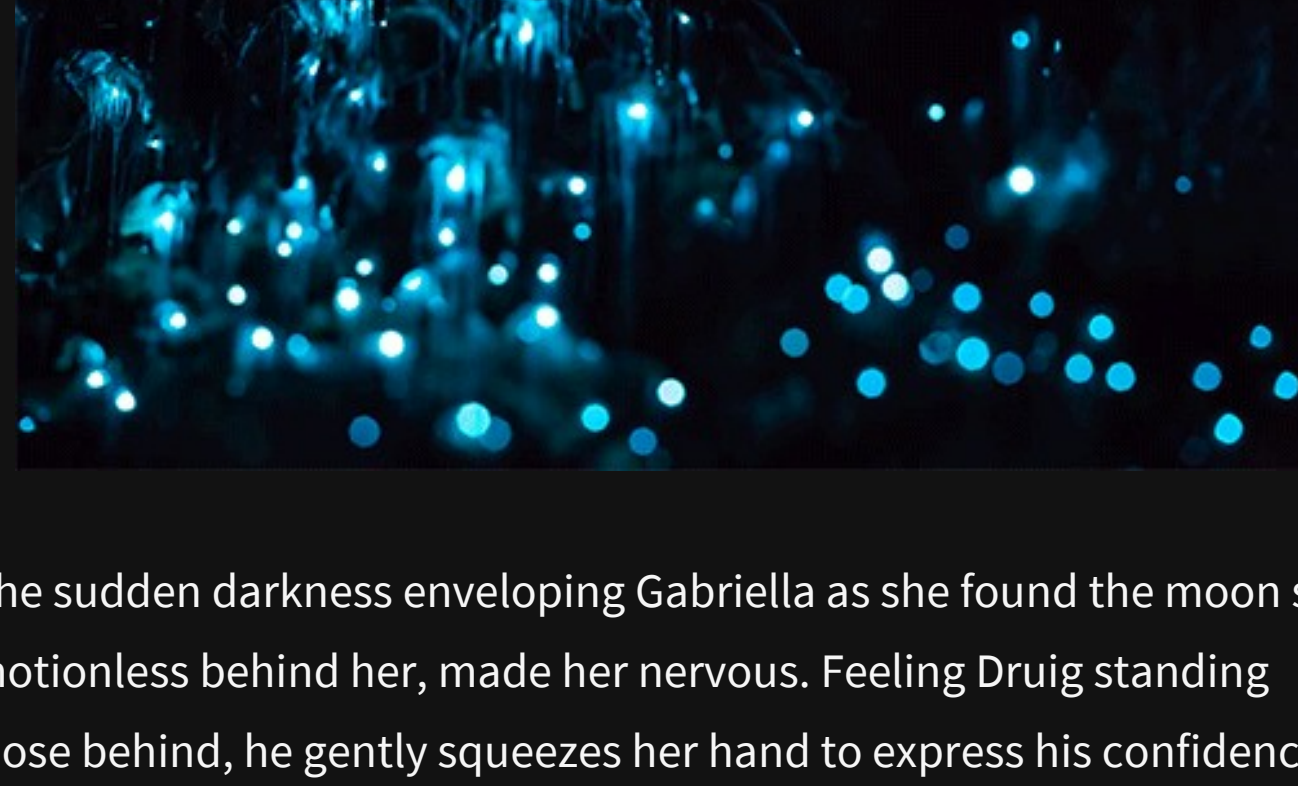


KISS ME



The sudden darkness enveloping Gabriella as she found the moon sit motionless behind her, made her nervous. Feeling Druig standing close behind, he gently squeezes her hand to express his confidence in her and to urge her to push on deeper into the shadows. The echo's of shu ling feet mixed with the mu led sounds of wind in the trees outside, broke the silence as Gabriella focused on her breathing. A small sigh mixed with frustration and uneasiness, escaping her lips let Druig know she was anxious.

"How much further do we have," Gabriella suddenly questions, her words much louder than she meant as she stretched her free hand nervously before her, "and really, must we walk in the dark?"

"Isn't it more exciting in the dark?" Druig's voice filled with sarcasm as it bounces off the walls, his free hand finding her shoulder as Gabriella rolls her eyes, "Besides, we don't have much further to go."

"Exciting? How is walking in a dark tunnel, exciting?" She continues her questions slowing to a halt as Druig follows her movements so he doesn't run into her, "what should I be feeling for a door? A hole? Are you sure there isn't another cliff or ledge? Could I fall?"

"Gabriella calm yourself," Druig whispers with a chuckle moving closer to her, feeling her tremble slightly as she felt his breath on her neck, "I've travelled this many times, you are safe. You'll start to see a faint glow soon, once you see it, move towards it."

"So that's it? Straight line? Just continue forward?"

"Yes," Druig replies so ly as he gently pushes her to continue once more, "don't worry, I'm here, so nothing will happen. Trust me."

"I do."

Not feeling very confident despite Druig's best attempt at reassuring her, Gabriella slowly continued forward. The path felt endless as the earthy aroma from the forest was replaced by stale air and wet stone, the walls damp with what she hoped was water. Gabriella was surprised that the path seemed clear as they moved through the tunnel, only shining rocks from time to time. Druig mentioned that he used to travel to this place often but from the time she found the compound, it seemed like he barely visited it.

"Druig," Gabriella utters through the dark as her steps became more confident, the less she thought about where she was, Druig humming in response, "why did you stop? If you cared so deeply about it and made it's location so secret, why did no longer visit this place?"

"This place, used to be somewhere I could hide," Druig's voice sounded distant as if he was once again thinking of a past memory, "but that changed when you arrived. I didn't feel the need to hide, to run away."

"It's because of me?"

"Don't make it sound so bad," Druig responds with a chuckle as Gabriella glances down to where her feet would be if they were not covered by darkness, "I just meant, because of you I felt whole again. I didn't feel like I had to be alone."

"I didn't realise, that's how you felt," Gabriella states so ly as she thought back to the past, "Druig, I'm glad."

The silence took over once more as Gabriella smiles, a faint tinge of blue finally appearing before them. Feeling her pace increase with a chuckle from behind, Gabriella's smile widens as the blue light grows brighter with each step.

Stopping short of the blue light which now illuminated a doorway, showing that the cave went deeper than she expected. Gabriella turned to finally see Druig's face again as he admired her with a smile, his eyes memorizing with the glow of light only enhancing the colour of them.

"Hi," Gabriella whispers with a little laugh as Druig's chuckles.

"Hi," he whispers back as she smiles, "I'm glad to see your pretty face."

Heart fluttering in her chest Gabriella turns away from his gaze as she tries to focus back on the lit up doorway, her face heating up as she did. Rocking forward slightly and angling her head so she peered into the opening, Gabriella suddenly notices a section of the blue light move making her fall back into Druig.

"It moved," she comments still leaning against him bewildered as he smiles, "the blue, the blue lights moved? What is it?"

"Why don't you take a closer look?"

"Closer?" Gabriella's voice is unsure as she can feel Druig urging her forward once again, "No, I think, maybe it's time for you to lead."

"Really?" Druig mutters out teasingly as Gabriella sighs happily, "fine, I suppose if I must."

Druig's laugh echo's through the tunnel as he places his hands to her shoulders, moving himself so he stood at the edge of the doorway. Letting go of her Druig stretches out his hand, waiting quietly for Gabriella to take it before moving into the bright opening. Flinching as she let Druig pull her with him, she finds herself gripping his arm nervously as they continued deeper into the new area of the cave.

"My brave Gabriella," Druig utters turning to look at her as she hugs and playfully hits him.

Finally looking from Druig to focus on their new surroundings still holding tightly onto him, Gabriella's eyes take a second to make out what she was looking at. The doorway led them to a wider part of the cave, the shape undecided as it wove in all directions to show it's size. The walls and ceiling covered in the patches of blue light, each moving slightly resembling the stars in the night sky.

"Oh my," Gabriella blurts out suddenly letting go of Druig and gently pushing past him as she spins around looking at everything, "glow worms? Actual glow worms?"

"Yes, they are beautiful aren't they?" Druig comments smiling as he places his hands behind his back as Gabriella looks to him again, "however, I do believe that since last time I was here, they have overpopulated the cave."

"Still, this place is breath-taking."

Taking her eyes off Druig once again to gaze at the flickering glow worms, Gabriella notices a corner filled with what appear to be a desk and several large chests. Tilting her head in its direction, she turns slightly to raise an eyebrow at Druig before looking back and making her way towards the corner.

"What's this?" She questions as Druig slowly follows after her as she looked back again to see his reaction, "it appears I have found your true place to escape?"

"This whole place is my escape," he replies so ly as she moves towards the desk, gently running her hand against the top to show it had collected a good deal of dust, "I just happened to like a desk to read at from time to time."

"In a dark cave?" She questions with a hint of humour, "and the chests?"

"Filled with treasures from all over the world," Druig utters as Gabriella makes her way to them as he takes her place at the desk, looking quietly at a forgotten book on it, "many treasures from admirers too."

"Admirers," she repeats so ly as she continues to look at the chests, crossing her arms bitterly.

Keeping her eyes focused on the chests, she couldn't help but to picture those that came before her. Biting her bottom lip glumly, Gabriella turns to see Druig leaning against the desk looking at her smiling as he also crosses his arms.

"You wouldn't be jealous, now would you?"

"Jealous?" Gabriella hugs as she glances anywhere but at him, not doing well to hide the fact she was, "you think so highly of yourself."

Pushing himself from the desk gently, Druig moves towards Gabriella with a light chuckle as she continues to look elsewhere. Finding herself now focusing on her shoes, Gabriella notices Druig remove the distance between them as he now stood before her. Feeling her body tense, she exhales slightly as he reaches to place his finger under her chin and thumb below her lips before lifting her face gently.

"You can be a little jealous," Druig whispers so ly as his thumb delicately brushes over her lips making them part slightly, "but you should know, I've looked at no one like I've looked at you. 7000 years and still no one holds a candle to how you make me feel."

"7000 years is an awfully long time," Gabriella replies shyly as her arms unwrap and fall so ly against her sides, hands picking at the pants she was wearing, "you might have just forgotten."

"I don't forget, nor do I lie."

Removing his hand from her chin, Druig gently rests it on the side of her face as Gabriella felt her whole body tense in anticipation. Despite the fact that it wasn't the first time they were this close, something felt different with the way Druig was looking at her.

"I suppose," Gabriella whispers as Druig's eyes lingered from her eyes to her lips, then back up again, "I suppose I must trust you."

"You suppose?" he questions leaning forward ever so slightly making Gabriella's heartbeat rapidly pound against her chest, "how should I show you, that what I say is the truth?"

Gabriella felt her whole body tingle as she couldn't focus on what was happening, her mind blank as she focused on Druig watching her closely. His eyes were intense as they watched her reactions to everything happening, time feeling like it was speeding past and slowing down all at the same time. Gripping tighter at her pants, Gabriella swallowed slowly as she watched him smile.

"Well?"

"I don't want to tell you to do anything," Gabriella continues to whisper, her voice nervous and eager as he continues to watch her, "I mean, I shouldn't need to... Haven't you realised yet, what I wish you would do?"

"I want you to say it."

Feeling every part of her prickle with intensity now, Gabriella can only look at Druig as he waits for the words she had been longing to say and he had been longing to hear. Finding her hands lifting slowly and placing them against his coat, gripping at it as she continues to watch him eagerly.

"Kiss me."

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