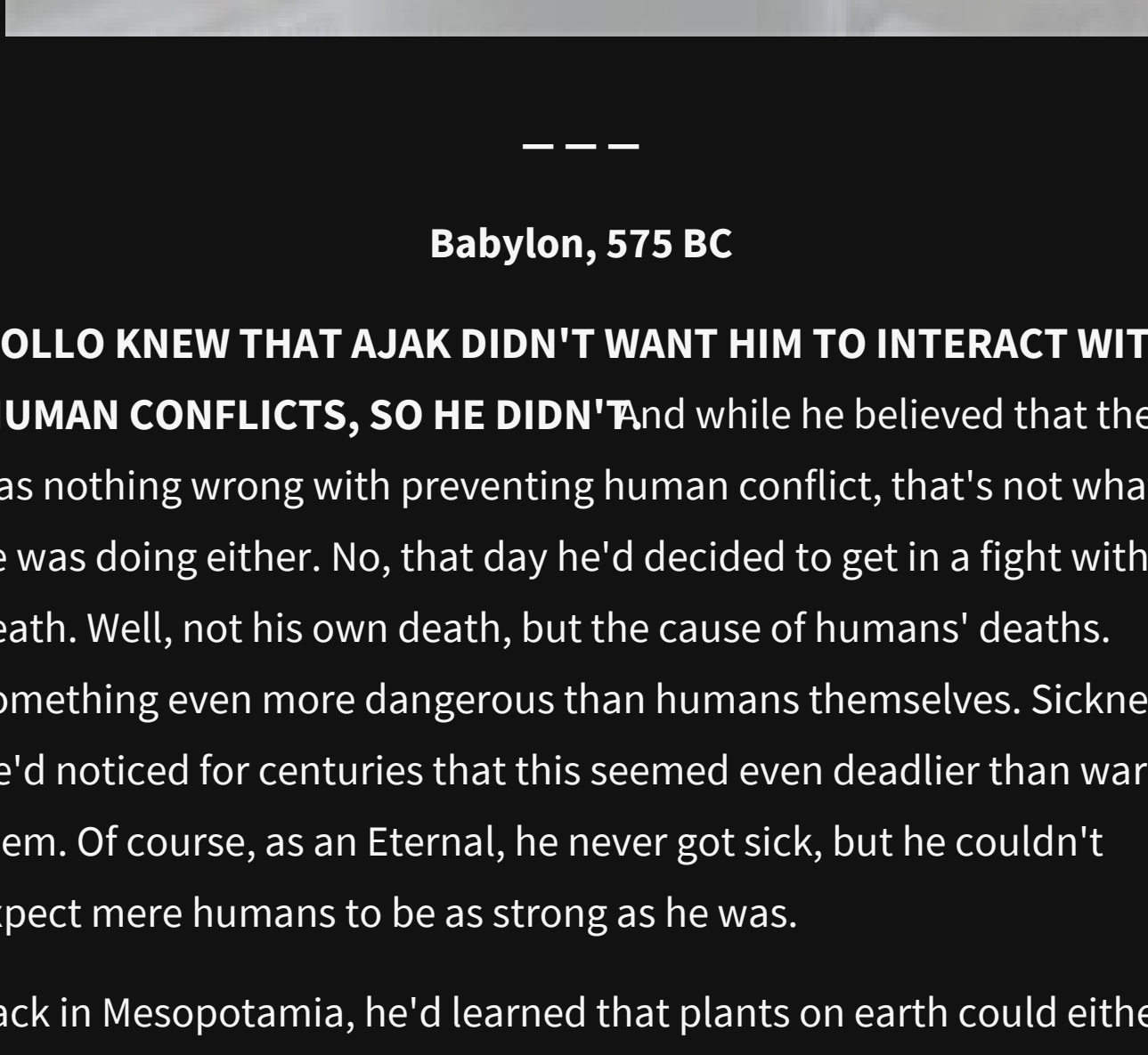


v - The invention of hot chocolate



Babylon, 575 BC

POLLO KNEW THAT AJAK DIDN'T WANT HIM TO INTERACT WITH HUMAN CONFLICTS, SO HE DIDN'T And while he believed that there was nothing wrong with preventing human conflict, that's not what he was doing either. No, that day he'd decided to get in a fight with death. Well, not his own death, but the cause of humans' deaths. Something even more dangerous than humans themselves. Sickness. He'd noticed for centuries that this seemed even deadlier than war to them. Of course, as an Eternal, he never got sick, but he couldn't expect mere humans to be as strong as he was.

Back in Mesopotamia, he'd learned that plants on earth could either be powerful medicines or deadly poisons. And because poisons weren't much help against Deviants, he'd decided to focus on the healing capacities of those plants. Some had to be eaten while others were placed on injuries, but each had its own unique benefit. And because, for some reason, humans didn't have a very good memory, he would always make sure that the knowledge of plants and remedies wouldn't be lost to humanity.

" Here" he breathed out in the human's language as he helped a woman drink the medicine he'd prepared for her. " This should calm the fever. If you make sure that she drinks a lot of water and that she stays in bed, she should start getting better. Try to open the windows from time to time, so that she can get some sun.

" Thank you" replied her daughter, tears in her eyes as she took Pollo's hands in her own. " How could I ever repay you?

He gently made her let go of his hands, taking a step back as he smiled awkwardly, trying to leave the house. " You can't."

He knew she wouldn't understand what he'd said and it was better that way. Humans were so keen on gratitude and payment that they o en forgot that there was nothing they could give an Eternal. Nothing that they couldn't procure themselves, that is. Anyway, Pollo didn't really want anything. He was not much of a material person. Except for one or two objects with sentimental value, he never held on to anything for very long. He'd realized a few years prior that he was a bit of a nomad. Which might've been why it took him so much time to get used to Babylon, one of the first cities on Earth.

At first, he hated having to stay at only one place. He wanted to travel, discover every inch of the planet, but all could was follow the Deviants around the world and then leave when they were dead. He missed Olympia, he really did, but while he was here, he would try and enjoy his stay. Earth might not have dragons, but it had plenty of other wonders. Cats, for example.

As he le the house, he immediately got attacked by a herd of children. All he could hear was a chorus of high voices screaming his mind as little humans jumped around him. His first instinct was to kick them away but he quickly remembered how fragile the little ones were supposed to be, so he held himself back. He had very little experience with children, as most Eternals didn't grow up, the closest thing to a child they had was Sprite and she actually had the mind of a grownup. Well, as grownup as any of the Eternals could be.

He had a little brother, he was sure of it. A sister too, maybe, but he wasn't sure if she was older or younger. Anyway, he must've seen his brother growing up at some point, but if he ever had any idea how to act around it, he'd have forgotten it with his brother's face. Still, he didn't particularly hate miniature humans, so he did his best not to be mean to them. Even then, that didn't stop him worrying about just how delicate the little humans could be.

" What is it? He asked them, knowing there must've been a reason why they were so excited when it was still rather early.

" We found something! Exclaimed one of the kids. " We want to show you! Come on!

Now, he knew it couldn't be dangerous if they were all smiling so brightly, but could humans really recognize if something was dangerous for them?The fact that they had found something and didn't have a name for it worried him. Well, most things worried him these days, but his mission as an Eternal was to protect humans, not lead them to their death by following them towards a bear they thought was harmless. Really, who knew what those children could've found? Pollo kind of hoped it was a Deviant. He'd been itching to get in a fight, lately.

He let the children lead them, looking around to see if anybody else was awake. The sun had just risen and he would've been surprised to see anybody walk around. Maybe Sersi would've already started talking to villagers and helping them around, but if most humans were still sleeping, then odds were that so was she. Actually, he wasn't quite sure why the children were awake so early. If he had to guess, he'd say that they found whatever they were looking for the night before and woken up as soon as they could to show it to him. But that theory did reduce his chances of fighting a Deviant.

They chattered in their language, but as he noticed they weren't directly talking to him, he let himself zone out. These days, he tries to avoid doing it. When he did, his mind seemed to wander in places he didn't quite like. Or remember. It was strange. He knew that he wasn't alright and he knew that he didn't always have the prettiest thoughts, but he couldn't quite remember the last time he'd felt this horrible feeling overcome him. Yet it was real, he was sure of it. Unless... unless he was trying to convince himself that it was real, just so he could get some attention from the others. Yes, that was the only possible explanation. If he'd really been in trouble, if he'd really needed help, he would remember why.

And maybe he did have that one mental breakdown a er a few months on Earth, but it had been centuries since that day. Something that had only happened one time didn't mean that it would last. It was clear now. The reason why he couldn't remember any of this was because he craved attention. He wanted to feel accepted by the others and have a place amongst them. He probably just wanted to make sure that they cared bg trying to convince himself of how bad he felt. But he wouldn't let himself do this. He wouldn't put them through this just for some strange sickness he'd invented. If it happened again, if he could clearly understand and remember what was happening, then maybe... No. It was a promise he was making to himself. For their sake, he would assure that he didn't bother them with his lies.

He snapped out of it as he felt one of the children tugging at his sleeve. They'd bring him to the fields and they were standing in front of some trees he'd never seen before. But, to be honest, while he knew quite a lot about plants and remedies, agriculture wasn't really his thing. Sersi knew much more than he did about that. In front of the trees were a few bowls filled with a brown powder that couldn't quite place.

" Can you help us take one back to the city?asked the kid who seemed to be the leader of this little group. " We're not strong enough yet"

The little bit didn't need to pout to convince Pollo to help, but that certainly helped his case. He let out a loud sigh, but it was more to not look like he would let them ask anything from him, because he didn't mind it. It wasn't as heavy as it looked, at least not for him, and anyway he was pretty sure there was another reason why the children wanted the powder back at the villager. He'd discovered rather quickly that small humans o en had mischievous ideas hidden behind every one of their little thoughts.

" What is that? He questioned.

" Cocoa" replied one of the youngest. " You can drink it if you put it in water or milk, but it's a bit bitter."

" I heard Sersi say to my mom that Makkari told her that you like bitter things" Shrugged another one. " She said you got hurt and she wanted to help Gilgamesh prepare something for you

He frowned, trying to understand why Makkari would say something like that, as she knew very well that he had a sweet tooth, before he finally understood what she actually meant by bitter things. He mentally cursed her for her relentless behaviour towards his personal relationships.

" Oh, she wasn't actually talking about food,he tried to explain, " it's just that Makkari has this weird and unhealthy obsession over Druig and I, which is stupid, but ai guess she was referring to the fact that Druig is bitter and Sersi just took it literally which is what caused this whole confusion!

For some reason, this seemed to disappoint the little ones as they all stopped walking. As he already had to walk slowly so he wouldn't lose them, it wasn't hard for him to stop with them. He looked at them, trying to figure out why they all looked sad about his explanation, but he had to give up, realizing that guessing children's emotions just wasn't his strong suit.

" Why do you all look like that?He tried to mimic their expressions, which did get some laughter out of a few of them.

" You healed my brother,the leader spoke. " And a lot of other people. We wanted to make you cocoa to make you happy. As a thank you"

He didn't want any thank you. It made him uncomfortable and, anyway, healing people was just basic decency. And it's not like he'd been the one to invent all those remedies, he was just reminding humans of a knowledge they'd lost over the years. A knowledge that was essential to their survival. Humans didn't have the luck to be healed by Ajak, so he was giving them the opportunity to learn how to heal themselves.

But he couldn't refuse their thank you. It was making them sad and he didn't want to be the one making little kids cry. They would probably go cry to their parents who would then go cry to Sersi who would go cry to Ajak. And he didn't want to be lectured by Ajak about something so simple and dumb. Also, he just didn't like seeing the little ones sad. He didn't like seeing anybody sad.

" Hey. It's okay! He smiled, trying to cheer them up. " You still have some sugar le , right? If we mix it all up, I'm sure it's gonna be delicious!

That was a lie. This idea seemed like it would end up either being sickeningly sweet or just plain disgusting. However, if all it took for the miniature humans to be happy again was for him to mix some sugar with cacao and water, then that's exactly what he would do. Even if he ended up throwing up, then at least he could do it in private and the children would be happy.

It seemed that the suggestion was enough to make them smile again. They jumped around, cheering, before one of them shushed them and reminded them that some people were still shushed. But that was only half true, as most of the humans had started rising. The sun hadn't completely appeared, yes, but it was enough to wake up the adults. They came out of their houses, walking towards the field or the places they hadn't finished building. They continued on with their mortal lives, doing the exact same thing they did everyday. Pollo was sure that he could never do that. Settle at one place, with one person, knowing everybody's names and repeating the same tasks. It seemed quite dull.

Half the children went to get sugar while the other half were going for the water. The Eternal was le there, still holding the cocoa and wondering if he was supposed to just stand there while they were gone. He finally decided it was the safest option, so he tried to stay still so he wouldn't make the brown powder fall onto the ground. Still, he couldn't stop himself from tapping his foot on the ground or simply humming a tune he'd heard a few years ago. He tapped the rhythm of the music on the bowl with his fingers, looking around to try and find something interesting to focus on. He didn't manage to find whatever it was that he was looking for, but luckily for him the kids quickly came back, so he didn't have to.

They were silly, holding water and sugar like it weighed a thousand pounds, and while he found it funny, Pollo would've helped them had he not already been holding on to the cocoa. He placed the bowl on the ground, making sure not to drop the powder, and he made sure the little ones did as such.

" Now we just need to heat the watet hesitated one of them, obviously scared he would be the one that would have to do it.

Pollo smirked, a glint of mischief in his eyes as he put one knee on the ground and approached his hand to the water. " You kids want to see something awesome?"

While they all looked confused or uncertain of what he meant by that, they didn't hesitate to nod vigorously as an answer to his question. It was all he needed to fully put his hand in the water. He gestured at them to take a step back as he concentrated on his temperature. In less than a few minutes, the water was boiling, little bubbles appearing as the miniature humans looked at the bucket in awe. He let out a small chuckle at their reactions, but still took his hand o before it would get put of control. He made sure to only lower his temperature a er he'd taken his hand o the boiling water, as he'd once made the mistake to go back to a normal temperature as he was heating up Ajak's tea. While he did go see Ajak a er that, it was less for her tea and more for the severe burns he'd su ered.

As soon as he did, each kid started drinking cocoa and sugar in the bucket, making the Eternal wince at the thought of having to drink the strange mixture. Still, he tried not to let it show, not wanting to bruise their mortal little hearts. It's not like he wasn't mortal as well, but unless he was murdered by something stronger than him, and another Eternal or a Deviant for example, he would never die. And that somehow made him a tiny bit immortal. However, he would never grow old or die of sickness and because of that he granted himself the right to call humans mortals

" It's ready" exclaimed the leader.

Pollo was not ready for this. He didn't want to spend the rest of his day throwing up just because he was being nice to little humans. Ajak would probably spend too much time laughing at him to heal him. And Sprite would never let him forget it. Druig would probably have a good laugh too, but at least he was used to the mind controller's mean laugh. It was so beautifully painful to hear it, he couldn't forget it even if he wanted to. But the fact that he didn't want to probably wasn't helping.

He shot a confident smile to the children, but he knew anybody older than ten would've noticed the fear in his eyes as he put his hands on the bucket. He hesitantly approached it to his lips, closing his eyes in anticipation. He hoped he wasn't trembling, it would look pathetic. As he prepared himself to the worst, he let the brown liquid pour down his throat.

He waited a few seconds so he would gag, but nothing happened except that he wanted to take another sip. It was sweet yes, but not quite as grossly sweet as he expected it to be. And it wasn't quite as bitter as the children had said it would be. It was... good. Sure, there were a few improvements that could be made, but it was still far from disgusting. He licked his lips to get a taste of what was le of the drink as he placed the bucket onto the ground. The children were staring at him, waiting for a verdict on the mixture they'd helped make. He smiled at them, giving them a thumbs-up as they started cheering.

He laughed with them and probably would've suggested they taste it as well, but he'd put ten his lips on it and he'd been around sick people since he'd woken up. It's not like he could get sick, but he had no idea whether or not he could give other humans sicknesses. He looked at the little humans, unable to believe that then only in a few years they would be bloodthirsty adults, turning on their friends and killing their parents. He'd been around humans for long enough to understand that their innocent grins quickly turned into snarls, while their friendly banter o en became slaughter. He wished he would have trusted that they would evolve and become better persons over time, but years had passed and they'd only managed to find more barbaric ways to betray each other. Nonetheless, he tried to forget about it.

If he couldn't interact in human conflicts, then he would simply have to prevent it.
