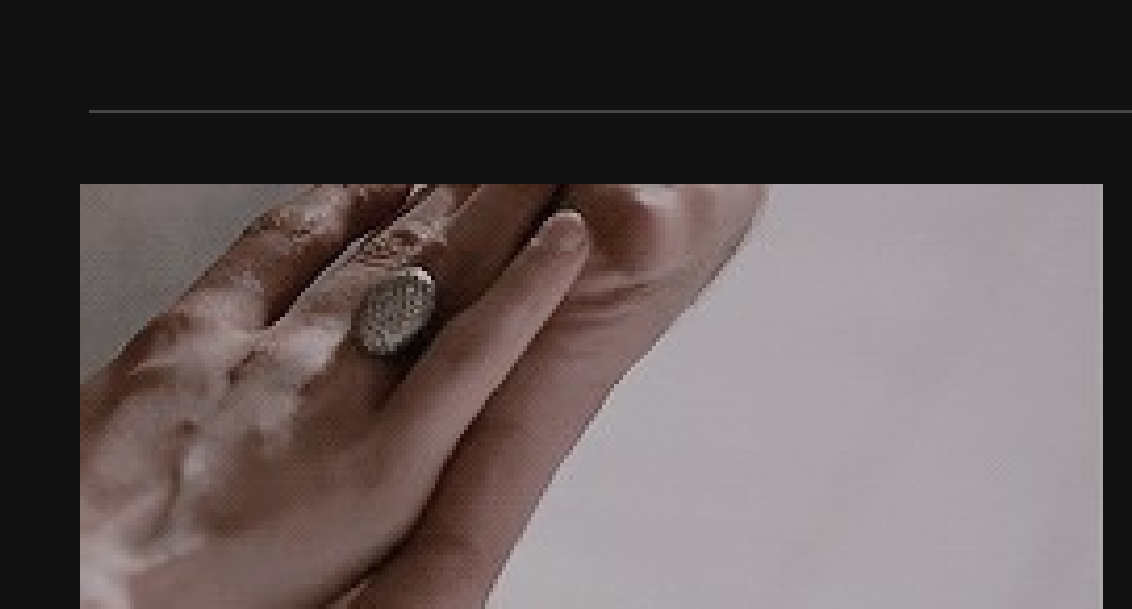
xxiii - Gilga-Mess



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Australia, 2023

THE FIRST THING POLLO NOTICED WAS THE DEAD DEVIANT ON THE GROUND. It was no doubt the result of a fight with Gilgamesh, as its organs were pouring out of its belly, covered in dust. He couldn't quite tell if Thena had helped him or not, but his guess was that it wasn't the case. The Deviant would probably have been sliced in half, if she'd been a part of this.

"This is the Deviant you fought in London?" Asked Kingo, walking side by side with Karun who held his camera, even if he hadn't started filming yet.

Ikaris shook his head slightly before replying. "It's different. There must be more out there than we thought."

Pollo sighed loudly, hugging Dragon a bit tighter, his reaction bringing the others' attention towards him. "Of course there is. Why am I not even surprised by that?"

Both Kingo and Karun approached the dead Deviant while the other Eternals just walked past it, not really minding it. Still, Pollo preferred to stay close to the two men, who were standing the furthest from the door for now, still fearing his meeting with Thena and Gilgamesh. After all, the spark to the fire of his anger had been started by those two, even if they hadn't deserved it. Druig had thrown the gasoline on the woods and Gilgamesh's words had accidentally started the fire.

"Oh. Is... Is this a Deviant, sir?" Wondered Karun, even if he probably already knew the answer, walking closer to the beast.

"Yep."

The human chuckled as he continued to look at the monster. "It's a beautiful creature."

While his comment made a smirk appear on Pollo's face, it seemed to profoundly insult Kingo, who started gesturing at the Deviant with his two hands.

"What? This? This?" He repeated, trying to get a confirmation from his valet about his previous statement. "No. It's hideous. You've never had one try to bite your head off. A beautiful creature would be Dragon the cat, not that ugly thing! Roll."

"Oh," simply let out the human as he started the camera.

Sighing, Pollo took a step back, not wanting to be in the shot. He was already seen too often in this documentary for his liking.

"You're about to meet two of the greatest warriors the world has ever known. Thena, legendary, deadly, fashionable. And her trusty friend... Door." The last word was whispered to Karun, so that he would get a closer shot of the door with his camera. "...a mighty powerhouse of strength, the fearsome Gilgamesh!"

As soon as he finished talking, Ikaris knocked on the door, Kingo waiting in anticipation. However, no one responded, the only sound that could be heard being Dragon's purring as Pollo patted his head.

"Gilgamesh!" Kingo called out loudly one more time, this time managing to get a reaction out of the house's inhabitants.

When Gilgamesh opened the door, he didn't exactly fit the warrior-like description that Kingo had made of him, as he was wearing an apron with the inscription 'Kiss the cook' on it. Yet, he was still exactly as he'd been a few centuries ago. Just like Pollo remembered him, at least. He was still the same kind man he'd known for so long. Though he couldn't see the inside of his house, Pollo still recognized the song Mama Tried by Merle Haggard playing on something he guessed was a picture.

Gilgamesh quickly looked at everybody, his eyes never stopping on anybody in particular. "What took you so long?"

Similarly to Pollo's reaction when he'd first seen the camera, he waved at it in displeasure.

"You look younger today, Sprite," he spoke, walking past them. "Pollo..."

He seemed to hesitate before continuing and Pollo could understand why. The last time they'd spoke, he'd indirectly accused Gilgamesh of being the reason for Druig's departure. And then, when Druig had gone to see Gilgamesh and Thena, he hadn't asked of him to apologize for his behaviour, no, he'd asked that he would say 'hi' for him. That's all. He would've understood if Gilgamesh now hated him.

"It's nice to see you again," he finally decided to say. "I like your cat."

And that was all. Pollo didn't thank him, nor did he apologize, but he promised that he would do it later. They smiled at each other and moved on, Gilgamesh walking up to an oven, which was surrounded by a few other kitchen accessories.

"I have the same apron," chuckled Karun from behind his camera.

Gilgamesh turned his head, confusion painted on his face, probably not having noticed who was behind the camera before. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Karun. Kingo's valet."

"Oh, valet. Like Alfred in Batman," uttered Gilgamesh, stopping to stir his pot for a second so that he could point at Karun, who nodded happily.

"Gilgamesh," called out Ikaris. "The Deviants are back."

By instinct, Pollo turned his head, looking back at the dead Deviant they'd encountered.

"No shit. I could have used some help," he stated,

"We were attacked by a Deviant in London, too," admitted Sprite.

"Even Ikaris couldn't kill it."

Pollo didn't miss the offended look Ikaris threw towards Sersi after her comment, probably wondering why she felt the need to say that.

"You couldn't?" Repeated the warrior, obviously amused by the whole situation.

"I was distracted," Ikaris said, trying to defend himself.

"Sure, man," he laughed. "Hey, guys wanna try my pie?"

He took it out of the stove and just by the smell of it, Pollo knew that he hadto taste it. When Gilgamesh had become such a good cook, he didn't know, but he wouldn't question it as long as he got to eat what he made.

"I'm sorry, Gil. Ajak's dead."

Gee, Ikaris really needed to let someone else do it next time. He obviously didn't know how to break out such a news gently. It was like it didn't even affect him, the way he said without even trying to warn the person he was talking to first. And, when said in such a way, it was not so surprising to see the way Gilgamesh hesitated to believe him.

"It's true, buddy," Sprite continued with a bit more delicacy. "We lost her"

Gilgamesh dropped his arms to his side and, seeing the disaster coming, Pollo made a rope appear, wrapping it around the pain in which the pie was and pulling it towards him. He caught it, yet Gilgamesh didn't seem to notice what had just happened. At first, Pollo tried to look away, however, by doing so, he noticed how everybody else was looking away. Even Karun had lowered down the camera a bit.

Gilgamesh went to sit down, alone. He placed his hand on the table, closing his grip on it until it cracked. Then, Pollo saw something he never expected to see before. Gilgamesh started crying. And not just one silent tear rolling down his cheek, no. He was sobbing, head in his hands. And no one seemed to know what to do. They were all still refusing to meet his eyes, incapable of doing so anyway. The great Eternals, useless when one of their own was in pain. It was almost comical. Almost.

Now, Pollo had never been good when it came to crying, which was ironic, as he did cry a lot. Of course, it actually kind of made sense when you thought about it, because he had no idea how to deal with himself when he started crying, so the others? It was a mess, really. He remembered when he'd first cry, arriving on Earth. He would never have been able to stop had it not been for Thena, who'd been there for him. And when he'd left Druig's village, he'd cried all night, wishing someone was here for him, wishing someone could hold him. He'd hated being alone, back then. He could only guess that Gilgamesh would hate it. Because even if he was surrounded by people who loved him, he was still alone if they refused to help him out. So Pollo, through all of his unease, walked towards him and put a trembling hand on his shoulder.

When Gilgamesh looked up, he was tempted to look away. He didn't like looking at people crying and when that person was his friend, well it was just heartbreaking. He didn't, though. So Gilgamesh took his trembling hand on his own and nodded, as he was not able to use his broken voice to thank him properly. He didn't need to. And for the next few minutes, the man continued crying while Pollo never looked away, even when tears started appearing in his own eyes.

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When Gilgamesh stopped crying, he led them to Thena. She was sitting in front of a tree, which was decorated with wind chimes and surrounded by bones and rocks. She seemed to be drawing something, however Pollo couldn't see it from where he stood. They'd left Karun back at the house with Dragon, not wanting to risk his safety. Seeing Thena, Sersi started walking towards her but was stopped by Gilgamesh.

"Sersi," he said before placing his hand in front of her so she would not go any further. "The attack triggered her. She's no fun to be around right now." Slowly, he approached her, alone. "Hey, Thena. Look who's here. Give me your hand."

She turned around but, of course, it wouldn't be so easy. She'd made her spear appear and tried to attack Gilgamesh with it, however he'd expected it and used his own powers to block her attack.

"Thena," he called out, trying to get her back.

She panted, unresponsive to the name he'd just used. "Everyone in Centuri-6 is going to die."

"Give me your hand."

"It's too late," she continued. "We can't save them."

"Thena," he tried again.

Instead of replying, she simply took out some sort of weapon, a knife maybe, and grunted. To be perfectly honest, Pollo hated the way her eyes turned white when she had an episode. He found it... disturbing. As he expected her to attack again, he was surprised by Sprite deciding to help out, using her powers to change the scenery around them. Even though he hadn't seen it in thousands of years, it barely took him a second for him to recognize the Domo.

"Thena. We came to Earth together on our ship." Sprite used her powers to make constellation-like images appear, retailing some of Thena's greatest battles, which, really, were most of them. "You're an Eternal. The greatest warrior of Olympia. The legendary protector of Athens. The goddess of war. Remember who you are."

The blonde woman started breathing heavily and though she was still in a fighting stance, her weapons seemed to fade away. Carefully, Gilgamesh took her hand in his own.

"Remember," he echoed her speech.

Then, something weird happened. With that word leaving Gilgamesh's lips, Pollo felt a chill go down his spine, an uneasy feeling taking over him. The word. It meant something... more. He knew. It was right in front of him. The answer. All he had to do was reach for it and knowledge would be bestowed upon him.

"Are you okay?" Asked Sersi in a whisper, making him snap back to reality.

Only then did he notice the way his eyes had started watering and his words had gotten caught in his throat. His only answer was to nod, as he didn't actually have an answer to her question.

As he did so, Thena's eyes lost their terrifying white colour and went back to what they originally looked like. Her whole body seemed to relax as she let her hands fall to her side and Sprite's illusions, bringing them back to Australia.

"Thena," called Ikaris.

"Hi," greeted Kingo, with a wave of the hand, an action that was mirrored by Sprite.

She looked at them with mild confusion and while Gilgamesh hadn't seemed to notice Pollo's presence when they'd met earlier, Thena did. Her eyes stopped on him, looking him up and down. She didn't look disappointed by his presence, nor did she look mad. But Thena always was too forgiving with him. She'd seen him weak and because of that, she was the only one who had a good reason to forgive him. And yet, it seemed that none of them wished to hold a grudge against him. Had he really spent so much time fearing that they would hate him when they barely even seemed to remember his outburst?

"Hello," she replied hesitantly.

"Hey, who's your gardener?"

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They'd gone back to Thena and Gilgamesh's house, having been invited to stay over for supper. Now, Pollo wasn't sure if they'd been expecting them to show up or if this was just how much they ate every day, yet the table seemed to have been fully covered in food of all sorts. Pollo didn't stop himself from putting as much as he could in his plate, even if he didn't know what half of this was supposed to be. In the last few years, he'd mostly eaten food you could put in the freezer on more than one occasion.

"This is what you guys eat every day?" Asked Kingo with wonder in his eyes. "Yeah, this is amazing."

"Every day," Gilgamesh confirmed with a chuckle.

"Thank you for this," spoke Ikaris, Pollo immediately joining in on the thanks, though it was barely heard through all the food he'd stuffed himself with.

"Oh, you're welcome," replied the cook, chuckling as he looked at Pollo.

Even Dragon had gotten something, as Gilgamesh had helped Pollo make him a plate filled with meat. Thena looked at her protector who patted her back before starting to go around the table with a pitcher.

"Help yourself," he replied to Ikaris. "This one is a trio of wine, beer, and mead. Made for all the soldiers in the battle of Troy."

"That's so thoughtful," chuckled Karun, which seemed to make Gilgamesh laugh as well. Pollo found himself thinking that those two would be great friends.

Then, Gilgamesh came to Pollo, about to pour the drink into his glass, but the other Eternal stopped him from doing so, putting a hand on his glass. He smiled awkwardly as he received a few confused looks from the others.

"I... I don't drink," he explained.

"What are you talking about?" Questioned Kingo. "You used to drink all the time!"

He looked at the table, a dry laugh leaving his lips. "Yeah. I did. And, at some point in the last few centuries, I started drinking... too much. But I don't anymore. And I want to keep it that way."

He didn't really know what to say after that, so he stayed silent. It didn't seem to bother Gilgamesh, who just shrugged and continued to pour drinks to the others. Though that reminder had made Pollo feel uneasy, he still tried to hide it, continuing to eat and even glancing at Dragon, who seemed just as happy with what he'd gotten.

"Should she be drinking?" Kingo asked Gilgamesh, nodding at her as he did so.

Gilgamesh leaned in close and placed his hand next to his mouth as he started whispering in Kingo's ear, though most of them could still hear what he was saying. "No, hers is non-alcoholic. For kids."

As Gilgamesh took a step back, Kingo smiled at Thena while she drank. Pollo was about to ask if he could have the same, as it seemed rather good, but Gilgamesh spoke up before he could even open his mouth.

"I gave you the same thing, Sprite."

As soon as he said that, he let out a booming laugh, followed by Kingo. The others let out a few chuckles as well, though not quite as loud as those two, yet it was obvious that Sprite was unamused by the joke.

"For kids," repeated Kingo with hilarity.

Gilgamesh clapped his hands together, his laugh slowly fading, while still present in his voice. "I was just kidding."

Those words weren't enough to appease Sprite as she used her powers on him, making it so his clothes would appear to be a pink onesie for a baby. Pollo couldn't help but laugh, almost choking on his food because of it.

"Yours is a secret brew Odin taught me as a thank-you after we helped defeat Laufey's army in Tonsberg," started to explain Gilgamesh, still unaware of what happened to him.

Then, Thena started laughing and it was one of the most beautiful sound ever. Because, after all, what sound could be more magical than the laugh of someone who never laugh? Of course, it wasn't quite as melodious as Druig laugh, but... No. He had to stop thinking about Druig. And he tried to do so as all the other Eternals laughed as well, seeing what Sprite had did, yet he wondered: Would Druig have laughed to this? Or would he have simply considered it childish?

"What?" He looked at his clothes, finally noticing what had just happened. "Oh. I'm a big baby. Very mature. Can you stop?"

Though it was Gilgamesh's turn to be unamused by the joke, Thena seemed to find it particularly funny, as she was still laughing. Just the fact that shewas laughing was enough for Pollo to want to start laughing again.

"Stop," he asked again.

With a smirk plastered on her face, Sprite used her powers, undoing what she had just done.

"Speaking of Odin..." Kingo started. "Thor used to follow me around when he was a little kid. Now he's a famous Avenger and won't return my calls."

Pollo had half the mind to tell him that, as an Asgardian, it was unlikely that Thor owned a phone. He didn't, though.

"So, now that Captain Rogers and Iron Man are both gone, who do you think is gonna lead the Avengers?" Asked Sprite.

"I don't think there's enough Avengers left to need a leader," replied Pollo, shrugging. He hadn't really followed the career of the Avengers, but he had heard that two of them had died and that another one had become extremely old, or something. It was hard to miss, as it had been everywhere in the news, after the Blip.

"I could lead them," stated Ikaris. "I figure I'd be good at that."

"Yeah, you would," Kingo agreed, of course.

"Ajak didn't even choose you to lead us," spoke Gilgamesh, placing his hand on Ikaris's shoulder.

A chorus of 'woah' and 'ouch' were immediately heard, yet they seemed far away from Pollo, as all he'd needed to lose all ties to reality was the mention of Ajak. Ajak. Why were they talking about how she hadn't just died? Why was this not a big deal to them? Ajak. Ajak. The name turned in his head, refusing to leave him alone and making it hard for him to breathe.

"I'm gonna let that one slide because, you know, you've always been bitter that I can fly and you can't," Ikaris gloated.

Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak.

"Oh, so what, you can fly." Shrugged off Gilgamesh. "I'm better-looking, everybody knows that."

Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak.

He heard a chair scratching the floor. Someone stood up. He wasn't sure who. Everything seemed blurry. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak.

"Where are you going?"

Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak.

"I'm just gonna get some air," Sersi muttered.

Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak.

"Mmm. This is really good, Gil. You know, I could sell this," suggested Kingo. "Put my face on it, move some units."

Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak.

"I made it from corn," he explained. "I chew each kernel myself and ferment it in my spit."

Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Ajak. Druig. No Not Druig.

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