

War Series: The Letter by Gabby Soong

Her heart was a mirror to mine. Her purity, her authenticity, her passion all reflected back at me and made me ache to be good and to produce goodness. Even Mother Nature envied her raw beauty and strength. Every breath she took filled the Earth with warmth and art. She believed that her purpose in life was to help people. She spent each day pouring into others, like a spring rain that coaxes the flowers to bloom. Although, she wasn't one to merely stop and smell the roses, rather, she lived in the garden. She slept among the sunflowers and dined with the daffodils. She sang lullabies to the lilies and twirled with tulips. However, she did not live to please others. No, her existence simply brought forth pleasure. She was not easily manipulated, the little fiery one. Her soul exuded light. When I think of her, I am in a state of awe. Knowing her, loving her- was an honor. It was something I took very seriously. Even at war across the sea, I fought for *her*. Protecting her has always been my top priority- my purpose, even. And that's why I'm so unbearably angry with myself for what happened.

I'll never understand why Camille chose me. I was never anything special- just a scared kid who enlisted out of his patriotic duty to his country and to his father. I had nothing to offer her. But by some miracle she fell in love with me, and I with her. This was the only thing I was ever sure of. All I wanted was to marry her, to be able to call her my wife. But every single time I got down on one knee and presented the sparkling diamond before her, she smiled and kissed me and said no. And that was that. She was always devoted to me, there was never any question about that. But she never offered an explanation. The day before I went over seas I proposed to her again. She smiled and kissed me and said no. But this time, miraculously, when I asked for an explanation, she promised me, "I'll write you a letter while you're gone. And I'll tell you why."

Before Camille, I was simply sleepwalking through a black and white world. She exploded in like a lightning bolt of color, waking me from my perpetual slumber. She opened my eyes to the wonders of life. I was blind without her. You see, when a person is born visually impaired, they accept it and they learn how to live without sight. They are fully adjusted, normal members of society. But when a seeing man has his sight taken from him, he is forever broken. And he will never forget what once was. She was my vision. And I'll never be whole again. There is something inside of me. Some small animal has found that I have been hollowed out and has made it's home within me. It stores food in my arms for her soon-to-be born children. Her eggs are kept warm in my stomach, and she sleeps in my head. I'm quite fond of her. Her little feet scratch the lining of my limbs, reminding me of my own existence. There is life inside of me, but it is not my own. I can only hope that the smog of my nightmares does not pollute her home.

Camille was not oblivious to the horrors of this corrupted world. She simply chose to rise above it, rather than dwell on sorrow. But she had never been exposed to the violence and war that I had experienced. And I vowed that she never would. It's not fair. It's not fair that someone so sweet and so pure would happen to be on her way home, and get on the subway with the killer. It's not fair that some low life, desperate man held up that subway car because he got into financial trouble. He approached each person, gun in hand, and stole their money. But Camille, sweet, innocent, lovely Camille, *my* Camille, had just given her last few dollars to a homeless woman sitting in the cold. So he shot her. He couldn't take her money so instead he took her life. And mine as well.

"Sir? Is this the correct address?" The taxi driver's voice snapped me back into reality. I hadn't slept in what felt like days. My flight landed a few hours ago from Vietnam. I looked out

the window, and an entirely new wave of hopelessness washed over me. "Yes, this is it". I thanked the man, handed him my money and slowly made my way up to her apartment. I slipped the spare key out of my pocket and opened the bright red door. Her scent drifted through the air and I fought back the tears. She would not want me to be broken. I walked inside, determined to find the letter she promised to write. I searched through her favorite notebook, her purse, and the pile of mail on her kitchen counter before entering her office. On her desk sat a single sheet of white paper. My entire body shook as I picked up the note. It read: "Dear Carter,"