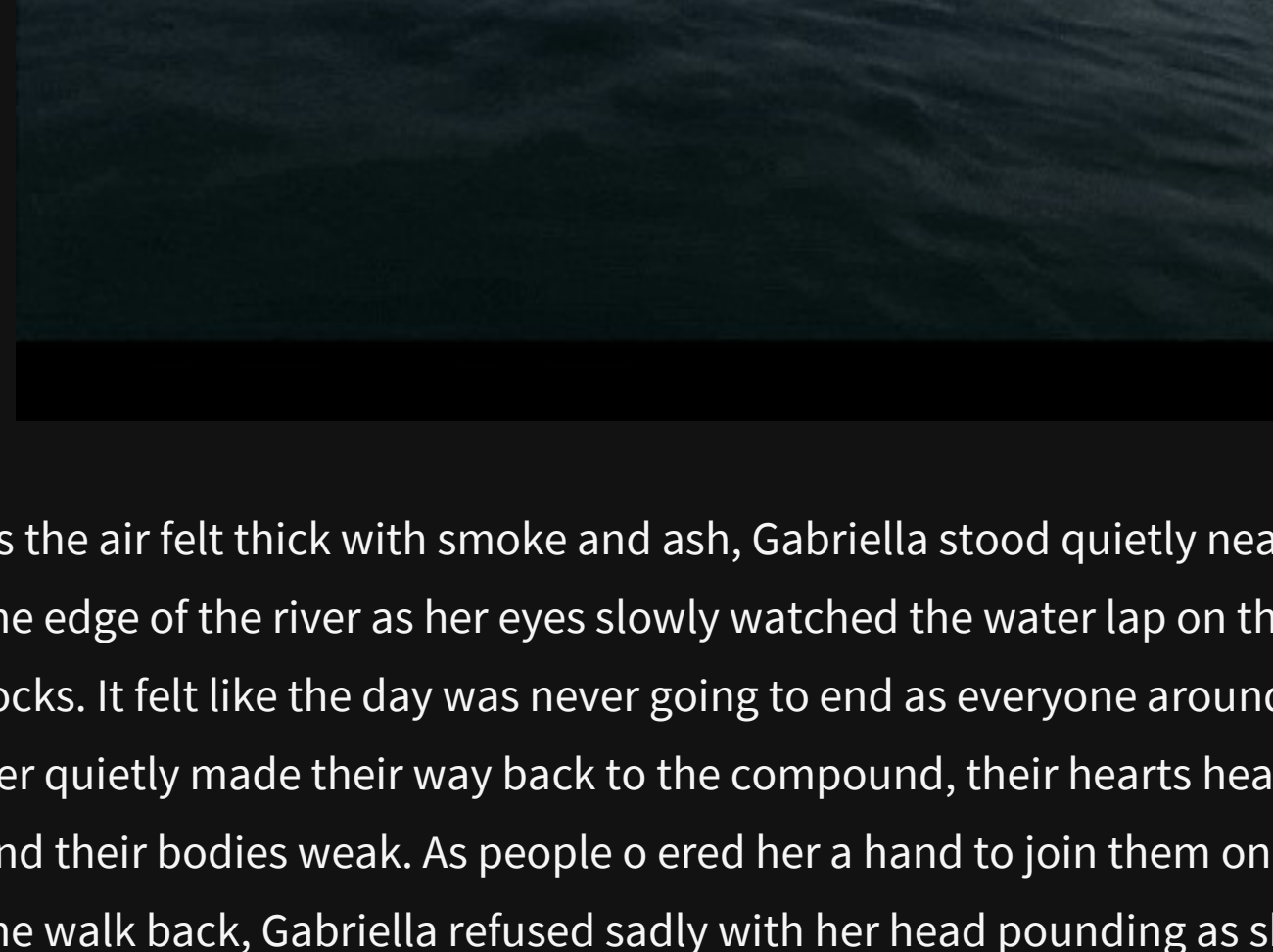


SUFFER -- PART TWO



As the air felt thick with smoke and ash, Gabriella stood quietly near the edge of the river as her eyes slowly watched the water lap on the rocks. It felt like the day was never going to end as everyone around her quietly made their way back to the compound, their hearts heavy and their bodies weak. As people offered her a hand to join them on the walk back, Gabriella refused sadly with her head pounding as she politely asked to be left alone. Slowly crouching down to run her fingers along the water, her chest tightens slightly as she realises what was to come. The heartache she was feeling no longer became just about the attack, but about the fact that she would have to say goodbye to Druig.

Pulling her hand from the water, Gabriella sighs softly as she eventually stands and begins to step back towards the forest. As her eyes stung gently, she felt herself suddenly overcome with exhaustion as she lets her thoughts linger over everything that had happened and was about to happen. It felt as if she knew it was going to kill her to send him away, but she couldn't ask him to stay, she wouldn't. So with another soft sigh, Gabriella spins on her heels slowly before heading towards the compound as her chest begins to ache.

Feeling her lips part slightly as she gently crosses her arms against her chest, Gabriella's eye focus on Druig who was leaning against a tree just before the entrance of the compound. Watching his eyes

look up from the ground slowly, Gabriella feels herself frown as his body pushes from the tree calmly before turning to look at her.

Taking a deep breath, she bites at her bottom lip before continuing

towards him as he lifts his hand slowly as if he was calling to her, no

words needed. Reaching a hand to take his, Druig delicately pulls her

into him as Gabriella feels him place a soft kiss on her forehead,

making her shudder sadly.

"My love."

"Have you been waiting long?" Gabriella questions quietly as he

hums a note in response, "I didn't notice how long I stayed by the river.

Are you okay?"

"I wanted to ask you, if you're okay," Druig comments softly leaning

back against the tree as he fiddles with her hand, "but, I already know

the answer, sadly."

"What did I tell you about going through my head," Gabriella replies

mildly as he lets out a soft chuckle spinning her hand lightly in his

fingers, "but, you know that's not what we have to talk about, right?"

"Can we not have a few moments of normality?" he questions as his

tone flattens slightly, "must we only talk of more sadness today?"

"Do you think I want this? Don't you think I wish we could go back to

yesterday?" she adds as his eyes linger up, his head resting on the

tree, "But, we can't. We have to talk about you leaving."

"I'm still standing with my choice," Druig utters out letting go of her

hand, his eyes finding hers as she hugs frustratingly before turning

away.

"Why won't you just go?" Gabriella states loudly turning to Druig as

his eyes close with a short burst of irritation, "it hurts I know, and it will

continue to hurt but you staying for me isn't the right choice here?"

"Why don't I get a say?" Druig questions back with more frustration

as his eyes flutter open to look at her again, "why don't I get to

choose?"

"Druig..."

"It's not fair," he continues as Gabriella tries to reach for him as he

ignores her, "I don't want to leave you alone, I promised you,

remember? When you came to this place, I won't break that promise,

I don't break my promises."

"I know it's not fair! But we don't have a choice," she whispers softly

as he slowly looks away from her, "I am so thankful of you, for

everything, but having you stay because of me, I couldn't bare that

pain. I'd die with regret, you, you would get to exist again, but I

wouldn't..."

"What if something happens to..."

But before Druig can finish, Gabriella suddenly moves close enough

to pull Druig's face into her shoulder as she lets her arms lay lifelessly

against his side, her fingers playing with his hair softly. With her lips

trembling as she could feel her heart ripping in two, she sighs gently

as she feels him frown against her skin.

"I'll be okay, you'll be okay," she whispers as he pulls away with a

stern frown, "please, you must go."

"I don't think I can."

Feeling him move from her touch, Gabriella sighs before placing her

hands through her hair. She was so frustrated but she knew a part of

her was happy and this only made her more angry, her eyebrows

furrowing.

"Why must you be so stubborn? She questions as he laughs feebly

before crossing his arms, "we don't have time for this."

Watching Druig hug her silently and looking away, Gabriella goes to

question him again before looking to the side as she notices the

group moving towards them with Kingo leading the charge, Thena far

behind. Awkwardly pulling at her shirt, Gabriella half frowns as the

group slow down before stopping as Druig looks slowly to see them.

"I'm so over this," Kingo mutters out loudly as his hands go up

defeatedly moving towards the pair as Sersi tries to slow him down,

"Druig, you left us all those years ago in Tenochtitlan, because of

humans. You left because you didn't think it was fair to stand by and

do nothing but what are you doing now? Wanting to do nothing!"

Druig grits his teeth as Kingo puts a hand up to stop Ikaris who was

going to say something, making Ikaris hug him. Moving a step closer,

Kingo rubs his forehead annoyingly as he half turns to speak to

everyone, looking back to make sure Druig knew he was doing him a

favour.

"Clearly, this human..."

"She has a name, Kingo," Sersi comments noticing how

uncomfortable Gabriella was as she stood awkwardly as he spoke."

"Right, sorry, Gabriella, she clearly means a lot to Druig, right?" Kingo

continues his finger spinning at Karun as the man quickly pulls out

his camera, "so here we are, if the reason that Druig is so adamant

about not helping us, is her, why can't she just tag along?"

"Oh what an amazing idea!" Sprite suddenly interjects clapping,

throwing out Kingo's inspiring speech making him grumble, "another

support human. Fantastic."

"I'm with Sprite," Ikaris calls out as Gabriella feels Druig tense and

notices Sprite smile proudly, "when did we become a charter for

humans? Why are we just letting anyone tag along."

Feeling the silence longer for a moment, Gabriella looks down

awkwardly as she feels like a wedge between the group. As her eyes

rest on the ground, she frowns slightly as Druig takes her hand softly.

"I'll agree to help if Gabriella is allowed to come along."

"See," Kingo comments loudly as he points to Druig, "we might as

well agree and go, we're running out of time and we still need

Phastos, right?"

"Yes you're right," Sersi finally adds in as Ikaris hugs her before turning

away, "if it means you will help us Druig, then she's welcome to tag

along."

Looking from the ground to Sersi, her smile is soft and warm as

Gabriella quickly looks to Druig who was waiting patiently for her

response. Feeling her chest pounding at the thought of it being up to

her, Gabriella sighs softly before nodding and looking back to the

group.

"I'll come," she mutters out nervously as Kingo smiles, "of course I

will and I promise, I won't be in the way... and I'll make sure, to do my

part."

Watching Ikaris turn around slightly, Gabriella feels herself step back

as his eyes linger from her to Druig, placing his arms crossed against

his chest, Sprite slowly moves towards him as he frowns.

"Just let us do our job," Ikaris comments as Sersi looks to him,

making him shrug slightly, "and you won't need to help."

"Before we go anywhere," Druig suddenly adds moving forward as

Ikaris takes it as a threat and follows his movements, "Ikaris, stay

away from Gabriella and stop acting like you're in charge, because as

I see it, as we all do, Sersi's boss. And for the record, I won't be

following orders from you, not now, not ever."

Stepping closer as Kingo tries to put himself between them, Druig

continues as Ikaris simply watches him.

"You have no right speaking to her like that, or as a matter of fact, at

all," he mutters out angrily as Gabriella and Sersi both move to drag

them away from each other, "if you want me to play nice, you better

hold your tongue."

"Keep away from me then," Ikaris comments bitterly as Gabriella

tightens her grip on Druig and Sersi looks at him with frustration,

"and we will be all good."

"Ikaris, I think it's best you go back to the jet to cool off," Sersi says

placing a hand to his chest as his eyes soften looking down at her,

"take the others, I'll wait for Druig and Gabriella."

"Fine," he replies, his voice more gentle as Sersi half smiles as he

turns to walk towards where Thena was leaning silently against a

tree, "don't be long, I don't feel like waiting anymore."

Watching Sprite skip a few steps as Sersi frowns slightly turning back

to Druig and Gabriella, Kingo slowly moves towards them as Karun

waits patiently. Looking from Druig to Kingo, Gabriella feels her smile

slightly as he places a hand against her shoulder.

"I know it seems slightly uncomfortable, right now," Kingo states

glancing at Druig's eyes linger to his hand on her shoulder, "but trust

me, Ikaris is a great guy! He just hates Druig, let him warm up to you."

"Not helping Kingo," Druig adds as Kingo rolls his eyes before lifting a

hand to swat at Druig's nose teasingly, making him hug her.

"So grumpy! Is it nap time?" Kingo questions as Druig playfully

pushes him, a small smile playing on his lips, "Gabriella, I look

forward to getting to know you, as well as what you see in Druig."

"Kingo," Sersi calls out as Kingo nods before patting Karun on the

shoulder and walking a few steps away, "Druig, Gabriella, let's get your

stuff and go. We don't have much time."

With a quick nod, Gabriella smiles softly as she watches Kingo and

Karun disappear into the darkness as Druig pulls on her arm spinning

her to towards the entrance. Taking a deep breath, she lets him gently

pull her into the compound as they set off to get some belongings for

the journey. As they moved slowly to their homes, Gabriella frowns

slightly as she realises this might be the last time she sets foot in the

clearing, her chest tightening as she looks around.

Letting go of Druig's hand as she made her way towards her home,

she wished she could say a final goodbye to everyone, her heart

feeling heavy. But with time fleeting, Gabriella knew that it was best

to leave as quick as possible and she found herself saddened by the

thought.