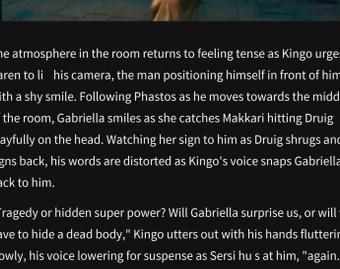


FIGHT



The atmosphere in the room returns to feeling tense as Kingo urges Karen to let his camera, the man positioning himself in front of him with a shy smile. Following Phastos as he moves towards the middle of the room, Gabriella smiles as she catches Makkari hitting Druig playfully on the head. Watching her sign to him as Druig shrugs and signs back, his words are distorted as Kingo's voice snaps Gabriella back to him.

"Tragedy or hidden super power? Will Gabriella surprise us, or will we have to hide a dead body," Kingo utters out with his hands fluttering slowly, his voice lowering for suspense as Sersi hugs him, "again."

"Again, sir?" Karun squeaks out as Kingo flutters his fingers towards him with a chuckle.

"Seriously Kingo?" Sersi comments as she moves towards him to push the camera down, Kingo stamping his feet at her as she furrows her eyebrows, "don't you think Gabriella is already nervous, without you having to put your two cents in?"

"Ah Sersi, where's your sense of humour!" Kingo mutters out as he turns to Gabriella, stepping towards her suddenly and taking her hands, "you get it, right? You humans love jokes?"

"Funny jokes, yes," Gabriella comments as Druig's laugh echos around her before his hands gently tap Kingo's away, his presence consuming her as he stands so close their arms were touching.

"You wound me Gabriella," Kingo whispers with his hands grabbing at his chest, turning his attention now to Thena who had been patiently waiting for everyone to leave Gabriella alone, "Thena, where are you holding this fight?"

"Help me clear this space, and we can do it right here."

"Oh no, no-no, no you aren't!" Phastos blurts out as he stumbles over to the group as Makkari smiles, Sprite quietly looking at the door in hopes Ikaris would return, "this place is already ruined thanks to Makkari, I'm not having you fight in here on top of it! Besides, I need you out while I work on this Unimind."

"That's fine, we can move this party to outside!" Kingo says clapping his hands together, Thena looking from him to Gabriella as if to allow her to decide, "come on, we might not get another chance like this again."

"I will have to pass, besides I'll go find Ikaris. I have a feeling I know where he's gone," Sersi adds so lightly fiddling with her nails as Sprite looks at her, before looking away grumpily, "then, I'll come back to help. Makkari, I suggest you stay with Phastos as well. We might need you."

With a soft hug Makkari moves to Phastos side as he gently pats her shoulder, the rest of the group following Kingo as he ushers Thena and Gabriella out the door. Watching him grab two wooden swords on his way, Karun nods awkwardly offering to carry them as his body wavers slightly with how heavy they are. Turning back to looking through the hallway as they walked to leave the Domo, Gabriella smiles as she feels Druig nudge her gently. Glancing up at him as she placed a hand over her eyes, she frowns as streams of sunlight break through the narrow pathway. Stepping outside once more as the heat consumes the group, Gabriella feels herself tense as she watches Thena move ahead of the group.

"We shouldn't delay this any longer," Thena comments her head tilting towards Gabriella as Kingo taps Karun quickly to get his camera ready, taking the swords from him and offering one to Gabriella before moving to give one to Thena, "I'm sure once Sersi comes back with Ikaris, Phastos will have the Unimind ready to take on the Celestial."

"Are you sure you want to do this Gabriella?" Sprite adds in, her voice surprising Kingo as he does a double take before his eyes turn to Gabriella, "I mean regardless, this should be over quickly."

"Sprite, how about you just stay out of it? Speak your opinion, when we ask for it," Druig replies coolly only to look only at Gabriella as Sprite rolls her eyes at him, her feet dragging as she made her way towards Thena's side, showing she had chosen who she knew was going to win, "Gabriella are you alright?"

"I'm fine," Gabriella comments with a lack of confidence that makes Druig smile slightly, her hands tightening on the sword she was given before she glanced over him to see Thena testing the swing of hers, "Thena is right, we shouldn't delay. Besides, this is for her."

Pushing Gabriella's hair behind her ears as his smile grows, he chuckles before placing a gentle kiss against her forehead. Pulling away and nodding to him, Gabriella half smiles as she clutches the sword against her chest and moves to stand before Thena. Feeling all eyes on her, Gabriella can't help but to feel all her nerves hit her at once as she watches the warrior before her move to a fighting stance.

"Gabriella, I will try my best not to hurt you," Thena declares spinning her sword gently between her hands as Gabriella nods slowly, holding her own sword forward, "but, don't think this means I will go easy on you."

"Noted, let's hope your mind stays focused," Gabriella replies so lightly as Thena nods with a small smile, her feet stepping forward as Gabriella braces herself for the first attack.

The first hit comes swiftly as Thena twirls quickly to throw Gabriella, the sword missing her slightly as Gabriella quickly moves out of the way. Barely getting the chance to find her footing, Thena strikes again and this time Gabriella holds her own as their swords clash with the force pushing her back. Dust falls into the air as Gabriella tries to push at Thena who held her sword tightly, Gabriella's footing sliding as Thena puts more pressure on her. Gritting her teeth and keeping her eyes forward, Gabriella feels Thena pull her sword away as she is given a chance to regain her footing. Without a moment of hesitation Thena strikes Gabriella once more, her sword slamming against her shoulder as she stumbled with a short gasp of pain.

"Ah yeah, ouch, that's got to hurt, you good Gabriella," Kingo comments his hand clenching before his mouth as Gabriella steps back grabbing her shoulder. With her face distorted with pain, they watch closely as Thena circles slowly.

"I told you this was a dumb idea," Sprite adds in as she looks at Gabriella straightening herself slightly, noticing Thena moving to strike again, "Druig, aren't you worried that your girlfriend is going to die?"

Ignoring the others, Gabriella moves her hand to tighten her grip on her sword as Thena grins excitedly as she stands tall before her. Lifting her sword, Gabriella groans as she stops to try and swing against Thena but finds herself groan as she stops it easily. Pulling her sword back to try again, Gabriella curses under her breath as Thena knocks her once more against the side of her stomach. Stumbling back as she places her sword against the ground to steady herself, Gabriella looks up slowly to see Thena holding her face.

"Thena?"

"I'm fine," Thena replies quickly as she straightens herself, her eyes focusing once more on Gabriella who had also straightened herself from the pain radiating from her side, "Gabriella?"

"I'm okay," Gabriella pushes out through painful breaths as Thena walks before her, her sword twirling gently, "Thena, I want to know, why did you want to fight me? What was the real reason?"

"Because this is my way," Thena replies eyes still focused on Gabriella as she continues to spin her sword, Gabriella tensing as she notices Thena slowly moving towards her, "this is the best way I know how to understand someone, to see the person they are."

"Understanding fighting?"

"I can see why you would see it as odd," Thena says halting the sword so it pointed towards Gabriella again, her fingers tightening as Gabriella does the same with her own sword, "but you can tell a lot about someone, by the way they fight. Even if you aren't the strongest fighter, it doesn't mean you don't have the chance to win. Power isn't everything."

Gritting her teeth as Thena launches for her again, Gabriella can tell she's holding back this time as her sword clashes with her own. Trying to push at Thena as she simply holds her own, Gabriella watches her smile as she easily pushes back. Stepping back quickly, Gabriella gets only a moment where Thena fumbles before straightening as she begins to step towards her again. Glancing around to see if she could spot anything to help her as she continues to leave a space between her and Thena, Gabriella notices Druig fiddling with a compact mirror.

"You're right Thena, power isn't everything," Gabriella mutters out as Thena cocks her head, her interest peeked as Gabriella quickly steps back and moves towards Druig, the others confused as he smiles.

Grabbing for the compact mirror while poking her tongue at Druig, Gabriella spins to see Thena flinging her sword towards her. Ducking quickly and finding herself stumble, Gabriella uses her sword to push her up in the same movement. Turning to look back at Thena who was now chuckling, Gabriella smiles with a hug before straightening and pulling out the mirror. Watching Thena's eyes narrow, Gabriella grips her sword before flipping open the compact mirror and holding it in the air before her. Praying that her idea would work, Gabriella's smile widens as she watches the sunlight hit the mirror and reflect before her. Rotating the mirror quickly, Gabriella pushes forward as she manages to reflect the sunlight into Thena's eyes.

"Now, I didn't see that coming," Kingo comments shocked as he turns to see if Karun was still filming the fight before them, the man's face bewildered with amazement.

"That's my girl," Druig calls out as he watches Gabriella pull her sword up and launch for Thena, her body using all her leftover strength to get at least one hit against her.

Noticing Thena shield her eyes, Gabriella manages to strike Thena against her shoulder making her stumble back slightly. Dropping the mirror, Gabriella tries to use this moment to strike again but suddenly Thena finds her strength and moves her sword towards her. Swinging low Thena pulls her sword swiftly against Gabriella's legs, her balance gone as she falls flat against the ground. Wincing at the pain, Gabriella hugs herself as she notices Thena's sword in front of her face as she simply grins.

"I'm impressed," Thena announces calmly as she moves her sword to drop it before offering her hand to Gabriella, her eyes observing the girl sitting frustratedly on the ground, "I didn't expect that at all."

"Didn't think us humans had it in them?" Gabriella says to her feet, Thena as she takes her hand and allows her to lift her to her feet, Thena smiling as she reaches to pick up her sword before looking back at Gabriella.

"Mock all you like but humans are simple creatures, don't take it personally," Thena replies as Gabriella chuckles before dusting her pants. Glancing over to the others, Gabriella notices Kingo talking to Karun about the fight, his hands filled with enthusiasm as Sprite kicks at the dirt as she listens.

"I'm not taking it personally," Gabriella replies as Thena chuckles before looking to Druig as he makes his way to Gabriella's side, his hands reaching for her shoulders before squeezing gently, "I'm glad I got to prove not all humans are helpless."

"You proved with a little help, you can achieve some sort of win."

"Help? I didn't have help?" Gabriella whines as Thena chuckles before pointing towards Druig and then to the mirror, Gabriella's eyes following her finger as Druig smiles innocently, "He barely helped? I practically stole the mirror, I thought of the idea all by myself!"

"Settle down, it's okay. It was a good idea to use your brain, since our strength level wasn't fair to begin with," Thena comments proudly as the others make their way over to them, Kingo clapping his hands slowly before stopping before Gabriella.

"Honestly? That was so cool! I mean yes, you did lose, which is a total bummer," Kingo mutters as Gabriella chuckles before seeing Sprite turning from them to the domo, Karun finally putting his camera down as he finds himself staring at Thena, "but, that was impressive! The mirror trick? Amazing."

"I'm glad you liked it," Gabriella replies with another chuckle as Druig leans into her shoulder, Kingo fake gagging before turning to Thena. "Thena! I'm proud of you too! You didn't kill her!"

"Kingo, I suggest you start heading back to the domo now," Thena says turning from him to Gabriella as Kingo smiles before backing away, pulling Sprite and Karun with him as they move away slowly, "Gabriella, thank you."

"Oh Thena, you don't need to thank me..."

"I know, but I could tell you weren't that excited to do this but you did it anyway," Thena says so lightly as Druig moves to wait for them to follow the others to the domo, Gabriella smiling as she pulls Thena to follow behind Druig, "you did it for me and that shows a lot about the kind of person you are. It's refreshing."

Smiling slightly as Thena allows for her to catch up to Druig, Gabriella turns back to see Thena looking distant again but this time less pain visible on her face. Feeling Druig poke her cheek making her turn back to him, Gabriella notices him holding his hand out. Taking it so lightly and gripping it, Druig leans into her head as they make their way back to the domo. Walking back through the hallway to find Phastos fiddling with what looked a gold ball, it gently floating between his hands as he looks up to acknowledge the group returning.

"You didn't die?" Phastos comments turning back to the gold ball as Gabriella half smiles before chuckling as Makkari speeds over to squeeze her gently, "I'm glad."

Feeling her cheeks flush slightly Gabriella's moment is cut short as a deafening alarm goes off, Phastos pulling up a gold image of the earth. Watching the image expand, Gabriella notices a red beeping marker and looks around to see everyone suddenly serious.

"It's started," Phastos mutters out as he turns to Makkari, handing her a tracker as everyone else shuffles closer to the pair, "Makkari, find the point of emergence."

Nodding quickly Makkari speeds through the room, the wind almost knocking Gabriella over as Druig holds her steady. Finding her eyes linger slowly over everyone as everything starts to feel more dire, her heart sinks at the possibility of failure. Clutching tighter at Druig's hand, Gabriella frowns slightly as he moves a hand around her shoulders to rub her arm gently. Taking a deep breath, Gabriella notices Thena leave the room as Phastos frowns before continuing his work on the gold ball.

They were running out of time.

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