the tenacity of hope
by pistolgrip

Summary

At the end of his fights with the Eternals, Six has one person left to thank properly.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Just keep in mind that there are people you need to tell why it is you seek power.

In the open clearing, Six stands in front of another figure, ten paces ahead, in matching white, red, and gold. There's never been a clearer day for a fight; the sun's heat is present but not oppressive, the wind gentle enough to cool but not to shove. The terrain is theirs.

The Six-Ruin Fist's voice has all but faded in his mind; it struggled to keep its hold ever since last night, when half of the Eternals had shown up and knocked it out of him before any of the thoughts had time to take root. He has his suspicions when Siete was the first one to confront him, and they are all but confirmed when Siete is the last one in front of him again, with such a genuinely enthused look on his face about Six's appearance that he can't even be truly mad. It was by design, he knows, because Siete is persistent and he knows he is too—and above all, Six's problem is maybe that he thinks too much these days, ruminates instead of shaking the cobwebs off and letting his blood-rusted joints creak into action.

"You caught me," Siete says, throwing his arms out to the side, looking not the least bit dissatisfied
by it. The white of his cape is thrown aside with the action, and he walks a little closer, the grass
swallowing the noise his steps make. The smile he has on his face is the same as usual—maybe a
little kinder, maybe a little more cheeky. "You're too observant for your own good."

Six crosses his arms, doesn't move. Siete gets closer, unperturbed by his silence, and Six simply
stares at him as he approaches. "Sending all of the Eternals after me was transparent, especially when
you started with Funf. And, as it were, a few of them mentioned you."

"What, did they really?" Siete's face twists into mock offense, clutching his chest with a hand.
"Damn, here I was thinking I was sneaky."

"Why?"

"It was a good plan—"

"No. Why did you go through the effort?" Siete's within arms reach of him now, and it infuriates him
only slightly that he has to tilt his head up in order to look Siete in the eye.

"Oh, that? Why wouldn't I?" He says it so nonchalantly, even throwing in a little shrug and a quirk
of the lips, like it's a given that Siete would go above and beyond for him. Six is hardly used to
letting people hear his story, used to set up the retelling of it with the ending of that's how I've gotten
to where I am—but with Siete around, he's taken to telling it as that's how I'll move on forward.

If it were anyone but Siete, it would be disrespectful to him to be so flippant, to be so dismissal—but
it's Siete, and so it's anything but. Maybe it's because Six has been struggling with the idea of his
own power for his entire life that Siete's so easy about it, tries to put him at ease by so casually
saying, more or less, that Six is wrong. It's so casual that it riles Six up for a fight, and he knows
Siete knows it because of the way his grin grows, and—

And then softens, and he crosses his arms to match Six's stance and look him in the eyes, even when
he's wearing the mask. Six is playing right into his hands again, goddamnit, but for some reason, it's
never felt so right. "Wouldn't you like to know," Six says, unclasping his cape and entering a
fighting stance—and it doesn't escape Siete's notice, who grins further and does the same, beginning
to unsheathe his sword—"But first, care for a round?" Under the mask, he grins wildly, throwing
Siete's own words back at him.

"Music to my ears," Siete says, hand turning his sword over in his hands as they start to circle each
other.

"Don't hold back, either. Don't think I couldn't tell the first time." Without so much as a warning, Six
charges in, a signal to start the battle.

Siete is the most powerful of the offensive Eternals; this, Six knows beyond a doubt. He may not
have Sarasa's raw power, Six's born unholiness, doesn't have the years of patience that Okto has—
but anyone less kind than Siete, armed with the skill and strength he has, would have caused
destruction to the skydom a long time ago. In fact, it's a mistake to not consider him a threat because
of how unassuming he seems. It would be an insult to write his skill off as talent or as luck. Every
movement that Siete does to attack, block, and parry him is no mistake. If there's something that Six
has learnt in all his years of being an Eternal, it's that nothing Siete does is ever unintentional.

The difference between Siete fighting now and last night is clear from the second he sidesteps Six's
charge easily, like he's letting the wind guide and carry him; both of them are putting their all into
this, fighting as if it were to the death. None of the Eternals he'd fought recently had treated the battle
as anything but serious except for maybe Siete, and now he's back in front of their leader, all pleased
grin and calculating eyes, the winding road leading Six back home to a new beginning of his journey that Siete's nudged him along.

You might be strong, but I always got the impression you didn't really like fighting. I sort of get why you'd hesitate, though. It can be suffocating to be so different from everyone else.

They're used to fighting each other. All of the Eternals have sparred with each other at some point, and Six himself has a few people that he's regular partners with, people that are normally around, whether he likes it or not. Siete is one of those people, and so he has a general idea of the attacks he might execute.

Six hates being read so easily. But he might be able to make an exception for Siete. Their leader. His friend.

Sins do not go unpunished. Though I don't know if you're afraid or just waiting.

It hasn't escaped his notice that Siete's picked a shorter sword than the one he normally uses, as if to force the both of them into close combat. But Siete's proficient with all types of swords, and to call this a handicap would be severely underestimating him; it just means that the stakes are higher, less room for hesitation, Siete not capitalizing on the option to keep Six at farther than arm's length. When there's this little space between them, it's act or die.

I used to hear a majestic yet terrifying fugue from you. But not now. It's still a very profound composition, but so much more harmonic with all the depressingly low notes blown away. As long as you keep in mind who to thank for that, I don't think you'll strike any false notes.

Truthfully, Six doesn't know who'll win. But no matter how it ends, part of Six is going to die, impatient to be reborn.

You're so ridiculously strong, yet you're always pissing on that strength!

Six has had time to think about what his power means in relation to him. He's had time to consider what it is that the other Eternals have been telling him. Regardless of who wins, Six knows what he's looking for and what he has to do. He has an answer whether he wins or loses.

They're on even ground here, as much as they can be. There's a wide open space, both of their weapons keeping them at the same range, and both of them are well-rested with clear minds, the same goal. With all of this in mind, pushing as hard as they can, Six delivers a flurry of blows with the fist that knock Siete across the grass, letting out small noises of pain as he tumbles down the slight incline of the hill.

It's not the first time either of them have been knocked onto their backs, but it's the first time neither of them haven't gotten back up within a few seconds. Six walks over to him as he stabs his sword into the soil, a sign of defeat. Siete's panting heavily, breastplate of his armour rising and falling with every laboured breath, sweat rolling down his face. Six isn't much better off; he tries to steady his breathing as he looks down at Siete again, willing his legs to support his weight for just a moment longer.

Eyes shut with the pain of exertion, Siete still manages a grin. It's full of genuine elation, pride, joy, and it's so unabashed that Six feels his own lips twitch upwards. "Kay, you actually got me." He coughs, spit flying out when he moves an arm up to cover his mouth. "Fuck."

Six doesn't know why, but he starts laughing. Maybe it's not so much laughter as it is a release of all of the stress and rumination he's had in overdrive the past twenty-four hours, finally falling to his
knees next to Siete. His laughter is similarly punctuated by coughs; he still hasn't completely caught his breath, but he can't stop it now, and he has to extend a hand onto the grass to support himself, his other hand clutching his stomach.

"Wh—" Siete coughs again, and then he too starts laughing. "What's so funny?"

You've gone absolutely mad, the Six-Ruin Fist says, not entirely displeased. But maybe you've had your taste of real blood against your leader. It's easy to finish it, you know? He's vulnerable. When the rest see that you've taken him down—

"That's why," Six says, interrupting the voice. "It's—absurd." It's absurd that Siete would allow himself to fight Six twice, when Sarasa still calls him a monster, when Funf didn't even know how strong he was when she fought him, when he'd clearly gone through the eight other Eternals with minimal problems. It's absurd that Siete is grinning when Six has so clearly won the battle, smiling at him when Six still has the power and energy to kill him, completely and thoroughly. "He trusts me."

And you can destroy it, so absolutely—

"I don't know who you're talking to," Siete says, cutting off the voice, the pauses between his words to breathe growing shorter. "But if you're talking about me, I do. Trust you. There's few people I trust more."

"As an Eternal, you mean," Six continues for him. Siete doesn't make it a secret that he considers Six one of the Eternals with the better work habits, one of the more diligent workers. Six is reliable in that sense, and he knows that.

He watches Siete turn his head to the side slightly, looking up at him as if he's said something odd. With a questioning look, Siete's grin grows. "As a person, Six. As a friend. There are few people I'd trust more than you to watch my six. Hah, Six watching my six."

The words fill his chest with something warm, a new brand of anticipation for the unknown. Six hardly has trust in himself, but it's clear that all of the other Eternals do, and coming to that conclusion before the awakening of the Six-Ruin Fist might have caused him instead to isolate himself again—if he didn't have faith in himself, how could he have faith in his greatest weapons?

But now he runs towards the responsibility, instead of away from it. In fact, there's no greater honour.

Rolling his eyes, Six decides in the end to sit down on the grass next to where Siete is lying on his back, panting and looking up at the blue sky. The clearing is far enough from civilization that nothing should come to them, and he feels... safe. Safe enough to start talking. If there's anyone that'll listen, it would be Siete, for better or for worse.

Besides, regardless of whether Siete would listen or not, he should speak about the journey. Siete deserves it for setting the pieces on the board for Six to orchestrate his own enlightenment. "The Eternals don't need much protecting, I'm aware. Except, perhaps, from each other.

"The strength you all hold—that we hold... we've sworn to protect the skies with it. I'd never put in faith that a monster like me could protect anything, but you all seem to have a disproportionate amount of faith in me."

"Nah, we got just the right amount," Siete interrupts.

"Siete—" He shakes his head, huffing a laugh out through his nose at the man's adamance to defy him at every turn. "Was strength really the only reason you recruited me into the Eternals? You did
say it was the primary attribute."

"Nothing really gets by you, huh." Sighing, Siete puts his arms behind his head, wincing when his bruises and cuts from battle sting. "Primary attribute, yes. You're not even gonna guess why? Humour me and guess first."

"Do you always need to play games?"

"Yes."

Despite himself, he laughs, the usual frustration from talking with Siete hardly a damper on his mood. "That may just be the most forward you've been with me yet." He does give it consideration; it's been in the back of his mind during every fight with the other Eternals, ever since Siete found him in Karm.

At the time of recruitment, he'd pushed away Siete at every opportunity, the idea of being called to join a group of other people with mastery in a certain weapon abhorrent to him. It was like a sick joke, to become infamous for killing his own clan in cold blood as a child. It made no logical sense to him, and yet Siete had been there day after day, because he'd seen something in Six that Six could no longer see in himself, so shrouded by darkness he'd accepted it as his own.

The Eternals didn't spend much time with each other until the Two-Crown Bow had taken Song and dragged all of them through the ordeal to try and stop her, and then they all considered that maybe—just maybe—they should look out for each other more, because they all cared about each other more than they thought.

And yet Six had fallen for the same trap, the Six-Ruin Fist telling him to continue falling into despair, to stop resisting his true monstrous nature, to continue to isolate himself because nothing would save him. And when that didn't work, the fist threatened to take over any one of the Eternals, still recovering from being barely able to take down Song, questioning the extent of their power.

Six, too, was questioning himself, unable to stop her in her tracks. Her worries and fears had been so alike to his, and he'd never realized until it was almost too late.

He'd wanted to pull her from the call of darkness, because he knew what it was like to fall, too. And he would stop at nothing to do the same for the others. The Six-Ruin Fist called him lonely, threatened to take over another one of them so that he wouldn't be alone in destruction, but instead he'd come to the end of this journey deciding that he wouldn't be alone not by dragging those down to him, but to clawing, tooth and nail and bone, back up to the surface.

—No. He'd make the future by his own hands, striking his own path true.

"You got an answer?" Siete asks from next to him. His eyes are closed peacefully, hands clasped and resting on his chest, breathing steady. The scene is idyllic, almost ridiculously so, and Six lifts his hand up with the Six-Ruin Fist and spreads his fingers, sunlight streaming through the gold.

You bore me, the fist says, die with your childish desire for camaraderie, and he feels it simmer down, the soul of the weapon dispersing and leaving only a heavy, cold weight in his hand. Chuckling, he lays his hand back down by his side, against the grass.

"Maybe I will," he mutters, more addressing the Six-Ruin Fist than Siete. And then, turning his head slightly to Siete, still keeping his eyes up to the sky, he starts. "I shouldn't have survived this long." That's simply a fact that he finds, through and through, when looking back at his memories—the blurs between his massacre and the skyfarer that found him, the foggy images between when Siete
recruited him and where he is now. "By all means, I should have taken my life once I found out the truth to atone properly for my sins.

"But I existed—somehow, I had managed to simply exist for an indeterminate time before that man found me. And even when he left me again, I remained.

"If there's anything I've learnt, it's that the Eternals are a tenacious type, almost to a fault." It's not a straightforward answer, but Siete didn't ask a straightforward question—one way or another, the Eternals are all survivors. "When we found the journal in Karm, why didn't you leave me to die? Why did you insist that I remain?"

He turns his head fully to the side and finds Siete already looking at him thoughtfully. "Well, the journal said so. 'When you find friends you can truly trust one day, don't ever let them go', right?" Siete laughs. "Whoever that man is, wherever he is now, he'd want you to be happy, wouldn't he?"

"More than that," Six mutters, already guessing where this is going, "You'd want me to be happy. All of you."

"Bingo," Siete winks at him. "Do you even need me? Taking the words out of my mouth now."

"It would be disrespectful for me to forget my sins, not that I believe that's what your intention is. And similarly, it would be disrespectful for me to forget about the one that first showed me mercy and kindness.

“Perhaps once, I would have gladly welcomed death.” Six’s voice is more conversational, the hurt that would have been there no longer raw; he prods at it absentmindedly like he would a scar that’s long since whitened over his skin. “It turned into a fear of dying because I’d have one single regret. No more, no less.”

*The light*, Six had called that man who had saved him, *the one I’d fight to the ends of the earth for*. He’d hoped every day that he would come back, even set foot outside of Karm in the hopes of finding him himself. But in following that light, he was brought out from the shadows into the sunlight, illuminated from every corner instead of one single point. “Now... Now, there’s an apprehension to my own death because I’d have too many regrets. And yet, that in itself is a liberating feeling, to have more and more things to live for as I go on.”

Siete isn’t that man, that skyfarer from so long ago. None of the friends he has now are, not even close—and that’s perfectly fine by him. Siete hasn’t saved him; he’s pushed Six into saving himself.

"That wasn't in the job description, happiness," Six says, absentmindedly, almost amused.

"A lot of things aren't."

"However, refraining from fighting each other does happen to be one of our rules."

"Well, yes." That's all Siete says, and that along with a smile in his direction is an invitation to keep speaking if he's ever seen one. So, he does.

"I realized as I was fighting against the nine of you that it felt fundamentally wrong to do so, not simply because of external rules imposed on me."

The Eternals were hardly a family. They were too far removed from each other, too content to do as they like without doing it together. Six remembers what family is supposed to be like, and he’d had it fall apart in his hands. The signs, however, were there; the beginnings of openness, going above and beyond in dangerous situations, knowing where everyone is. *Family* is a long time coming. *Friends*
is a start, and to fight people he'd more or less called his friends for no reason went against everything he believed.

With every one of the Eternals he fought, he'd felt more and more self-assured, instead of being overcome by worry that he was becoming the monster he'd always feared—and maybe his uncertainty showed how far he had grown, why the fist never truly took over his thoughts. "But similarly, do understand that as much as I had no desire to become an Eternal, I do still take my role seriously. Should any of you give due reason for me to sincerely take up arms against you, that I will."

"As long as you know it's always been like that for all of us," Siete says easily. You've never been a threat to us, he says, so, so easily that it knocks the wind out of Six, like it's common knowledge among all of them. When Six is too quiet, Siete adds: "Not to be hamfisted about it, but we've always had faith in you." Groaning, he sits up, crossing his legs and looking off into the distant hills. "Do you really think we'd let anyone, let alone one of us, run around all willy-nilly if we knew they were dangerous?"

"I certainly hope not," Six mutters disconnectedly.

"We can't tell much about how you're feeling with that mask of yours always on, but we know you wouldn't hurt us for the sake of hurting us. You're more reasonable about these things than you give yourself credit for, you're not some..." Siete moves his hands around in the air, trying to find the words. "Indiscriminate monster."

Hearing the word monster still sends a shock through his body, makes him freeze in place, but it's no longer debilitating. He's getting used to it in a way he never thought he'd get used to it; accepting it as part of his history, but not letting it bog down his possibilities.

Do you seek power because of your past? Or is it for your future?

My future, obviously.

Wordlessly, Six moves up to unclasp his mask, loosens it off his face and holds it up, blocking out the sunlight. He turns it back and forth, inspecting the way the light makes the obsidian shine, before moving it over to block his view of Siete. When he lowers the mask, Siete's face is there, smiling at him in his direction.

"I do wear this an awful lot, don't I?" The sunlight is bright, and his eyes not entirely used to being under direct light, but it's warm on his face. It makes him relax, his inadvertent frown melting away. "It's still not something I feel I can entirely do without, but if you'll all be patient with me, there may come a day where I feel as though my stable presence isn't tethered on wearing it."

At least, in this moment, not wearing it feels right. He feels exposed under Siete's gaze, like every single one of his thoughts is so obvious they might as well have been spoken, but Siete's eyes wane into crescents, a grin that says nothing but I'm happy for you, and it fills him with a new kind of hope.

"I suppose I should thank you. For planning this all along"

"Alright, guilty as charged. But I didn't tell you what to think. Don't forget to give yourself credit." Siete is infuriatingly good at getting people to do what he wants them to do when he really puts his mind to it, but instead of feeling played, Six feels at ease, knowing that there's at least one person looking out for him, enough to go through these efforts just to help him come to his senses.
It's as if a wall has fallen down in his mind, one that started crumbling a long time ago; Siete and his conversations with the Eternals were simply the last things standing between him and realizing that his power truly had the potential to protect those he cared about, instead of him having to worry about keeping everyone at arm's length out of fear that he might break, once again.

Defeating Siete gave him the peace of mind that he'd be able to protect everyone from someone as powerful as the leader of the Eternals, should it ever be needed; to be defeated by Siete would have given him the faith in the strength that Siete had sought for himself and the rest of the skydom, a promise that Siete had only become strong for the good, that he had gathered the Eternals for that reason.

Stretching, Siete moves into a standing position and grins down at him before extending a hand. "C'mon, let's get outta here before we get grass stains all over our nice clothes."

"You're only saying that because you're the one who made these outfits," Six says, grinning crookedly as he grabs Siete's hand with the gauntlet. As he stands, his cape gets thrown back at him, carried over by the wind; he clips it back to his shoulders, lifts the hood over his ears, and walks alongside Siete to leave their battleground.

End Notes

[minor edits made jan 2019 for prose/flow]

i've been meaning to write this for a while, but it got kicked into gear because of a friend that named themselves siete in-game and then did six's 5* fates

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