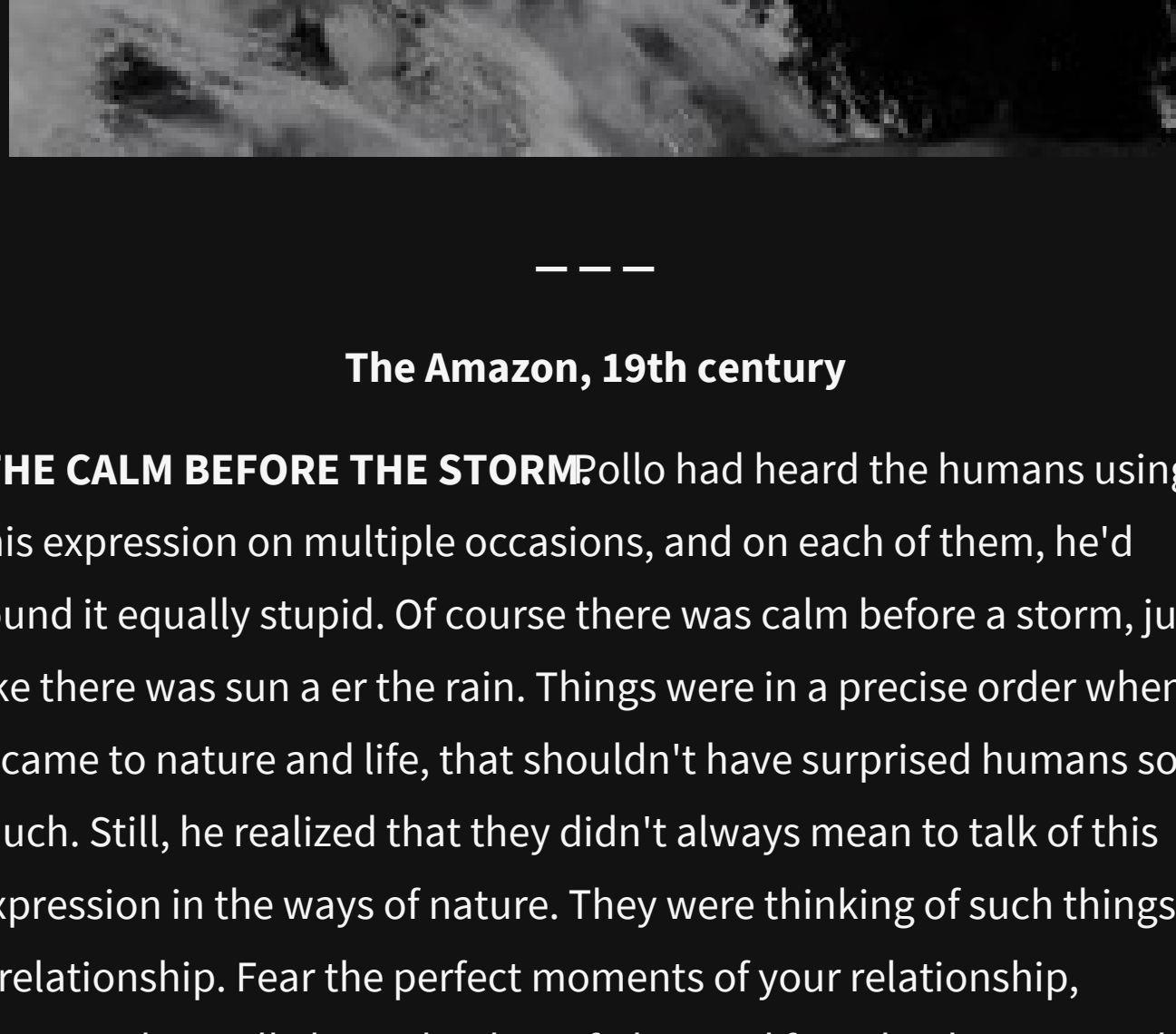


xix - Never ending storm



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The Amazon, 19th century

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORMPollo had heard the humans using this expression on multiple occasions, and on each of them, he'd found it equally stupid. Of course there was calm before a storm, just like there was sun after the rain. Things were in a precise order when it came to nature and life, that shouldn't have surprised humans so much. Still, he realized that they didn't always mean to talk of this expression in the ways of nature. They were thinking of such things in a relationship. Fear the perfect moments of your relationship, because they will always lead to a fight. He'd found it depressing that humans would think in such a way, even more knowing that they had so little time to live. They should've enjoyed the calm while they had it instead of already fearing a storm that might never come. For those reasons and some more, he'd never understood that expression. Now he did.

He and Druiq were known for often exploding in each other's face, the smallest accident starting a storm of its own. However, things had been almost perfect, since their last fight, a few years—ten, maybe—ago. At first, the realization of time passing had made Pollo a bit tense, for whatever reason, but then it had passed and he found himself chuckling, thinking of how pessimistic the humans could be with their little expressions. He'd been wrong to think in such a way. Later, he would manage to make himself believe that it was the way he'd mocked this certainty that had made it happen. He'd been cocky, thinking that simply because he was an Eternal, an immortal, human laws of nature didn't apply to him. There would be no rain for him and his crops would never die. There would be a sunny sky with never a cloud in view. There would be calm without a storm. Humans live short lives, but they have the lives and knowledge of thousands before them. They didn't invent proverbs for the fun of inventing them. They'd invented things such as these to warm people. Calm, no matter how long it lasts, will always be followed by a storm.

The way it all started was with calm. Blissful calm that he never would've thought could lead to such a horrible storm. After all those years, those centuries, Pollo had finally found enough courage to admit his feelings to Druiq. The task seemed more dangerous than anything he'd ever had to face before. No matter the number of times he'd fought a Deviant, no matter the number of battle he almost lost, there was nothing that was quite as terrifying than talking about his feelings. With Druiq, out of all people. Why couldn't he've been able to crush on someone nice, like Makkari? At least, she would've been able to reject him without making him feel bad about himself! And yes, he had no proof that Druiq would be cruel to him when turning him down, except for all those times where the man had been cruel to him for lesser things. But this had been in the past. And he had to believe Druiq had learned from this.

He hadn't written a speech, though he had repeated in his head over and over again what he might say. He'd thought of hundreds of scenarios, of reactions, and he couldn't quite decide which one he wanted to be real. For once, maybe for the first time, he wanted Druiq to read his mind. It would be so much easier if the smaller Eternal simply overheard all of his thoughts, all of his feelings, and at least, that way, he wouldn't have to hear his voice shake. Or if Druiq wasn't going to enter his mind, then he wanted to be able to know exactly what would happen. He couldn't quite explain it, he'd decided to blame it on his instincts, but more than once in his overly long life he'd found himself knowing exactly what would happen before it ever happened. However, that day was different. He had no idea what would happen next and he hated. He didn't trust himself enough to do this kind of thing. Nonetheless, if he didn't do it, then nobody would do it for him. So he had to. He had to try and hope for the better, even if he'd never been very good at that.

The sun had already disappeared from the sky. It was dark now, though the faint light of the stars and the moon was undoubtedly there. After supper, Druiq had some business to attend, still he'd promised that he'd come stargazing with him, as they'd done a few times before. And while Pollo really did like stargazing, this time it was nothing but an excuse to get some time alone with his friend. Well, if this all went as he wished it would, he could only hope that they would no longer be friends before the rise of the sun.

Druiq was never one to be late, nor was he ever early. He always arrived right on time. On the contrary, Pollo never did. More than once, he was much too early, but on a few other days, he would arrive late, unaware of the time that had passed since he'd been supposed to be. That day, he was early. Druiq arrived on time. As always. Still, he'd feared that he wouldn't show up, which was one of the disadvantages of being early. Of course, he had no reason not to come. Just as he was growing more nervous, it seemed that Druiq appeared out of the darkness, walking towards him. A sigh of relief passed his lips as he saw him arriving, but he tried to hide it, wanting to keep a neutral face as he talked.

"Druiq! Hi!" Well, the indifferent façade he'd wished for was already broken, still he would've to continue anyway. "I wanted to talk to you. It's... It's important."

Though he hadn't chosen the right words and he knew it very well, Druiq didn't seem too concerned. Or maybe he was just much better than Pollo at looking emotionless. "Okay. Go on"

"Okay, so I've been thinking a lot," he started. "And I realized a lot of things. First, I think that I've been happier, if I can put it this way, since I've been here. Since I've started being around you more."

And it's with those words that it all went to shit. Pollo immediately noticed the way Druiq tense up, closing his hands into fists and tightening his jaw. His eyes had darkened and that's when Pollo realized that the smaller Eternal already knew what he was trying to say. Still, this time he hadn't used the ring words. Nothing he'd said could've possibly offended Druiq. Nonetheless, he wasn't a mind reader and he had never known what went inside Druiq's mind anyway.

"You don't mean that," spoke Druiq, his voice as cold as ice, a strange yet clear sigh of his unexplained anger.

Though a frown had appeared on his face, the warrior tried to hide it. "No, I do. I don't know what it is, but you really do make me feel good about myself. It's like... I think it might because I—"

"Stop it," snapped the other man, interrupting him. "I'm not making you happy. Not really."

"I think I know how to tell my feelings from one another, Druiq," he replied, his tone much more dry than he had wished for it to be.

"Do you, though, Pollo?" Sneered the Eternal, the disappearance of Pollo's nickname on his tongue cutting through his heart and skin.

"Because that's not what I hear, what I see, when I have to take those thoughts away from you. The only reason you feel like you're happier with me is because you're never feeling good. You're miserable when I don't use my powers to erase your thoughts."

Pollo wanted to laugh. Of course he'd had a little idea of what had been happening, but he'd tried to ignore it, thinking that as long as nobody didn't say it out loud it wouldn't be true. And all those times he'd tried to convince himself that Druiq would never enter his mind without making sure he was okay with it first... It was ironic really. But quickly, the laughter in his chest turned into a frozen anger that blocked the air in his lungs, making it so that the only sound coming out of his mouth was a shaking sco.

Druiq must've only now realized what he'd just said as his eyes went wide. Still, he didn't try to apologize or say anything to correct his previous claim. Druiq had never been good at apologizing, but then again neither was Pollo. They were both rather good to start fights, though.

"You played with my mind?" He growled, voice dangerously low.

"I didn't play with your mind. I was helping you. You don't remember of course, but you were depressed. You would get hurt on purpose when fighting a Deviant, your smile would drop in less than a second."

"Wait," mumbled Pollo, suddenly realizing something, "we got rid of the Deviants a long time ago. How long has this been going on?"

Druiq had the decency to look ashamed. "It doesn't matter, okay? I helped you and you can't deny it. Be honest, how were you feeling before you arrived here?"

He had some bad moments, he wouldn't lie about this. Of course, from time to time he would miss his family and friends, but it was never quite as horrible as Druiq made it out be.

"You want me to be honest? Fine! I was okay! I wasn't losing my memory and feeling insane anymore, so yeah, I was okay! Have you ever considered that you might be the reason why I'm so unhappy? Maybe the fact that you keep erasing my mind is why I was so... What did you say, again? Miserable? Maybe it's all your fault! Maybe it's always been your fault!"

Pollo hadn't noticed that he'd started screaming and pointing his finger at him. He'd never liked screaming, still he didn't mind it for once. If it was the only way for Druiq to understand just how angry he really was. And though it might have worked, the mind controller didn't seem to appreciate it. He snatched Pollo's wrist, which made him stop breathing for a second, and pulled him closer until their faces were only a mere inches apart.

"I realize that it's easier for you to think that you're always blameless, but you must have realized by now that not everything is my fault," he said, voice calm and polite in a way Pollo had never heard before. If he had to be honest, this was the first time he had ever been scared of Druiq. "Fine, maybe I didn't always did the right thing, but you have no idea what you were like without my help, Pollo."

The taller man let out a dry laugh, trying to take his wrist away from Druiq's which only worked after he sent him a sharp look. "You're right. I have no idea. Because you kept stealing my memories! You don't realize how terrifying it was for me to wake up only remembering half of the day before. Maybe a year ago I woke up in your bed with no idea of how I got there. You told me I had a nightmare and came to find you. Tell me, what was so terrifying that you had to take a dream away from me? You like to think your powers make you a god, but they don't. You don't get to decide for me what I want or don't want to remember! You know what? I think I just realized something. You, Druiq, are selfish. Always has been and always will be."

The colours had faded from Druiq's face, his eyes turning into ice as he glared daggers at Pollo. Both of them were well aware that they should've stopped their fight before it went too far, or further than it already was. They should've apologized, asked to talk about in the morning when their minds were less hectic. But they had kept so much from one another and there was much they had left unsaid that they finally wanted to say. Even if they wanted to, they didn't know how to stop now.

"I'm the one who's selfish?" Repeated Druiq, slowly losing his cold demeanour. "You let me go when Tenochtitlan fell! You let me alone because you were too afraid, too selfish, to try and take a chance with me!"

In another circumstance, he would've been glad to hear those words. All this time he'd wondered why Druiq had let him alone when really he'd wanted him to go as well. Maybe he'd even looked behind when leaving, hoping to catch one last glimpse of Pollo. But now, those words were empty. They were a desperate comeback in a fight that shouldn't have even been a fight in the first place. Pollo was starting to forget why he'd even wanted to talk with Druiq in the first place. If he'd really wanted to stargaze, then this wouldn't have been the right day to do so, as dark clouds had started to hide the sky. Maybe the humans were right after all. There was always calm before a storm.

"Did you, now? Because I can't read minds, Druiq! I tried, but I can't! When you let me, you didn't say anything, you didn't even look at me! How was I to know you wanted me to come with you? You think I didn't come because I was scared? Well yeah, I was scared. But I would've come with you anyway! All I needed was for you to tell me you wanted me to come too! I needed was for you to tell me that you wanted me! But you didn't! And that is just proving my point. You are selfish. Whether you admit it or not."

Pollo felt like he was stuck in a time loop, fighting over and over again with the same person about the same thing. How many times before had he told Druiq that he was selfish and that he couldn't read his mind? Probably more times than he knew, as he wouldn't have been surprised if some of those fights had been erased from his mind. He hated that about them. No matter what they did, no matter how happy they were, they always found a new way to fight about the same old thing. They would never change. He could see it now. It didn't matter what they did or how to they tried to get better, they were doomed to fail. It was some sick joke, the work of Arisheim probably. They'd been placed in the same mission of Eternals because their hearts would always betray them and they would always fail for one another, even if they were incapable of getting along even for a day. He was a soldier. He didn't know how feelings worked, he wasn't supposed to know. But he knew one thing. And that was pain. He could see it now, in Druiq's eyes, as they tore each other apart.

"You wanted me to ask you to come? Is that all you needed?" He questioned, his voice back to a being as calm as terrifying. "Then if I asked you to leave now? Would you listen to me?"

I would never abandon you! The words resonated in his mind in a way that made him wonder if Druiq hadn't been the one to make him hear them. He didn't want to abandon Druiq. He never had. However, his heart had just been shattered in billions of little pieces, making it almost impossible to which one he had to listen to. If he stayed, they might be happy for some time, but they would start fighting again not long after. He knew it. The calm before the storm. Never before had he ever understood so well one of the humans' expressions. He had the chance to fix this. If he refused to leave, then this fight would be over. Until another one started, that is.

He'd always been much more devoted to Druiq than he wished to admit. The mind controller might as well have controlled his heart as well, because he knew he would've listened to him even if he had nothing to say. And that devotion was still here, even now that they were fighting. He was tired of having the weight of the world on his shoulders. It wasn't his job to fix everything. This time, he would let the matter on Druiq's hands.

"Yes," he breathed out, the word barely passing his lips.

He waited for what seemed an eternity when it was really just a few seconds to hear Druiq's reaction. Suddenly, he regretted everything he'd said before. He wanted to kneel in front of him and beg him to accept his apology, to let him stay. He wanted to finally admit that he couldn't live without him, that if he let one more time, then both his mind and heart would shatter. He would never be able to fix them again and he knew it. But earlier, he'd told Druiq that he wasn't a god. He still believed those words. So he wouldn't act like he was one. Druiq was an Eternal, just like him. He shouldn't have had so much power on him.

"Then leave," ordered Druiq, barely hesitating before speaking up. "And never come back."

He could almost hear the sound of glass breaking as his whole being was destroyed to the point where he no longer knew if he had ever even been alive. Still, he tried not to let it show, as he hid his sorrow with a cocky smile and a mocking bow.

"As you wish, your highness."

Before the sun would rise, before Druiq could even realize his mistake, Pollo would be gone. And Druiq would never find him, as he was always travelling. It seemed that Pollo had been right for once. Before the morning had gotten the chance to show up, they had no longer been friends.

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