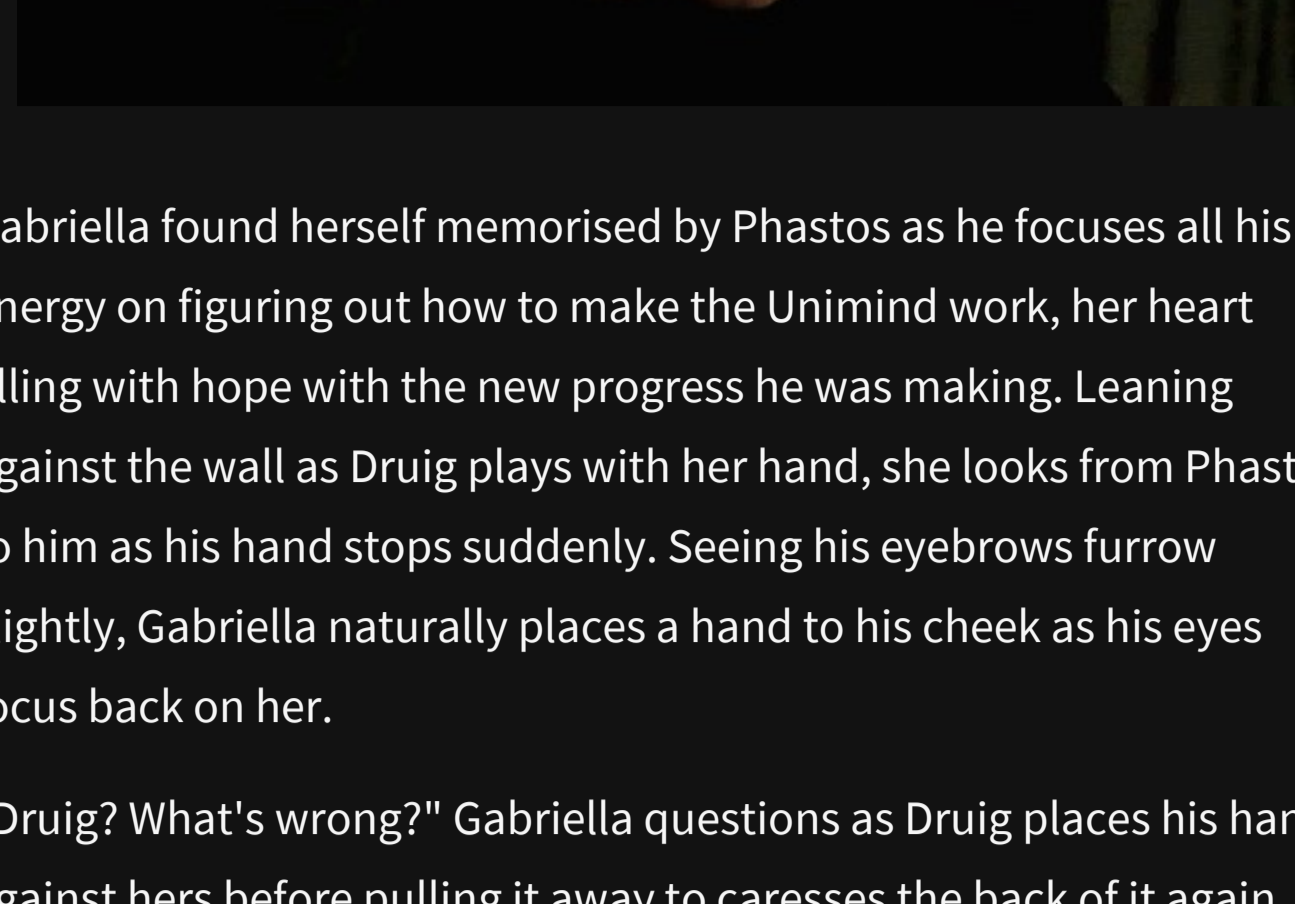


## BETRAYAL



Gabriella found herself memorised by Phastos as he focuses all his energy on figuring out how to make the Unimind work, her heart filling with hope with the new progress he was making. Leaning against the wall as Druig plays with her hand, she looks from Phastos to him as his hand stops suddenly. Seeing his eyebrows furrow slightly, Gabriella naturally places a hand to his cheek as his eyes focus back on her.

"Druig? What's wrong?" Gabriella questions as Druig places his hand against hers before pulling it away to caresses the back of it again, his eyes drifting from hers to the door as he moves her behind him, "Druig?"

With little warning Ikaris enters the room dressed in what Gabriella could see was a detailed blue suit, lined with gold and she could see his face was tense. Looking past Druig to see Ikaris stop and look to the centre of the group, she steps forward taken by surprise as Ikaris's eyes light up and shoots beams of energy at Phastos's work. With the Unimind destroyed and Phastos flung back with the force of it, Gabriella is stunned as Sersi pushes past Ikaris to help Phastos on the floor.

"What's gotten into you?" Kingo questions stepping forward, his eyebrows furrowing as Ikaris simply looks from Sersi to him, his face still tense.

"I have let this go on long enough."

Gabriella could barely look away from Ikaris as she notices how tense everyone was, her mind trying to wrap around why he would stop them.

"He lied to us," Sersi mutters out shakily, tears welling up in her eyes as she holds Phastos upright, "he already knew about the emergence."

"No, he didn't," Kingo adds in, his voice cracking as if to show he couldn't believe what he was hearing, Sersi wiping her face, "he couldn't have."

"Ajak, told me everything when we left Babylon," Ikaris states turning his gaze to glance at everyone in the room, faces twisted with pain as they look at someone they called family.

"What?"

Watching Kingo's shoulders drop as Ikaris's face doesn't falter with his words, Gabriella grips at Druig's back as she can feel him just as tense as the others. Feeling her hands shaking while holding onto his jacket, Gabriella frowns as she watches the group struggle with what was coming to light.

"You weren't going to let us stop the emergence," Phastos spits out finally pushing away from Sersi as his hands ball into fists against his side, Ikaris's lips curl slightly into a frown, "you were just waiting for the best time to screw us over?"

"No," Ikaris replies as Phastos turns his face slightly before Kingo stumbles back with everything hitting him a little harder, "I only ever wanted to protect you from the deviants."

"I don't understand, if Ajak wanted you to take her place, if she told you everything," Sersi questions sofly as she steps past Phastos, placing a hand to his arm, "why did she end up choosing me?"

Watching Ikaris's jaw tense at Sersi's question, Gabriella watches her grab at her chest as she steps closer.

"What have you done?"

Feeling Druig step forward, Gabriella's hands unlatch from his jacket as he moves into the view of everyone. Trying to step with him, Gabriella follows slowly as she watches Druig's hands tense.

"He killed her."

Noticing Sprite step forward now with her eyes filling with tears, her eyes return to the ground as she realised what he'd done.

"I had too," Ikaris declares, his voice softer than before as everyone in the room is shocked and can barely speak.

Watching Sersi grip her chest, Gabriella can feel the pain as she watches the others try to process what he was saying. Trying to reach for Druig, she hums sadly as he continues to stand strong and all she can do is pull herself close to him.

"She loved you," Sersi finally chokes out as the others look down slightly, her shoulders drooping as she thinks back on past memories and everything they've been through.

"Did she?"

"Of course she did," Sersi replies quickly, her heart breaking as she angrily shakes her head while crossing her arms, "how could you think, that she didn't."

"Do you think this was easy for me?" Ikaris questions stepping forward slightly as Sersi steps back, "do you think it was easy to live with the truth? To know that one day all this would end? To keep on lying to you?"

"You killed Ajak, Ikaris," Druig adds in as Ikaris doesn't look from Sersi, Gabriella clutching tighter at his jacket to make sure he doesn't do anything stupid, "you didn't simply just keep a secret from us? You destroyed everything."

"What did you expect me to do?" Ikaris replies, his gaze lingering slightly to Druig before turning back to Sersi, "this is what needed to happen."

"Needed to happen? Is that some sick joke?" Phastos comments with a scoff, his eyes glaring at Ikaris as he barely looks away from Sersi.

"If we gave humanity the choice, how many of them would be willing to die, so that billions more could be born?" Ikaris continues ignoring Phastos as he stands firm with what he was saying, "I don't need you to agree with my decision, but you will deal with it. I won't stand down."

"But you're not giving them a choice!" Phastos questions loudly as Ikaris finally looks to him, his face still not changing as if the pain from his family meant nothing to him, "how could you think this is right? You're so pathetic!"

Feeling her heart thumping in her chest as Phastos grows more upset, Gabriella can only hold onto Druig tighter as she can't think of anything to say with everything being said. With everything crashing down, it felt like it was going to be worse now with Ikaris against them and Gabriella could only feel the stress growing.

"We are Eternals Phastos, we exist for Arishem," Ikaris states as Phastos angrily turns away from him before turning back, "we will not disobey him, it is who we are. We weren't made to exist among them."

"No, that is what you are. A blind-less follower, not wanting to see the bigger picture," Phastos yells back, Kingo moving towards him before he's pushed away, "that's not me and I wouldn't change a single thing about who I am, born or made. So Ikaris, I do not exist for Arishem, I exist for my family!"

"Then you are making the same mistake, Ajak did," Ikaris responds with his jaw tensing as Sersi steps forward to pull Phastos back, Druig finally leaning back into Gabriella as Ikaris slightly turns to Gabriella, "she began to feel for these human's and look what happened."

A sudden gust of wind takes Phastos by surprise as Makkari speeds through the room before stopping short of him, her smile bright and determined. Pulling at her jacket to show she was proud of herself, Makkari looks around before her smile disappears with her eyebrows furrowing.

"I found him," she signs slowly as her gaze stops on Ikaris, "I found the celestial."

"No, Makkari!" Kingo calls out stepping forward to push her out of the way as he sees Ikaris do the same, his eyes shooting harsh beams towards Makkari, "get out of here!"

Stepping forward with Druig this time, Gabriella freezes as she sees Makkari frown before speeding through the room. Noticing Kingo step forward with his breath heavy, Gabriella watches as he slowly lifts his hand to show a ball of glowing gold blaze at the tip of his finger. With his shoulders shaking as he points his hand towards Ikaris, Gabriella frowns as Ikaris can only look at Kingo with little change of expression.

"Kingo-"

"You do not turn against your family," Kingo voices, his words heavy with pain and anger as he looked upon his friend, "Gilgamesh, died because of you."

Ikaris's eyes flicker from Kingo for only a moment to look at the others before it returns, his jaw tense as he shows no sign of changing his mind or plan. Gabriella could feel the pain radiating from Kingo as he could barely stop his hand from shaking.

"You won't succeed against me," Ikaris comments as Kingo's hand lowers slightly before returning to point strongly towards him, "and I will kill every last one of you, if I have too."

As Ikaris turns to walk away as his hands tense against his side, Gabriella's head snaps suddenly as she watches Sprite step forward. Watching the grief wash over her as she lifts a hand, Gabriella's eyes drooping sadly.

"Wait," Sprite adds as Ikaris stops quietly as the others look between the two, "I'm going with you."

"Sprite-," Sersi begs also stepping forwards as the small girl ignores her, her movement faster as she made her way besides Ikaris, his smile so.

"What's going on?"

Thena's question is sofly as she steps into the room, Ikaris moving a hand to his temple, his eyes glowing before Sprite raises a hand to use her power. With a quick wave as her finger tips blaze gold, the pair explode into a swarm of moths. The cloud of bugs spread wildly, clouding everyone's vision as Thena retaliates with manifesting a sword. When the cloud disappears and Thena's eyes focus on the rest of the group, they stop at Druig and she smiles slightly to see Gabriella was safe. Making her way to Druig, Thena brushes past him to raise a hand towards Gabriella who smiles sofly and takes it before pulling her close.

"Are you alright?" Thena questions gently as Gabriella frowns with a quick nod, Druig moving away towards the others as Makkari speeds into the room once again, her movement nervous as she notices Ikaris and Sprite were gone.

"I'm okay," Gabriella quietly replies her frown growing sad as she looks past Thena, "but this isn't about me. Right now it's about you, it's about all of you. I wasn't the one to lose friends today."

"Why did Sprite go with Ikaris?" Makkari signs as Kingo scoffs looking from her to the door, his pacing about the room slowing as he turns to everyone.

"Because she loves him," he mutters out loudly, signing back to her as the others turn to look at him, his arms crossing against his chest, "Oh, did nobody catch onto that?"

Gabriella felt her chest ache as she watches Kingo rub the back of neck with frustration, his eyes lingering away from the group and to the door as Karun slowly makes his way from the corner he hid in. Watching Kingo place a hand on Karun's shoulder, her lips quiver slightly as he turns back with a disappointed sigh.

"Guys, look this has been fun. It almost seemed, possible," Kingo exclaims sofly his hands shaking as they raise as everyone's eyes drop from watching him, "but, this is Ikaris we are talking about? We can't fight him, let alone a celestial? I can't fight him, I can't go against him."

"Kingo please," Sersi pleads reaching for Kingo as he dismisses her and turns away to walk past Karun who was saddened by what was happening, "please don't go, we need you."

"I'm sorry Sersi, but I won't."

With his last words, Kingo disappears down the hallway as Karun quietly watches before turning to the group. As tears form in his eyes, he gently places his hands together to thank everyone for what they have tried to do before bowing slowly. Karun's breath is shaky as he turns to follow Kingo down the hallway before anyone can speak further, the atmosphere growing tense once more.

For a moment everyone is quiet, trying to process everything that had happened as Gabriella watches Druig turn back to stand with her. Letting him take her hand, Gabriella half smiles as he gently rubs the back of it with his thumb. With the situation looking more bleak, Gabriella can only pull Druig close as he leans himself into her. Feeling Druig pull away again, her eyes follow him as he smiles and turns to the rest of the group.

"Looks like we need a plan B," Druig comments mockingly as Gabriella pulls at him but he doesn't turn back, her eyes looking from him to the others, "If I'm going to wind up dead facing Ikaris, it better be a good one."