iv - Depression is a bitch unless Druig is here

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Babylon, 575 BC

POLLO WAS TIRED OF FIGHTING. It got boring after some time. Well, a lot of things seemed to get boring from time to time. He couldn't really explain it, but at some times everything around him seemed to get monotonous. It could last days, months and sometimes even years. It all really depended and it seemed this was one of those times when even killing Deviants couldn't make him feel better.

He sighed as he let his rope wipe in the air, burning the side of a Deviant's face. He didn't even try to move as the beast jumped onto him, pinning him onto the floor. Once again, he didn't struggle, only breathing out loudly as the monster bit his right shoulder. He tightened his jaw at the pain, but the sizzling of the Deviant's paws as his high temperature caught up to it was enough for him to forget. And while he wasn't a fan of feeling blood run down his neck and arm, he barely let out a whimper. He knew that he was in pain, but he could barely feel it. It seemed distant, surreal. But it was there. And the thought of Makkari worrying about him was enough to decide to attack the thing. He made two ropes appear, one for each of his hands, and twirled them around the Deviant's neck. He gagged as he felt the skin melt on him and though he still didn't regret not wearing his armour, he knew it might hav3 been less disgusting if he'd listened to the others and worn it.

Finally, the monster's head fell off and he rolled to his side to avoid it, wincing at the pain in his shoulder. He tried to ignore all the blood, both his and the Deviant's, but it quickly wasn't his main problem. A new Deviant attacked him before he was ready for it. He managed not to fall back onto the ground, but the sudden maneuver he had to do to avoid the creature made him lose his balance for a second, giving the perfect opportunity for the Deviant to charge at him once more. This time, instead of letting the monster tackle him, he jumped onto its head, immediately regretting the idea as he met out a small yell of pain. His shoulder was hurting much more now that he actually had to use his arms not to fall off and the Deviant was of absolutely no help as it tried to get him off its back.

So maybe Pollo had not thought this through. It wasn't the first plan he hadn't thought through and he was still alive! Maybe a small part of him had thought that trying something crazy would help him feel better and bring back the joy that was supposed to come when he killed Deviants. Yet, even though he was trying to stay onto a monster's back all while having a badly injured shoulder should've been a lot of fun, everything still seems lifeless.

As he finally managed to grab onto the Deviant so he could sit on its back, he let one of his rope go around its neck, forcing it to answer to him. He tried to control it, but of course that wouldn't be so easy. Nothing ever seems easy for him. In the distance, or maybe it was actually rather close, he heard Kingo's shout of surprise, however he ignored it as he tried not to fall off. He had to give it up to the best, it was persistent. Of course, he'd met more than one persistent Deviant and they'd all ended up dead, so he didn't care much for this one. He tried to tighten the rope, but the constant movement made it hard for him to hold on. Eventually though, the Deviant managed to make him fall off. He rolled onto himself, cutting his left cheek on a rock and feeling his ankle twist, before he managed to land rather gracefully. Of course, it was probably just making his injury worse, but it didn't matter to him anymore. Not like it'd ever mattered to anyone before. He was there to kill Deviants and if he died in the process, the only thing the others would cry about was that he hadn't managed to finish them all.

He growled a bit, as though acting like an animal would scare off the Deviant, before he threw a rope towards it, managing to grab a hold of its waist. With a cute movement in his direction, he managed to cut the monster in half. Even if he hadn't actually used his hand for that, he could still feel the skin melt under his light and the rope passing through the bones like it was butter. He didn't move for a few seconds, looking at the two half of the monster falling on the ground as he let out a deep breath. He tried standing up, but he immediately winced at the pain in his ankle. From the corner of his eye, he noticed Makkari coming his way, so he put on a fake smile and tried to advance towards her, ignoring the pain.

"I told you to wear your armour!" Now, Pollo wasn't scared of a lot of things, but an angry Makkari was simply terrifying. "And you're bleeding, of course!"

He looked at the spot she was gesturing at to see that she was right. His sleeve was soaked in blood and he could feel a few drops fall down his cheek as well. Still, he tried to reassure her as well as he could.

"That? It's not blood," he lied. "Not mine at least. I think it's melted skin."

While that was a half-truth, she did not look like she believed him for a second. Luckily for him, he was saved by Kingo before she could continue lecturing him on why it was important for him to stay alive.

"Man, that was awesome back there!" He shouted as he wrapped an arm around his shoulders. Pollo had to contain the yelp of pain that tried to pass his lips as he noticed that Makkari was still looking at him. "I mean, the Deviant totally won, but it was still super cool! I was sure you had him for good!"

He was neither insulted or flattered by those comments. But then again, that might've just been because he'd zoned out. He was trying not to feel all the pain in his body yet it seemed like this was all he was able to focus on. He could feel the blood running down his skin, tainting every part of him as he felt it slid down his arm and staining his fingers. It was all he could feel. He shuddered as he felt the warm liquid going down his back and everything seemed to fade around him. Everything but his thoughts.

Those always refused to leave him alone. They would taunt him, toy with him. Sometimes, he would hear them laugh at him and he'd wish they would just stop. Sometimes, he would hear them scream and he'd cry, hoping they would just stop. They rarely did. They would crawl under his skin, biting and screeching. And though none of his thoughts were making sense at the moment, he still knew they were here, hiding in the darkest corner of his mind. He heard their whispers and the fact he couldn't make words of them only made it worse.

"Kingo, get away from him!"

The sudden shout startled him, forcing him back to reality. He snapped his head towards the voice, only for his eyes to fall onto Thena's terrorized face. It was a rare expression, so rare it made Kingo take a few steps back, hands in the air in surrender.

"Can't you see he's injured?!" Since she'd found him crying in a cave a few centuries ago, she had become overly protective of him. He knew it wasn't because she cared, she didn't, but just because she felt responsible for him as long as she was the only one to know about him. "He needs to go to Ajak right away!"

He used all the strength he had left not to roll his eyes. He didn't know why she faked her concern in front of the others when he knew very well that, if he died, she would finally be free of the secret he'd asked her to keep.

"I'm fine," he tried to convince them, though the fact he faltered and Gilgamesh had to hold him so he wouldn't fall didn't really help his case. "Seriously guys, you're worrying about nothing."

" We'll see," Makkari signed as Gilgamesh lifted him up off the ground, not even letting him struggle.

"Fine. Do whatever you want," he snapped.

The speedster smiled at him maliciously. " We will."

"Well don't come crying at me when you look like dummies because Ajak told you there's nothing to worry about."

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"You were absolutely right to be worried," spoke Ajak. "I can heal this, but he's lucky that it didn't get infected or that he didn't make it worse."

This time, Pollo did nothing to stop himself from rolling his eyes as the others let out little shouts of victory. For people who'd been worried about him two seconds ago, they seemed strangely proud to have been right about his injuries. They must've realized how inappropriate it was to cheer at the news because they stopped after a few seconds, looking at their shoes in shame.

"I'll need space," the prime Eternal ordered. "So go, relax. When I'm finished, our Pollo will be as good as new."

"If it's possible, I'd like to be a bit better, though," he teased, trying to cheer up the other Eternals. "I feel like there would be some place for improvement."

She shook her head at him, smiling. "You're fine as you are. Now all of you go. I don't want you to distract me. Or him."

While Makkari seemed hesitant at first, she finally smiled at him before following the others out of the room. They all waved at him, but quickly enough, they'd completely disappeared. Then again, he wasn't surprised. Or maybe he was a bit. After all, he'd expected them to leave sooner. It's not like they actually wanted to stay here. They knew he would be fine and even if they didn't, they probably would have cared less. It's not like he was extremely close to them anyway. They were his friends, yes, but he was almost certain that to them he was nothing more than a colleague they had to endure until the last Deviant was dead. If the blood lost was fatal to him, it wouldn't be quite significant and maybe, just maybe...

Pollo frowned. He went to pass his hand in his hair, but Ajak stopped him before he could do so. He was forgetting something. Just a few seconds ago he'd been thinking of something but... it was escaping him. He tried replaying over his thoughts, but it was as though he hadn't thought of anything since before his fight against the Deviants. He raised his head, wanting to find something in the room that could clue as to what he was thinking before, but instead he met Druig's yellow eyes. They weren't yellow for long, leaving him to think he'd had only been a trick of the light, however he didn't let it haunt his thoughts. Instead, he smiled brightly at the young man, feeling a billion butterflies passing in his veins.

"Druig!" He exclaimed, once again tempted to wave before Ajak gave him a warning look. "Did you miss me already?"

"No," he huffed, but Pollo easily saw the smile he was trying to hide. "I just heard that you'd gotten hurt."

"So you came to see me? Aww, that's so cute!"

"I just wanted to see if Makkari was right and you'd been dumb enough not to wear your armour," he snapped.

He didn't mean to be bitter, but how could he not be when his friend's previous thoughts haunted him? Pollo had been supposed to be the sweet to his bitter, alas he was really the salt to his cut, the flower to his grave and the tears to his thoughts. When they'd met, the taller man had been nothing but sunlight and golden petals. But he had only just started existing. It didn't take him much time to change. All he had to do was see humans happy, always with their families, for his petals to wither and his light to darken. After that, he started... changing.

He wouldn't smile as much, his life would never be anything but bitter, he'd refuse to wear his armour in a fight and would always come back with grave injuries that could've been easily avoided. Everybody had noticed the sudden change, but no one noticed quite as much as Druig. He would hear his thoughts, hear them screaming, and at some point, he just couldn't bear seeing him suffer anymore. Maybe he'd done it in a selfish act so he wouldn't be bothered by Pollo's self-destructive thoughts, but he couldn't say that he wasn't happy to see him smile again.

So why was he suddenly so mean to Pollo? Yes, their friendship had always been strange, a fine line between rivals and flirts, still he would've expected he'd be happier as he saw his friend's whole face light up as he came into the room. But he wasn't. Instead he just found himself annoyed by it, as though it was Pollo's fault he would change mood so quickly, when really he had been the one to force the change. He tried not to feel the pain in his chest as he noticed the absence of armour on Pollo and even if the other man hadn't been thinking about it when he arrived, he wasn't a stranger to this behaviour.

Maybe that's why he refused to show his friend kindness. Because he didn't want him to get closer when he could decide at any moment that he was tired and would go fight a Deviant without wearing any kind of armour. Because he knew that being friends with Pollo would hurt him. And yes, it was selfish, but he couldn't help himself. He was afraid. So for the moment, he was more than happy with the strange friendship they had.

"Oh." The disappointment in the taller boy's face was obvious, but there was also an uneasy smile stuck to his face. "It's weird, I can't quite remember why I wasn't wearing my armour. Maybe I forgot?"

Druig hesitated before he answered, not wanting to slip up and tell him the real reason. "Probably. These days you always have your head in the cloud."

Before any of them could say something more, not like they had anything else to say anyway, Ajak interrupted them. To be perfectly honest, both of them had forgotten she was there, even though she'd been working on healing each of Pollo's injuries the whole time.

"All done!" She smiled. "Now all you have to do is try not to get injured as much."

"I don't get injured that much," he laughed, but the look the two Eternals gave each other was enough to convince him otherwise. "But if I do, it's only so I can see Druig worry about me."

Of course, Pollo couldn't guess how much Druig would hate this sentence, making him shudder at the thought that the taller boy might actually think this was the way to see him more often. Still, he tried to hide with a charming smile.

"You don't need to make me worry for me to see you." He smirked as he passed his hand on Pollo's arm. "You can just ask."

A chuckle passed the boy's lips as he pushed Druig's hand away so he could put on his blood stained shirt. "And let you win? Well that's just dumb."

"There's nothing to win, Polly, this isn't a game."

"Of course it is." He pushed himself off the table, forcing the other man to take a step back so he could leave him some space. "And there is everything to win."

"Stop it," interrupted Ajak, a grimace of disgust on her face. "Or if you want to continue, go elsewhere. I don't need to know what both of you do in your spare time."

Druig huffed, placing his hand on Pollo's now covered arm as they started leaving.

"Thank you, Ajak," spoke Pollo. "I don't know what I would do without you."

"You'd bleed out to death." Her tone was teasing, but there was no denying the truth in her lies. "And you're welcome. Now go! Have fun! But not too much fun."

The taller boy's heartfelt laugh seemed to resonate in all of the Domo as he once again moved away from his friend's touch. "Race you to the door?"

Druig sighed, not expecting anything else from his friend. For some reason, he loves competition. But what he loved even more was winning. Which is why he always chose the exact competition he knew his adversary couldn't beat him at.

"Which door?"

Even though he had no intention of making an effort in this race, the simple sight of his friend's brightening grin was enough to make him feel good about accepting the race.

"The main door, of course," he uttered. "So that we can go see the humans outside."

"Of course," he groaned. He liked going to see the humans, but the main door was a longer race than he was ready for. "And when do we start?"

"Right now!"

And in a second, Pollo had disappeared, the only thing he'd left being the sound of his feet as they hit the floor. Druig, on the other hand, hadn't even moved. He took an apple that was lying around, following behind his friend. Only, he was walking, knowing that running would just put him in a good mood. But as he was about to leave, Ajak called out for him.

"Druig." She sounded worried and her eyes showed the same concern as he turned around slightly. "You do know that you won't always be there for him, right? This is a monster he has to fight on his own. You can't keep doing this to him."

He narrowed his eyes at her before he continued to walk away with a click of his tongue. "I don't know what you're talking about."

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