

xx - I'm sorry, mother; I'm sorry, I let you down



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Amsterdam, 2023

"THIS NIGHT IS COLD IN THE KINGDOM, I CAN FEEL YOU FADE AWAY."

Pollo continued to sing as he brewed the ramen, using his hand to do so, hoping he wouldn't lose control while his skin was in contact with boiling water. Well, that was only half true. He kind of hoped he would lose control. At least then he would be sure that he wasn't stuck in some awful nightmare where he was empty and he wasn't alone. Some days, he found himself wondering if his time with Druiɡ had ever been real or if it had all been in his mind. It seemed like he'd never even le this apartment in Amsterdam.

It's not like he'd never thought of it. If there was one thing he'd really wished for, it was to help kill that dumbass purple alien who thought genocide was the answer to everything. Thanos, was it? He didn't care that he wasn't supposed to help out in any fight that wasn't Deviant related, he really nodded to kick the crap out of something. There was one problem, however: He'd only found out about Thanos a er half of the galaxy had disappeared. Like plenty of people, he'd seen on the news a few strange things about Tony Stark disappearing and an alien spaceship, but before he could even understand where the next fight would be, the Avengers had managed to mess up and let Thanos snap all of the world out of existence. A erwards, he probably should've helped out more during those five years, but what was he supposed to do? Anyway, it all passed in the blink of an eye for him, an Eternal. Later on, he would learn that there had been a second fight against Thanos, but for some reason this fight has been invite-only and Doctor Strange hadn't thought of creating a portal for him to be a part of the battle.

So here he was, with a lot of built-up anger and violence in him, thinking that Druiɡ had been right, in the end. He was miserable. He would never admit it to him, of course, he still a bit of pride, but it didn't change that he was rather unhappy. Every passing day he was reminded that his family was still waiting for him on Olympia, unaware of whether he was dead or not. The only company he had was his cat, Dragon, whom he seemed to have for longer than he remembered.

He continued to mumble the lyrics of the song playing on his phone, a human device he actually quite liked, as he walked away from his ramen, as he'd gotten bored. "Don't cut me down, throw me out, leave me here to waste, I once was a man with dignity and grace. Now I'm slippin' through the cracks of your cold embrace, so please, please..."

He missed Makkari. She always knew how to make him smile. Without erasing his mind, that is. Of course, he missed most of the Eternals—he'd honestly not thought of Ikaris enough to say that he missed him—but Makkari was di erent. She'd been his best friend for centuries. And it seemed that she'd always known him better than he'd known himself. Centuries before he'd even started thinking of the possibility that he might have a crush on Druiɡ, she'd known. She'd known that one day he would feel that way. Because she knew him better than anybody ever had. Though he'd always hated the idea of the other Eternals being a second family, he would have been lying had he said he'd never seen Makkari like a sister.

"Could you find a way to let me down slowly? A little sympathy, I hope you can show me. If you wanna go then I'll be so lonely," he continued to sing as he took out the only bowl he owned.

He'd found this apartment about twenty years ago. Before then, he'd never settled on anywhere, but he liked Amsterdam and to be perfectly honest, he was tired. He'd running from nothing for so long and now that he had a cat he couldn't put his beloved Dragon in a cage every time he wanted to change country. The place was rather small, yes, but it was more than enough for one Eternal who'd stopped trying to make friends a long time ago. There was one bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen that was only separated from the living room by a counter. Every now and then, he would change the colour of the walls simply out of boredom. For the moment, they were a yellow colour that reminded him terribly of the way Druiɡ's eyes looked whenever he used his powers. He would have to repaint them soon enough.

Would he ever have the misfortune of inviting somebody in, the message would be clear. He owned one bowl, one plate, one of each utensils, one simple bed—though he was thinking of changing that too as he'd fallen o on multiple occasions due to nightmares—and one chair. He hadn't really gone crazy on furniture, and so most of what he owned was rather cheap, still he preferred it over the Domo. There, the rooms had been cold, they'd made him go crazy. He'd hated so much the lack of personality of his room that on his first day there, he'd destroyed it. Obviously, he managed to change it a bit over the centuries, still it always reminded him of the room of a soldier. Which it was, he knew that, still he hated the feeling that it was the only thing he knew. He hated that all he would ever be to the eyes of Arishem was a soldier blinded by loyalty.

He was doing it again. Repeating Druiɡ's words without really wanting to. Over the last centuries, he'd never really been able to pass a day without the smaller man passing his mind for a second or more. For one of the first time in his life, he wanted to forget. He really did. He wanted to forget how flowers had grew into his chest and sunlight had caressed his heart whenever he looked at him. He wanted to forget that Druiɡ's smell of mint and rain, that there was thunder in his eyes even when he was happy. He wanted to forget that even though Druiɡ's hands were constantly cold, the only moment he managed to make him shiver was when he could feel his breath against his neck. He'd memorized thousands of details about him that he now wished he'd never noticed. He wished that Druiɡ had never touched him, never kissed him.

"Cold skin, drag my feet on the tile as I'm walking down the corridor. And I know we haven't talked in a while, so I'm looking for an open door."

It had happened a long time ago and he'd never minded it before. Probably because he'd convinced himself it hadn't meant anything. But now he knew that somehow, it had meant more than he'd let on. And he hated that thought. He hated the thought that Druiɡ and him had been intimate in that way when the mind controller cared very little about him and he cared just a bit too much. Sometimes, when he wouldn't get nightmares, his dreams got worse. He dreamt of him. It was awful, really. He'd wake up and it was like he could still feel Druiɡ's hands on his skin and taste the alcohol in his mouth. Those dreams were already bad before, but now the impression of being still drunk when he woke up made him sick. Long story. Well, not really, but it's for another time.

He'd come to the point where he despised Druiɡ. Though he'd never been one to hold a grudge, this was di erent. He wantedo have a grudge against him. It was easier to hate him than to remember every good things that had happened between them. Even if it wasn't much. He'd always hated his mind and thoughts, however these days it was worse. He wanted to tear o his brain and crush it in the palm of his hand.

Sometimes, he would get flashes. Little bits of memories. And though he didn't remember any of them happening, he knew that they were in the past. He'd been quick to guess. Druiɡ can't erase memories. But he can lock them away. That was his theory at least. And as it had been such a long time since the other Eternal had played with his mind, the memories were slowly reappearing. When they would do so, he hated Druiɡ more than ever. It was painful and disorientating. He'd get glimpses of his life without always knowing the context. As days passed, he grew more bitter, anger towards Druiɡ, towards everyone, building up inside of him. If they were to ever face each other again, he didn't know what he would. Kill him. Or cry. Or kiss him. Maybe all of that.

"If you wanna go then I'll be so lonely. If you're leavin', baby, let me down slowly. Let me down, down, let me down, down, let me down."

He finished transferring the ramen in the bowl as Dragon rubbed itself against his legs. He let his song finish, humming along with it as he sat down on his couch and let his cat come next to him. As soon as the last note played, he opened the TV that Ajak would have probably considered too close to his eyes for his own well-being. He missed her. Sometimes. He wasn't angry at her anymore. Well, not fully. He just wished he could speak to her one more time without yelling.

He'd missed the intro of the show he wanted to watch, still it didn't bother him much. He was just watching it because he wanted to complain about the main subject. And quickly enough, he let himself chuckle as a familiar cave appeared on the screen.

"Today, we're going to talk about one of the most mysterious places on Earth: The Stark Cave. It was called that way because the mission was funded by Howard Stark. This cave is well known for the strange painting, similar to the caveman's most common drawings, but with colours that shouldn't have been known at this time. Numerous people have spoken about theories concerning aliens or illuminati. But what is the truth about Stark Cave? Well let's go back in 6000 BC, the time when it was theorized those images were painted."

"5000 BC, you absolute dumbass," muttered Pollo in a mouthful of ramen.

On the screen, the paintings he'd made with Thena not long a er they'd arrived on Earth were shown. Most of the colours had faded away, nonetheless he could still recognize the Domo and the dragon he'd paint. They'd never really thought of what would happen if humans found out about it, but though he knew Ajak would've most likely disapproved, he found it pretty funny. He kind of hoped that Thena was watching the documentary as well, but from what Druiɡ had told him, she and Gilgamesh were pretty much recluses.

Ugh. He was thinking of him again. Why couldn't Druiɡ just leave him alone? Why did he have to be in his mind all the time? He would almost thin' that Druiɡ was still around, using his powers to annoy him, if he hadn't been so clear about how he never wanted to see him again.

"The people that were drawn on this wall are believed to be gods of that time. But, that fact has been questioned by many historians, has they looked more human than godly. That doesn't take away that the clothes, or armours, worn by the people in those drawings are far from what existed at that point, and so it is believed by some that those aren't really clothes, but rather their skin. Now, above them is a black triangle that some have speculated to be a spaceship, but scholars have found out that it is actually supposed to represent the sky."

"You're all so stupid," continued to speak Pollo, laughter in his voice. "I can't wait to hear what you have to say about the dragon I drew." He turned towards his cat, a smirk on his face. "Wanna bet they're gonna say it was a dinosaur?"

He was pretty sure that Dragon couldn't understand what he said. He'd started talking to him a long time ago and though he was well aware of how crazy he sounded, he did kind of help him feel less lonely. However, there were a few times when it seemed like the black cat would react to what he said. Tho was one of those times. As soon as he finished talking, Dragon jumped o the couch, running towards the door. Pollo was almost insulted by that reaction. He probably would've been if he didn't find this so funny.

Quickly enough though, his amusement was replaced by worry. Druiɡ was scratching the door with its adorable little paws, all while meowing and hissing at it. It's not like he was particularly scared of it, but there were no doubts that a bit of the cat didn't like whatever stood behind the door. And so, carefully, Pollo approached it, ready to attack in case it was an enemy of some sort. He kept the chain on the door as he opened it, letting half of his face show. And there stood the last person he might've expected to find in front of his door.

Sersi and Ikaris hadn't changed at all. Same haircut, same posture, same surprised expression as they didn't seemed to understand how he'd managed to know that they were here before they'd even gotten the courage to knock. Pollo had thought very little of Ikaris, or when he did he was mostly out of spite. They didn't have a very bad relationship, it was mostly neutral with a few bad moments, still he'd passed so much time being bitter or being with Druiɡ since they'd parted ways that he'd rarely had time to try and remember some good times they might have had together. He was ashamed to say that he hadn't thought much about Sersi, though. He'd kind of thought of her whenever he reminded himself of the Eternals, still he'd never been as close to her as he'd been to Makkari or Thena. He didn't expected her to have thought much of him either. Nor did he believed that Ikaris had thought about him in those past centuries.

"What are you doing here?" He asked, a bit more harshly than he'd wanted to.

"Some... Some things happened. We're bringing the Eternals back together," started to explain Sersi. "Believe us, we wouldn't have come to you if it wasn't important."

With those words, he was suddenly reminded of the little speech he'd done before leaving. So they remembered as well. Which meant that Ajak, Thena, Kingo, all of his friends, probably remembered as well. That thought made him cringe. Though he'd believed each word he'd spoken, he still wished he'd found a gentler way to say it.

"Are we going back to Olympia?" At this point in his life, he should've known that hope leads nowhere. He was doomed to be unhappy and thinking otherwise was just foolish. Still, he really needed his family right now. So if there was the slightest chance he might be able to see them again...

"No," blurted out Ikaris. "This is much more important."

Pollo let out a sco . The man had only said six words and he'd already found a way to annoy him. "There's nothing more important to me than going back to my family."

"Not even the return of the Deviants?"

The statement made him freeze and yet... It didn't surprise him. He wasn't sure as to why he wasn't surprised, maybe it was because of his newfound pessimistic ways, but he knew it was more than just that. For a second, he thought of what Ikaris had said. Was his family more important than his mission? Yes. A hundred times yes. If he had to let the Deviants devour each human on this planet to get just one hour with his family, then he wouldn't hesitate to let them do it.

"That's not my problem, Ikaris," he mumbled, though a bit of guilt blossomed into his chest as he looked down on the ground. "Not anymore, at least. We've stopped doing this a long time ago now. And I realize I was... harsh, last time we saw each other, but I did mean it. It's useless to ask for my help if we're not going back to Olympia."

"Pollo, please," pleaded Sersi. His name sounded strange on her tongue. It might've been because it had been so long since he'd heard it or maybe it might just have been because he'd gotten so used to hear Druiɡ calling him by nickname. "We don't know how many there is and those Deviants... They're stronger than before. We need to reassemble the teams. Kingo and Sprite are downstairs and we're going to get Thena and Gilgamesh next. We need your help."

This almost got him. He'd missed them and he really wanted to talk to his friends a er all this time. Kingo, for example, was now a movie star. He wanted to know where that passion had came from and if he was thinking of doing another Shadow Warrior movie. And Thena? Had she overcame her Mahd Wy'ry. Last time Druiɡ had went to see her and Gilgamesh, he'd had to put her to sleep when the other man had wanted to take a week o , so he assumed that he wasn't the case, but time had passed since that and maybe it had changed!

"Bullshit," he laughed. "You don't need me. You never have. Leave me alone, you guys."

"Pollo, wait!" Exclaimed Ikaris as he was about to close the door. "Ajak! She's dead."

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