

## Prologue

Gabriella felt something cool and damp run across her forehead, followed by a lingering astringent smell. Her head throbbed. She opened her eyes, but saw nothing more than a blur. She blinked until she began to see clearly. She was lying on a bed in a wood-paneled room, and a soldier wearing the bronze breastplate of the Reconnaissance Sabotage Order perched next to her. Gabriella tried to ignore her headache as she wondered what a soldier of the elite RSO division was doing at her bedside.

The soldier's face finally came into focus. He was half-shaven with unkempt brown hair, and his chestnut-colored wings lay folded at his back. His sea-green eyes stared at her intently as he wiped her forehead with a damp rag. Gabriella caught her breath. He was Major Davian, one of the Elysian military's most respected and feared warriors. She tried to sit up and cross her fist to her chest in salute.

"No, no, lay down, soldier," Davian said. He grasped her shoulders with a gentle, yet firm touch and laid her back on the bed. "No need for that here. What happened out there?"

"Where?"

"When you flew into the Hover Run."

"I did what?"

Davian frowned. "You don't remember flying into the Hover Run?"

"No, sir."

"You flew into there like a scab was chasing you, and another cherubian followed you in." Davian sighed. "When you flew out, you lost your balance and ended up destroying the nectar reservoir."

Gabriella gulped. "Destroy...ing?"

Davian nodded.

"The nectar reservoir?"

Davian nodded again. "The City of Ezzer lost its entire store of nectar. That's going to hurt our honeywine production for the

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next two months until the sprites can replenish it. Maurice has officially barred you from the Treetop Inn for life. And Seraph Zephor is ready to kick you out of the military. You know how much Zephor loves his honeywine.”

“Are you sure it was me?”

Davian frowned and wiped a few strands of hair off Gabriella’s forehead. His hand lingered as he stared at her with what Gabriella interpreted to be pity. “It was you. I’m the one who carried you here after you passed out.”

Gabriella groaned, shocked that she would ever enter the Hover Run, which was reserved for the Elysian military’s most elite, and embarrassed that Davian, of all soldiers, had witnessed such a horrible stunt. “But I’m just a guard. Why would I even enter the Hover Run?”

“That’s what the rest of us are wondering. Unfortunately, quite a few officers think you did it as a stunt to get yourself noticed, but—”

Gabriella sat up determined to keep Davian from thinking of her as a show-off. “Sir, you have to believe me. I would never try the Hover Run without permission. I swear—I—”

“I believe you, soldier.” Davian placed his hands on Gabriella’s shoulders and laid her back down. “I’ve watched you enough in training. You wouldn’t have flown in there on your own accord. Not without good reason.” At this, Davian’s eyes narrowed. “I swear I thought I saw someone chase you in. Tell me what happened, and I’ll try to ease things up with the seraph a bit.”

“But I can’t remember.”

“Try.”

Gabriella closed her eyes and thought. “I’m sorry, sir, but I can only remember up to the graduation ceremony. Then all of us headed to the Treetop. I realized I forgot my helmet, so I flew back to get it. That’s all I remember.”

“Well, I wish you had put it on before you—wait a minute.” The major bent down and picked up a syringe off the floor. Davian opened the syringe and tasted a drop of the medicine still inside. He spit it out and narrowed his eyes. He stared back and forth from Gabriella to the window and at the door.

“Sit up for just a moment, soldier. I need to check something.”

Gabriella sat up, and Davian’s fingers ran across her neck and down both of her arms. He then inspected the base of her wings. His hands combed through her wing feathers, tickling her and making her bite her lip to keep from laughing—until his fingers lingered on a particular spot near her lower wing-base. He huffed, but to Gabriella it sounded almost like a growl. He turned Gabriella around and stared into her eyes. “Look left for me.”

Gabriella looked left.

“Now look right.”

Gabriella looked right.

Davian laid her back down. “Soldier, someone injected you with a dose of memory serum. It’s a top secret potion we’ve been experimenting with. It’s only in testing stages right now. Obviously you learned something you weren’t supposed to learn. And if my suspicions are correct, you knew that as well, so you took off.” He looked into Gabriella’s eyes again and frowned. “Unfortunately, any information regarding the incident won’t be coming from you. Where did you go to retrieve your helmet?”

“The shower-house, sir.”

“I’ll check it out and see what I can find. In the meantime, stay here and do whatever the healers tell you. If anyone asks you what happened, tell them the truth: that you don’t remember and your head hurts.”

“Yes, sir.”

Davian smiled at her and turned to leave. “I’ll talk to Zephor and make sure you get a premium assignment on Earth, but until I find out more information on this, I’m afraid it will have to stay between you and me.”

She nodded.

Before he left, he added one more thing. “You may want to keep that helmet of yours on at all times for a good ten to twelve years. We don’t know much about the side effects of this memory serum. Another good hit to the head like that might wipe out your entire memory.”

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Davian scowled as he left Gabriella's room wondering who had chased Gabriella into the Hover Run. And why erase part of her memory? He bumped into a herald, who reached for Gabriella's door. Davian grabbed the herald's arm. "She needs her rest."

The herald held up a scroll. "She's been assigned to Earth, sir. I'm—"

"Today?"

"Yes, sir."

Davian tightened his grip on the herald's arm. "She's not ready to go to Earth. Who authorized this?"

"I don't know who gave the order, Major. I'm just delivering it."

Davian released the herald and watched him fly into Gabriella's room. Someone obviously wanted the girl out of Elysia. Davian stormed out of the healing house, determined to find out who assigned Gabriella to Earth.

Later that evening, Davian frowned as he flew through the trees. No one, it turned out, could tell him who placed the assignment order—even after his questioning turned heated. Davian glanced up at the sky and stopped.

Was that a new star in the constellation Capral?

Davian landed on a tree branch, still staring at the night sky.

*And the moon is waning*, he thought. *It can't be.*

Concerns about Gabriella disappeared, and a new worry took their place.