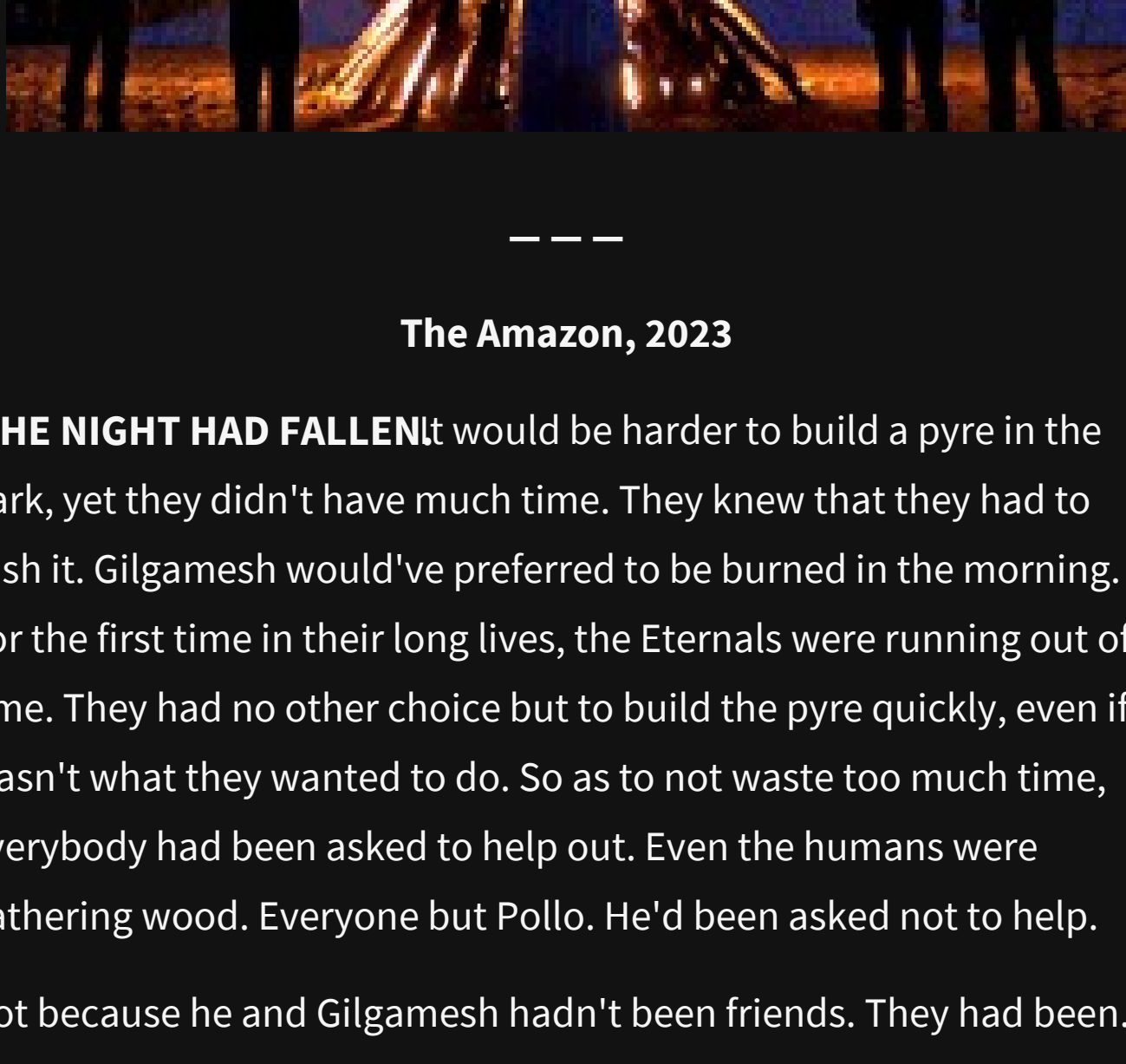


xxviii - Druig + Pollo = Confusion



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THE NIGHT HAD FALLEN! would be harder to build a pyre in the dark, yet they didn't have much time. They knew that they had to rush it. Gilgamesh would've preferred to be burned in the morning. For the first time in their long lives, the Eternals were running out of time. They had no other choice but to build the pyre quickly, even if it wasn't what they wanted to do. So as to not waste too much time, everybody had been asked to help out. Even the humans were gathering wood. Everyone but Pollo. He'd been asked not to help.

Not because he and Gilgamesh hadn't been friends. They had been. Rather, it was his injury that was stopping him from helping out. Druig had told him he would send the medic of the village to help heal him. Pollo refused. He already knew what to do. So here he was. Alone, in Druig's cabin, in the dark. Not doing anything to build Gilgamesh's pyre. Still, he knew he wasn't really doing nothing. They needed his help to light it. His help.

He'd managed to clean out his wounds, though his chest wouldn't stop bleeding. He'd checked out the injury on his head and, a er a few tests, he'd come to the conclusion that he didn't actually have a concussion. Or if he did, it was a very faint one, nothing to worry about. He'd bandaged his head and now it seemed much better. The same couldn't be said about his chest. Even if he was reluctant to do so, it had become obvious that the only solution to stop the bleeding and for him not to bleed out was to cauterize the wound.

The thought didn't please him, but at least he had Dragon with him. The flerken had reappeared a er Gilgamesh's death, going to scrub himself against Thena's legs. Kingo had stayed far away from him, fearing the flerken might decide to eat him, however Karun didn't seem quite as bothered by that fact. While at first he'd let Thena hold on to Dragon, she'd had to let him go when starting to build the pyre. So now, his companion stayed with him, rubbing his little head against his arm and purring loudly. As he closed his eyes, getting ready to make a burning rope appear in his hands, he heard the door opening, making him sigh in relief.

He lost all that relaxation when he opened his eyes, seeing who had just entered the cabin. Of course, he shouldn't have been so surprised, as it was, in fact, Druig's cabin. It was only natural that he would be the one to come here. He seemed tired. His dark hair was falling on his eyes, which were themselves decorated by dark bags. He'd been crying. It didn't show and nobody could've noticed, but Pollo knew him. And there was no doubt that Druig had been crying. He didn't mean the disgusted look on his face when he saw the blood that was staining the floor and covers.

"Sorry," Pollo breathed out. "I'll get it cleaned out, I promise. And I'll buy you never covers. If you haven't changed them since the last time I was here, then they're probably just as uncomfortable as before."

His words seemed to make Druig uncomfortable, still his face showed no emotions as he talked. "It's alright. I might not even need it, with the emergence and the destruction of the Earth. I just came to check on you. See how you were doing."

"I'm okay. Kind of bleeding out but, hey. That's nothing you," he laughed curtly. "Would you happen to have a tissue on you?"

"Oh, uh, yeah." He took a tissue from his pocket and passed it to him, which forced him to approach when he'd wanted to stay at the door. "Why do you need it?"

Pollo hummed as he started twisting. "I'm going to cauterize the wound, or it won't stop bleeding. It's going to hurt like a bitch so I need something to bite on. Y'know, so that I don't bother the village."

They both knew that he simply didn't want to worry the other Eternals. Thena in particular. She already had enough to worry about. Druig seemed to hesitate, as though he wished to leave but didn't know how to. In the end, he seemed to decide on doing otherwise.

"Can I... can I help you?"

Pollo thought about it for a second. Could Druig help him? Did he even want his help? A er all, it was his fault that he'd gotten hurt. Had he not gotten the flashes, he wouldn't have lost focus. And even if he hadn't had them, then he could've figured out how to stop this from happening if he hadn't gotten his memory erased. Druig should've listened to him when he came to his cabin the night of his nightmare and stayed true to his words when he'd said that they would talk about it in the morning. Still, he needed help. And he couldn't stay otherwise.

"Yes, you can," he replied. "This is a very delicate procedure but, by instinct, my body is going to tense up and try to sit up. Run from the heat, y'know? Anyway, I'm going to need you to hold me down while I do this. Even if I try to fight it, okay? It's just a natural reaction, I don't actually want to stop this. If I do, I'll bleed out and die. So, my life is in your hands. What do you think?"

His life wasn't actually in Druig's hands. At first, he'd just thought he would tie himself to the bed, or maybe try stay seated while doing the procedure, however he needed Druig fully focused on the task. If he was to trust him, then the best way to do it was to scare him into thinking he would die. Which wasn't technically a lie, but still.

Druig seemed to have lost some colours in his face, nonetheless he nodded and sat on the bed, next to Pollo. The taller Eternal laid down, taking a deep breath before he placed the twisted tissues in his mouth. Then, seeing that Druig wasn't doing anything, he let out a muddled complaint and took his hand, placing them on his shoulders.

As he couldn't talk clearly, he gave him a pointed look, which he easily understood, putting pressure on his shoulders. He wanted to close his eyes, knowing the pain that would come next would be horrible, still he needed all the focus he could have.

So as to make sure it would work, he had to make it so as that only his hands could endure the heat of the ropes, and so just that was already asking a lot of e ort out of him. It had become a reflex for him to change the temperature of his whole body every time he made a rope appear in his hand, which is the reason why it took him a few seconds before he got it right. Already, he could feel sweat on his forehead, though it could've just been the stress. He tried to relax his body, even if he knew it would be almost impossible to do. Before he could overthink it, he quickly placed the rope on his chest, letting out a muddled scream as he did so. Just like he'd predicted, his body tried to shot up, yet Druig managed to hold him down. He wanted to close his eyes, both so as to not see it and so as to stop the tears from leaving his eyes. He didn't do it, of course, though he did glance at Druig for a second.

The other Eternal looked worried for him. Or maybe the pain was just making him delusional. Still, in that second when he looked at him, he noticed the way Druig nodded at him, encouraging him to go on. And that was really all he needed. He counted to five before finally letting the rope disappear. As soon as he did it, his whole body seemed to relax, tears streaming down his face while he spat out the tissue and pushed Druig's hands away.

"Get me a painkiller and the sponge in the bowl next to the bed," he ordered. He didn't say please. He'd just successfully cauterized his own wound and was now in incredible pain. He would say please later.

The first thing Druig got was the sponge, though he seemed mildly disgusted—or worried?—about the fact that the water had turned red. So, carefully, Pollo tried to clean the blood on his chest, still he would've preferred if he'd gotten the painkiller first to stop the pain.

"Where can I find the painkillers?" Asked Druig, rather stressed out.

"They're in my bag," stated Pollo. "In a little blue box. The same blue as your eyes. You can just give me the box. And relax. I'm not dying. Not anymore."

Thanks to yoult's what he should've continued with, yet he didn't. He trusted that Druig could read between the lines and if he couldn't, then too bad. He was still mad at him. Not as much as he'd been in the last years, but he still was. And, in his opinion, he had every right to be.

For some reason, a smirk was tugging at Druig's lips as he took out the box. "Blue like my eyes? Did you miss me, Polly?"

No. He didn't get to act like everything was normal a er the flashes that he'd caused were the reason he'd gotten injured. He didn't get to tease him like he hadn't kicked him out of the village a er having locked away his memories for centuries.

"No, I just thought the painkillers would make you less of a pain in the ass if I were to see you again," he paused, swallowing with the help of the glass of water he'd le next to the bed earlier, the only water in the room that wasn't tainted red. "It looks like it didn't work."

He groaned as he sat down on the bed, taking his shirt in his hands. He sighed, seeing as it was still wet with blood. Before he knew it, Druig had threw another shirt in his face. He yelped in shock, taking the shirt out if his face so that he could give an o ended look to Druig. He stopped himself in his track when he noticed that the smaller was already leaving, stopping just before he'd passed through the doors. He wasn't looking at Pollo, so he couldn't see the look in his eyes. The look of someone who wanted to apologize without knowing how.

"You forgot it when you le," he mumbled, hands behind his back. "And the pyre is ready, by the way."

With that, he le. Pollo didn't blame him. He could see that he was trying to be better. And he wanted to forgive him. He really did. Yet, every time he tried to leave the last behind, something happened to make it all collapse. And they really lacked skills in communication. They never managed to have one conversation without fighting. Had Arishem made them like that, as a joke? Not being able to feel such a thing for anyone but the other and yet not being meant to be? How many had they failed to be happy together in the other worlds they'd destroyed?

Pollo put on his shirt, struggling to do so at first, and when he did, he was quick to leave the cabin, Dragon following close behind. He didn't want to make them wait, which is why he didn't take the time to look at himself and barely noticed the blood still in his cheek from before. When he arrived, they were already waiting for him without a word. Druig was standing further away from the others, still he was. Gilgamesh had been one of the few Eternals he'd never fought with. They'd been friends.

It was strange, seeing Gilgamesh unmoving, his skin grey and his eyes empty. This might be why Pollo closed his eyes as he made a rope of light appear at the bottom of the pyre, catching the wood on fire. It was almost a pretty thing to see. Well, it would've been if they didn't know the person laying on the pyre. It might not have been the sunrise, like it would've most suited Gilgamesh, nonetheless, it was pretty enough.

He stood next to Druig, not saying a thing. No one deserved to be le alone at such a time. Still, they were far enough from one another so as to not touch by accident. Even then, Pollo could smell him. That particular odour that was Druig's and Druig's only. He'd missed it. It always managed to make him feel better. Even when he had tears in his eyes. They didn't look at each other. They couldn't. If they did, they would start sobbing. They knew it. As the pyre went down in flame and Gilgamesh's body disappeared from view, Karun started to pray. Along with him, Pollo hummed a so melody, not loud enough to disparut his prayers but still there to reassure Thena, who was crying as well.

Gilgamesh was dead.

Most of the Eternals le to prepare the jet when the ceremony was over. Pollo didn't. He didn't approach Thena, nor did he say anything, still he stayed. He couldn't leave her alone. He wasn't quite sure why, but Druig hadn't le either. Maybe he just wanted to be there for Thena. Maybe he didn't want Pollo to be alone. He would never ask. He would never know. Nonetheless, he was glad that he was.

Sersi was here too, though she'd probably stayed to try and convince Druig to help. Yet a er what had happened, there was no doubt in Pollo's mind that he would be there. He couldn't leave them to do this alone, not a er Gilgamesh's death. Not a er the Deviants had attacked his village. Sersi didn't know that, of course. She didn't know Druig like he did. No one did. He still didn't know if that was a good or a bad thing.

Thena entered the river slowly, holding the urn in which Gilgamesh's ashes had been placed. She was hugging it like he was still there, hugging her back, as tears rolled down her cheeks. Pollo wanted to go see her, hug her, however he knew it was better not to do so. This was her last moment with him. He wasn't going to interrupt that. She deserved to say goodbye to her protector. A er all those years they'd lived together, even a er the Eternals parted ways, it couldn't be easy to lose him. For a reason that Pollo couldn't quite understand, he looked at Druig as that thought passed through his mind. He quickly looked away as he almost made eye contact with Sersi, who'd sat next to him.

"When I le, I thought about taking over the minds of every human on this planet," stated so ly Druig. He could've been talking to himself, Sersi, Pollo or even Gilgamesh. Maybe he was talking to all of them at the same time. "Violence, fear, greed, all gone."

"Why didn't you?" Asked Sersi.

Pollo had never wondered why. He'd always trusted Druig's judgment before. Before. It felt like such a long time ago since he'd last trusted him. It was tiresome, to hold a grudge. That's why he'd never been very good at it.

"Because without their flaws, they wouldn't be human," he replied.

The taller Eternal felt him looking in his direction. He didn't meet his gaze, nonetheless he heard the words that were hidden behind his statement. I'm sorry He let the apology pass through him, caressing his skin like the water of the river. He didn't answer, nor did he let any emotion pass on his face. He wasn't sure if he was ready to accept an apology. Not in front of Sersi, that was for sure.

"Please, Druig," she pleaded. "You can't stay here anymore. These Deviants are trying to keep us from killing their own kind. They have a conscience now. That makes them more dangerous."

He shook his head at that. He couldn't talk yet, his voice would break if he did, still he wanted her to know that he disagreed with her words. Druig understood. He always did.

"No, Sersi. That makes them us," he said, speaking both for himself and Pollo. "Eternals and Deviants. Arishem's children. But you are asking me to take control of the mind of a Celestial. I do not have that kind of power."

"We'll need Phastos," she continued, finally understanding.

Now, Pollo wasn't one to say 'I told you so', but he came very close to doing it. When they'd came to see him, he'd immediately told them they should go get Phastos, who could easily find the others and even use the Domo to do it without losing too much time. He didn't know why they hadn't immediately done it. Phastos had always been the smartest of them all. He would've known from the beginning what to do with the Deviants and the emergence. And, to be perfectly honest, Pollo had always liked Phastos.

"Well, good luck," Druig sighed. "He gave up on humans a long time ago."

As he spoke, Thena let Gilgamesh's ashes fall in the water, a few tears dropping into the river as well. Even a er she'd done it, she stayed there for a moment. In silence. Without moving. It must've hurt so much, to loose the better part of yourself. Once more, Pollo had the misfortune to look at Druig. This time, he was already looking at him. They didn't break eye contact, at first. They weren't trying to communicate anything either. Today had changed a lot of things. For the Eternals. For the Deviants. For the both of them.

Pollo closed his eyes. He had to.