what the other boy wanted to hear, he answered with the truth. "I don't know."

He'd been right to think that Pollo wouldn't like hearing those words. Still, he had the decency to try to act as though he wasn't bothered by those answer as he simply tried to get even closer to Druig, if it was possible at this point. From time to time, he would still feel a few shivers caused by the fever and as he couldn't control his temperature to feel better, he'd simply decided he would try to warm himself up with Druig's body temperature.

"If... If you do go back with us, will we still talk?"

Neither of them knew where that question came from and Pollo certainly couldn't understand why he would care. They hadn't talked back on Olympia, why would it suddenly change? But why wouldn't it? They'd saved Earth from the Deviants together. They'd spend centuries side by side. They shouldn't go back to strangers just because the rest of their lives were back to normal.

"I think so," hesitated Druig. "Why wouldn't we?"

Now that answer did make the taller boy feel a bit better. With the shadow of a smile still dancing on his lips, he started humming some melody, cutting himself off from the conversation. He liked how it had gone and because of that, it was the perfect end to the conversation. Of course, it was never that easy with the both of them. Druig still had one question that he hadn't asked before due to Pollo's fever.

"I told you that we'd built this place so that nobody would ever find it," started the mind controller, confusing the man next to him, "so how did you?"

He seemed a bit relieved by the question, nonetheless the fact that he'd stopped his humming to reply was never a good thing. "I didn't actually find it. Marco brought me here. Long story short, I forgot that weather is a changing thing, I got caught in a rainstorm, crashed my boat, then decided to go spend the night in a cave but got bitten by a snake that turned out to be venomous. I accidentally killed it, apologized, put it into my satchel and then I met Marco, showed him the body and he told me I was gonna die."

Once again, Druig pulled away, however this time it was just to confirm that he wasn't dreaming and that Pollo hadn't invented all the nonsense he'd just said. He blinked a few times as his friend looked at him with an innocent smile. At this point, he was sad to say it wasn't the weirdest thing he'd heard Pollo say.

"I wish I could say that I'm surprised, but..." He vaguely waved at Pollo before continuing. "You're Polly. I don't think you could do anything that would surprise me."

There was an awkward silence when Druig realized what a mistake he'd made by saying those words. Finally, Pollo spoke up, never breaking eye contact.

"The reason I came to the Amazon was to fight a crocodile," he admitted.

Here it was again. The absence of surprise as the fighter revealed something so strange. "You do know that there aren't actually many crocodiles around here? They're mostly just caimans. Which are part of the alligator family."

They continued to look at each other awkwardly for a few seconds, not a word leaving their lips. As he often did, Pollo was the one who interrupted the silence. He was chuckling at the situation, the whole thing finally sinking in form him. After all this time, he'd found Druig again. And for some reason, reason he was talking about fighting crocodiles. As he thought of it all, the chuckles evolved into an uncontrollable laughter, loud and inappropriate. And oh so contagious.

Druig was never one to laugh the way Pollo would. He didn't like that everyone could hear him laughing. The last thing he wanted was for people to mistake his hilarity for an invitation to come talk to him. Because once one person starts thinking you're chummy, then so do everybody else. However, the only person around was Pollo and he already knew that even if he started laughing that wouldn't mean he liked talking to strangers. So there were no reasons to hold back his laughter. Even then, it wasn't quite as loud or joyful as Pollo's was. It was low, and while you could still see that it was genuine, there were no doubts that it was more of a silent laugh anyway.

There was nothing particularly funny about the whole situation. It was actually pretty usual for the two Eternals. But they'd missed laughing with each other. And they would've tried to find an excuse to laugh together one last time before Pollo was forced to leave. They both knew that they were running out of time. And out of excuses.

Their stomachs hurting as they couldn't stop laughing and tears in their eyes, they finally managed to calm down. Pollo took a deep breath as he wiped the tears away and let the smile on his face fall a bit, so that his face wouldn't hurt so much. A hand on Druig's shoulder, he let all the stress that had come with almost dying leave his body, trying to enjoy the last seconds of laughter that were left. They let themselves take pleasure in the silence that fell after their hilarity.

As they were laughing, they'd gotten closer, skin against skin and hand against hand. On the spur of the moment, in a passing bravery, Druig let his hand wander to Pollo's face. He placed it on his cheek and as though it was a reflex, the taller boy's whole body relaxing as he let himself melt at his touch. A sigh passed his lips, which had parted as soon as he'd felt Druig's cold skin against his, and his halfway closed, so that he could still see the other Eternal's face through his eyelashes. He didn't dare move, fearing it might startle the mind controller and he would try to pull away, like he always did. At the moment, Druig could've been trying to snap his neck and Pollo wasn't quite sure he would've cared.

Druig wasn't quite sure where he'd found the courage to touch the other man that way, but he was glad he'd found it. Pollo's skin wasn't particularly warm or kind, it always was at the right temperature, still it felt like it was burning as their skin touched. He hadn't missed the way Pollo's breath caught in his throat and how he hadn't even flinched when, centuries ago, the touch of Makkari, his most trusted friend, would've made his eyes widen. But today, they were closed. His trust that whatever would happen next was what was supposed to happen filling the room. For once, his thoughts had gone quiet, stayed away from the both of them. And as he knew both their faith laid in his hand, Druig wondered what he would do with it. He could crush it and never have to feel the stinging pain in his chest again. Or he could let it bloom, let Pollo's warmth overcome him as he finally got to know what his lips tasted like when they weren't tainted by alcohol and tears.

He wanted neither of those options. Actually, he didn't even know what he wanted. But he'd waited a second too long. He knew now that whatever he would choose, Pollo would remember the hesitation before his decision. It would fill his head with questions, doubts, wishes. And that was the most cruel thing he could ever do to him. Making him wonder what might have been, due to his second too much of hesitation. So instead, he moved his hand from his cheek to his forehead, resulting in Pollo slowly opening his eyes.

"I think your fever is gone," he spoke up, hoping Pollo wouldn't hear the cracking of his voice as he noticed the disappointment on his face. "You must be feeling better."

"Uh... Yeah. Yeah, I'm feeling better. I guess you'll want me to leave, now," he chuckled awkwardly, looking at his feet and fiddling with Druig's sleeve.

No. Stay."Well, you have to. If you ever want to fight a crocodile, I mean."

"Yeah, right." Ask me to stay. I will. Please."Unless... uh..."

If you ask me if you can stay, I'll say yes. Please."Unless what?"

Unless you don't want me to leave."Uh... I'm not sure. Sorry. Do you... uh... know when you want me to leave?"

Never."Whenever you think the fever is gone and that you can row a ship without passing out."

And for once in their eternal lives, Pollo wasn't the one to mess up what they had. He was the one to save it. All he had needed were those few wires from Druig for his eyes to light up. Yes, he was running out of excuses, but he still had one. And a pretty good one, with that!

"Actually... If it doesn't bother you, of course, I think I'll have to spend a bit more time here," he said, trying to look serious but finding himself incapable of hiding his smile. "You see, as I said earlier, I kind of crashed my boat. And until I can repair it, well... I don't really have anywhere to go."

For a second, Druig's face lit up as well, however he was much better than Pollo was at hiding his emotions, so all he had to do was clear his throat for him to look like the new was leaving him emotionless. Still, there was undeniably a small twitch of his lips as he looked at the other Eternal who was beaming, made happy by the simple thought of being able to stay for a little longer.

"I don't mind," replied the smaller man, still trying to act like he didn't care much anyway. "What kind of person would I be if I kicked you out before you could finish fixing your boat. So of course, take all the time you need. After all, time is all we have."

A chuckle tingling his throat, Pollo let himself fully fall onto the bed, looking at ceiling as he felt Druig laying next to him. Neither of them were looking at the other, but they both had twin smiles plastered on their faces. Druig was right. All they had was time. And each other. Of course, they knew that, at some point, they would have to leave one another, running out of excuses for good. They would never admit how much they needed each other, or that they wanted to stay together, nonetheless there was no denying it. Luckily for them, they still a few excuses. So until they had no more time, no more anything, they would just lay there. Smiling. And hoping time would freeze. They had never been more aware of how quick time passed then when they were together.