# iii - Cave sweet cave

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**Mesopotamia, 5000 BC**

**A FEW MONTHS PASSED SINCE THEY'D FIRST ARRIVED AND THEY'D BEEN RELENTLESSLY FIGHTING DEVIANTS SINCE THEN.** Soon enough, they would have to move but until then, nothing would change. Still, even if they were Eternals, they could get tired, so Ajak had decided to give them the day off and let them do whatever it was that they did when they weren't fighting Deviants. Sersi had went to see the humans, Phastos was staying locked in his lab, Makkari would go and try to find something to steal, Druig would be gloomy, Gilgamesh would try to learn how to cook, Thena would fight Deviants, Ikaris would talk strategy with Ajak or just follow Sersi around, Kingo would be listening to Sprite who was inventing stories and Pollo had decided he would go back to the cave were they'd killed a pack of Deviants.

At first, he was joking when he said he wanted to make it cozier, but since then he'd found out that humans would paint on the walls of some caves to count the tales of their hunting trip. He had to admit, he'd been curious about that tradition and had wanted to try it out. The only things he would really hunt were Deviants, but he could draw his life on Olympia, so that Earth would always remember him and the other Eternals after they'd left. If they found the cave, then they would have tons of stories to tell their children. He liked that idea, which is why after learning how to create the paints with the help of a few humans, he now sat in front of one of the walls, wondering what to paint. He knew it had to be something meaningful to him, maybe even the thing that he cared the most about. But the blue he wanted to use for the eyes was more grey than anything, so it wouldn't be a realistic drawing, but he had to try.

Pollo's art skills weren't particularly impressive, but it wasn't mediocre either. He couldn't draw the form as he wished he could, yet he still knew that it didn't matter. It's not like anybody could understand what he was drawing anyway. Humans had no knowledge of the kind of beauty he wanted to represent on those walls. Shades of red and black stained his fingers as he traced the symbol of his hope onto the rock. Hope that he might see Olympia again. Hope that he might see his family again.

Before you start thinking that he was being sentimental or poetic, just know that he drew a fucking dragon. But maybe there was a bit of nostalgia in that drawing, after all. Because on the back of that dragons sat five little figures. His family. He was sure of it. He knew that he had two siblings, he had to, and that his parents still loved each other deeply. But was a middle child? Or a first born? What if he was adopted? And what about his siblings? Twins? One girl and one boy, maybe? What if he didn't actually have siblings? What if he imagined it all?

Why was he thinking about all of this?! It had months and not once he'd stopped missing his family, yet he still couldn't remember their faces! Why? All he could remember were feelings. He could close his eyes and picture himself holding a book as he sat in front of his house in the afternoon sun caressing his skin. He felt a laugh bubbling into his chest in the morning as his hair was still messy from an agitated sleep. He was sure he'd held someone's hands, humming as he walked down a street paved with white stones. He had cried once, ugly sobbing in his mother's arms after getting his heart broken for the first time. But maybe that last one wasn't really a memory. Maybe he was just confusing it with the tears that were now running on his cheeks.

He knew his family and his home had been real. All those memories and feelings were too precise for it to be all fake, so it must've been his own fault that he couldn't remember them. How could he be such a terrible son? He was being hypocritical, saying he missed and loved them when really he'd forgotten their faces. Soon, the sadness was replaced by anger, alas it had not stopped the tears from falling, staining his heart with the darkness that always comes when grieving something that is not yet dead. Some say that anger is an eternal flame, burning alive its bearer. Pollo disagreed. Love was a flame. Happiness was a warm ember. Anger was ice, freezing the blood inside veins and keeping you cold when you needed warmth more than ever.

He could almost feel his skin cracking as it froze, the frost crawling on his neck, wanting to go inside his mouth and ears so that he could finally touch his heart and kill him. Terrified that anger would make his tears freeze on his eyelashes, thus rendering him blind, he started changing his body temperature so he could feel the sunlight that was supposed to burst through his skin at every hour of the day. But anger is not something you can control in such a way. It is merely a feeling, haunting someone's mind until they couldn't hold it in anymore. So his power was useless against it. He couldn't have used it to kill the nager of anybody if he wished for it.

And as the pain that comes with this horrible feeling started taking over him, he thought of Druig. He did not hate him, even if they weren't actually close friends. But if he'd been with him, he could've stopped it all with one thought. He should've asked him to come with him, maybe even bribe him with food. He would've helped, he was sure of it. He would've made it all stop, but maybe in the bliss of controlling an Eternal's mind he would've taken all of his free will. If it had been the case, then so be it. His free will had cause him nothing but pain, he had no use for it, so if Druig could find one, then it was his!

The cold didn't leave him and neither did the anger. But he realized how much he'd raise his body's temperature when he heard his tears sizzling against his skin. He was lucky as it did not hurt him due to his controlled warmth, but he knew he had to go back to his original temperature. It had changed nothing when it came to the freezing feeling choking him and he did not wish for the rock around him to start melting. He tried to take a deep breath, but it was interrupted by a repressed sob.

Pathetic, he thought. And there it was. The freezing anger. It had managed to find its way to his heart. He felt it, making his chest tighten, cutting the air from his lungs and making all of him tremble. He'd never been so angry at someone as he was at himself right now. Not that he remembered ever being angry at anyone else. And so, as he did not know how to get rid of the frost in his heart or how to kill the rage trying to claw its way out of his skin, he did all he could do. All anybody in so much pain could do. He screamed.

The scream hurt his throat, aching but also warming. He did not put all his anger or all his pain in that scream. Because he didn't know how much he had. And he would need one way or another, he knew that. So instead he just put the little bit he couldn't bear anymore. The little bit that was too much. He screamed. As loud as he could, hoping that his family could hear it from Olympia. Hoping that they would hear him and hear his apologies, his sorrows. He wanted everybody to hear him scream. To hear him care. They had to know that he did love his family, even if he'd forgotten too much about them.

He screamed until he had no more voice left to scream with. But with the anger now gone, all that was left was the pain and sadness. He sobbed. Not like he remembered doing it in Olympia, because now that his voice was gone it was more like a whimper as his whole body continued shaking. He wished that, like Sprite, he could've made himself disappear. Then, he could've simply stayed in the cave, unseen by those searching for him, sobbing until he had no tears left. Even if the cold had left him, he still hadn't gained back the warmth he longed for. All that was left was emptiness, utter nothingness. He couldn't escape it. It was too late for him. That was what he was doomed to be. A son who could not remember his parents. An Eternal who could not live happily. A warrior who could not win. He was doomed to be empty. Cold. In so much pain that he wanted to escape his own skin and live as a butterfly. He knew very well that butterflies had short life, but that's what he found himself wanting more than anything in that moment. A short life.

And before he could question what stopped him from having the short life he wished for, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He could've attacked, tried to hide his tears or simply ran away, but he did none of those things. He stayed there sobbing and the person came to sit next to him, not saying a word until he'd finished crying. Through the blur created by his tears, he recognized the white armour of Thena and he felt grateful that it was here who'd find him. He knew that, out of every Eternals, she was the least likely to judge him.

He couldn't really tell how much time he spent crying. It could've been hours, it felt like hours, but the sun didn't look like it had moved much so barely a few minutes must have passed. However, he couldn't quite believe that it was even possible for someone to feel so many emotions in such a short period of time. When he finally managed to appease himself, he looked at Thena, wondering what he would say. How could he ever admit he'd forgotten his family?

Thena must've understood that he couldn't, wouldn't, talk about it, because she was the first to speak up. "Can I paint with you?"

The question took him by surprise but he nodded nonetheless. As she let the paint caress her fingers, her movements stayed so soft and graceful, as though she feared that any brusque movement would make him burst into tears once again. He let her paint by herself at first, too tired to do anything, but she didn't seem to mind. It was fascinating to look at her as she painted. She would barely touch the rock but still managed to paint on it. And while at first he couldn't quite understand what she wanted to represent, he finally managed to recognize his black and gold armour. She was a much better painter than he was, which didn't really surprise him.

She didn't stop after finishing the painting of Pollo. She continued painting another one of the Eternals, Gilgamesh, showing no signs of stopping. He didn't want her to have to stay until night had fallen just so she could finish her painting, so he put his fingers in pet as well, going to stand next to her, wanting to help her. He decided to start drawing something easy, the Domo, but he finished rather quickly. So he started drawing Makkari. She was probably his dearest friend. She always managed to make him laugh, not that it was really hard to do, and he just really liked hanging out with her. Expect for when, for some reasons, she put her mind into saying that he and Druig should date. He didn't really understand where that idea came from, but she was hanging onto it for months now, refusing to let it go. Maybe if it hadn't been so easy for those two to flirt she would've stopped by now, but she wouldn't listen to him each time he'd say that flirting was just a part of both his and Druig's persona. Still, even if she could be annoying with those things, he cared about her deeply.

He was taking more time than Thena to paint, so when he finished painting Makkari, she'd already done most of the Eternals. So, because he had to draw someone he could remember by memory, he decided to draw Druig. He could see Makkari's teasing smile even though she wasn't here, but he ignored it, starting his painting. It was easier to remembering Druig, because he was super annoying. Pollo was pretty sure that they were friends, but it was kind of complicated because they went from flirting to fighting in less than a second. But even if they weren't friends, Druig seemed to be everywhere. It was just impossible to ignore his presence. That's why he was the one he could remember best even if he wasn't even in his top three of favourite Eternals.

It felt like only minutes passed, but when they finished, the sun had disappeared from the sky and the only reason they could still see something was because of the faint light made by Pollo's rope. Next to his dragon now stood all eleven of the Eternals. Not all colours were the right ones, but it was still easy to recognize who was who. They still didn't speak a word as Thena placed her hand on his back, leading him outside of the cave. He wasn't sure he wanted to go back to the Domo. He felt good here and he just really didn't want to talk to anyone. He could always stay and live in this cave. It was much more colourful than his room, so why not?

He had let his thoughts distract him, because before he could even decide to live in a cave for the rest of his life, they were halfway to the Domo. Anyway, he was pretty sure Thena wouldn't have let him. He was thankful that she hadn't questioned him, even now she stayed silent. He didn't want to talk about it, he didn't know what he would say if they did. And she seemed to understand that. She hadn't even asked what had made him break down like that. But then again, maybe she just didn't care.

He counted himself lucky as they entered the Domo, as no one seemed to be around for the moment. They'd probably all left to go see the humans. He wasn't expecting any of them to wonder where they'd been, but he still preferred not to risk being questioned by the others. As they walked down one of the hallways, Thena suddenly raised her hand in front of him, forcing him to stop with her. She looked him up and down, making sure he wouldn't break down again.

"I think you should go to sleep. Relax."

Even though her sentence had been phrased like a suggestion, her tone made it clear that she was not giving him a choice. Immediately, he was tempted to argue with her, to tell her he wasn't a kid and she had no business telling him what to do. But she was right. All those emotions had tired him out. And he wouldn't stay awake just so he could prove a point. He nodded, but she didn't let him leave just yet.

"Do you... do you want me to tell Ajak what happened?" Thena asked. "Or would you rather do it yourself."

He didn't want to tell Ajak anything. She would worry and sideline when they were only there for a few months now. He would appear weak to the others and himself. But if he told Thena that, would she understand? Maybe if he told her he would do it himself, he would be able to avoid it... But no. She'd been so nice to him, he couldn't just lie to her. Either she would understand or she wouldn't. There was nothing he could do about it.

"I'd rather Ajak didn't hear about it."

She seemed hesitant at first, but after a few seconds of reflection, she agreed. She didn't let her hand fall down next to her body just yet, making Pollo wonder if she wanted to say something else. She must've been wondering the same thing before she finally sighed and let him go.

"Sleep well," she breathed out.

He smiled at her, wanting her to know that he was feeling better, but he doubted it was very convincing. "Thanks."

Quickly enough he disappeared from her view, but she still stayed there, unmoving. Was she making the right decision? Should she really keep silent about this event? If Ajak could help him, wouldn't it be worth telling her? But he was counting on her and she would not betray him.

"What was *that* about?"

It was as though Druig literally came out of the shadows, however she'd felt his presence as soon as they'd boarded the ship. At first, she wasn't sure it was him, but who else would sneak up on Pollo instead of talking to him like a normal person?

"Nothing that concerns you, Druig," she claimed. "He's feeling tired, that's all."

He scoffed, narrowing his eyes at her. "He once stayed awake for two days even though he was tired. Why would he decide to go to sleep now? Because you asked him to? You two are hiding something."

"No, but it's cute that you care enough to think so." She smiled teasingly at him

"I'll find out, you know that, right?"

"If you want to know so badly, ask him," huffed Thena. "But don't be surprised when he stops talking to you."

And without even a glance in his direction, she left. She was right, Druig knew that. Pollo wouldn't appreciate him encroaching on his privacy. Still, he'd seen the other boy's eyes when he'd come in. And he'd met with enough humans grieving to know what it was like for someone to be broken. So if Thena wouldn't tell him and he couldn't ask Pollo, he would just have to make sure the young man didn't destroy himself by accident.

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