

# **Reminiscence's Shadow**

## 1. The Beginning Ends

My name is Drew Barker.

Or so I've been told. I repeat it in my mind over and over again like it's the most essential mantra in the universe, as I settle into the scratchy armchair beside my bedroom window. I inhale abruptly, releasing it in a shaky sigh. It's going to rain today, and I *don't* appreciate it. But it's not the looming dark clouds on the horizon that tell me, nor the absence of bustling people on the streets. It's the thick aroma that has been pricking my nostrils for hours. It never rains in Galdur. Not since elemental magic dissipated. That makes it ominous...dangerous. I don't know why I know that, but I do. I shift uncomfortably in my chair and pick at the seam as if expecting it to unravel underneath me and disintegrate into thin air. Honestly, it would be a relief. Nothing here feels palpable anyways.

"Hey, you still with me?" My older brother Rowan asks, perched on the bed adjacent to me. "Is a blackout coming on?"

I grin halfheartedly. "Trust me. I have no intention of taking a nap."

"Good. Because dinner's in ten minutes, and I'd *have* to eat your food if you chose to go on hiatus again. We'll come get you when it's ready."

I cock my head wondering if Rowan ever considers filtering his thoughts before speaking.

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Five days ago I woke up from a two-year coma, which also happened to be the moment that Rowan decided to tell me I should stay clear of my ex-girlfriend, Nevaeh. Apparently, she

hates my guts. This would be fantastic information, except that at the time I didn't know who Rowan was let alone Nevaeh... or anyone for that matter. Including myself. I guess I still don't.

Previous knowledge of my family? Nope. Nevaeh? Not in the slightest. But how different weather makes me feel and Galdur's magical history? Obviously. Because that makes total sense. And that one other thing... But that's just a dream. And yet, it's the only thing I'm not overanalyzing. I squint as if I'm instantaneously transported back into that alley, the beams of sunlight reflecting off the smooth, freezing stone, blinding me.

"Ready?" says a voice that isn't Rowan's, shaking my thoughts away. It's Will. I mean, Dad. Gliding over and taking all my weight with his one arm - I still don't have my strength back - he leads me downstairs with a grace that I'm surprised a man of his size is capable of.

I study him rigorously. I can unequivocally say that I've *never* seen him or his features before in my entire life. In another face or my own...

They say it'll come back. But I don't know. Is it normal to have familial amnesia after a coma? Is it normal to perceive your soul being forcibly removed and punched back into your body like a wrecking ball? Not that I would remember, but I am going to go with no.

## 2. Things Get Ugly

I don't think anyone would be shocked to hear that I don't recall ever having an awkward dinner. But there's no way one's ever topped *this*. It starts fine. Food is served – some sort of chicken soup concoction – three indentures buzz around filling up our waters, and placing napkins on our laps. It didn't take me long to figure out that they had some kind of contract with my family negotiated in years of service. I don't know what they get out of it, no one told me, but it's probably a crap shoot compared to the luxury my family lives in.

I make awkward eye contact with one of them. Larry. He's the only one I know. I might have given him a small heart attack the other day when I woke up, the first time. He was alone in the room with me. I started shouting *who are you*, and he was trying to answer, but I was yelling at him. I worked us up so much that he had a fit, and I blacked out....I was a little overwhelmed.

The same old talk. Mostly to me, about me...if that makes sense. What I should remember, what I should do if a dizzy spell occurs, how I should stay home and take it easy until I feel better. I know it's only been a couple of days, but I'm already so restless that I want to flip the table over and run outside screaming, who *the hell knows how to kick amnesia in the ass?*

Anyways....

Dinner *starts* fine.

Then the front door bursts open.

And.

Wow.

"Nevaeh," Dad stutters, surprised. "We weren't expecting you home until next week."

“Yeah,” she says dismissively, breezing past the dining room and up the stairs, taking two at a time without looking over, “I realized I forgot something. I’ll only be here a minute.”

A door slams.

My mother clears her throat politely as my brothers make faces at me like they just watched a distant relative ask me if I remembered them.

Through the knowledgeable source known as Rowan Barker, I know that Nevaeh lives with us. My parents took her in when she was eleven after they found her living on the streets, and discovered she had no family. Now she’s sixteen, the same as me.

She’s been outside of the city for the past months, at a camp in the mountains. They’re mining out there – it’s super important I guess – and Nevaeh volunteered to help make tents cause she’s talented at weaving. Or something to that effect.

Doesn’t matter.

This is the first time I’ve seen her.

She’s just so... I mean look at her... She’s....

Her olive skin glints in the flickering reflective candelabras speckled throughout the house, perfectly complementing her auburn hair and striking violet eyes that pierce into my soul with a resounding clang. I open my mouth to speak – although she’s already halfway up the stairs – but only a slight cracking grunt comes out. I’m sure it sounded incredibly intelligent.

“Welcome home Nevaeh,” Rowan blurts out, deadpanning me, the sound of Nevaeh’s footsteps suddenly bounding down the stairs and tickling my ears. “How lovely your back looks tonight as you walk out the door, ignoring your family.”

*I dated her?*

"Rowan," she says, halting in a limbo area between the dining room and the front door.

"Can't you try a new personality trait for *once*?"

"Children, please," Dad interrupts, silencing whatever's about to come out of Rowan's opening mouth. "Nevaeh, since you're here why don't you have dinner with us?"

She blinks at him, quickly glances over at me, then back at him. I stare. For way too long. My heart is beating really fast. Really fast. I wish Rowan told me what happened between Nevaeh and I. Wow. I'm sweating. What the hell is wrong with me? Even when I woke up in a room I didn't recognize, with people I didn't know, my chest didn't feel *this* tight. I'm going to explode, or throw up, one of the two...

My Mother's voice floats through the air, concluding what seems like an eternity of silence, and that, thankfully, reminds my body that I need to breathe. "Nevaeh, sweetheart," She coos. "Sit down."

Nevaeh lingers in her stance for a moment longer, like she's debating whether or not to make a break for it, then plops down in the seat across from me. Larry, as if out of thin air, appears next to her, lowering her bowl onto the table. His hand lifts and Nevaeh catches it, giving him a gentle greeting squeeze. He beams at her and waddles back into the kitchen with the happiest face I've seen him wear.

We eat for a moment, the quiet settling in.

"Ezra," Nevaeh says sweetly, turning the attention to my younger brother at the end of the table. He's only two years younger than me, but I've never heard him speak. Nobody else has either. I'm not sure why. Rowan says that one day he just stopped. "You're looking especially handsome tonight. I heard that you decided to go to herbal school. Good for you. I'm sorry I wasn't here to help you make the final decision."

He blushes, shrugging his shoulders in a humble gesture of thanks.

My Dad slams his fist on the table. I jump, but no one else shares my enthusiasm. I guess his 'passion' is a normal occurrence.

"I *knew* you had a hand in this, Nevaeh," he says, voice raised. "I told you to stay out of it."

"William please," my mother sighs. "We both know she was just trying to help Ezra."

"If she wanted to help, she wouldn't have put these *thoughts* in his head. We're already under the wire, Mer, with Drew. We didn't need this extra nonsense from Ezra. And she *knows* that."

"*She's* sitting right here," Nevaeh barks. I slouch down in my chair, wishing I could disappear. Nevaeh doesn't strike me as a person who gets angry often, so this can't end well. And I'm not the only one sensing this. Ezra sinks so low into his spot that his head is almost unseen, falling beneath the table. "And are you seriously blaming me, that *he* decided to awaken from his beauty sleep at the worst possible time?"

I half-duck as she points her finger right in my face, almost hitting me.

In her defense, she's looking at my Dad, and not me so she can't possibly know how close she is to taking me out... I hope.

"It is a little messed up Dad," Rowan breaks in, slurping his soup so loudly it's obnoxious.

"Enough, Rowan," Nevaeh and my Dad say at the same time.

"You've never made a decision in your entire life that your Dad didn't want you to make," she finishes on her own.

My Mom abandons the hold on her spoon, and places her hand over her face in a – *there's no going back now* gesture. I hold my breath, placing my bets on who would erupt first.

It's my Dad.

"Rowan did what Ezra should've done, join the King's guard!" he yelled, now on his feet. "It's the right thing for the family."

Nevaeh springs up, facing him, fists pressed against the tablecloth. "Is it? Or is that just what –"

"Nevaeh, please!" My Mom shouts, her arms raised in exasperation. "No more."

Nevaeh and Dad looked at my Mother, their arguing ending abruptly.

It took one hug from my Mom for me to know that she's the warmest person in all of Galdur. Nobody wants to upset her. Even in the heat of word jousting.

Unfortunately, Rowan is part of an unknown species.

"Yeah Nevaeh," he says randomly, soup still sloshing in his mouth.

It's immediate chaos.

If he has anything left to say, it's not going to be heard.

The food is abandoned by all but Rowan, who's not fazed in the slightest by anything that's happening. Nevaeh and Dad are at each other's throats again going on and on about the King's guard, with Mom, also now yelling, trying to break them up. Ezra, seeing that the conversation is not really about him anymore, leaves the table altogether. The indentures are nowhere to be seen. They probably fled the scene a while back... Smart.

And I'm just sitting here. Like an idiot. With a spoon still in my hand.

My hands start to shake. This is too much. This is only my fifth dinner with people that I'm still getting used to, and they're trying to kill each other. Nevaeh, the girl that I'm supposed



to be in love with, or used to be in love with, has barely even glanced at me, and is mad at me for waking up from my coma?

And the worst part is, I don't even know what anyone's arguing about. Some information I've been told, and some I've deduced from my surroundings. But other than those two factors, the only things I remember are stories about elementals and even weirder things like how it feels to lay down in a shallow creek, or bare grass on my feet... and that damn ring in the alley.

But herbal school? The King's guard? What *is* that?

Now I can feel my whole body shaking.

Oh no.

I'm gonna be sick.

For real this time.

I try to force it down, but it's not working. I can't help it. I don't understand. I don't understand anything that's going on.

This isn't right.

Something about this isn't right.

I force my eyes shut, squeezing them so hard it hurts. My head is pounding.

*Bang.*

Something smashes.

I yelp in pain.

The knot in my head loosens.

My eyes flutter open. Not one is focused on me. They are all looking across the room, at the Victorian antique cabinet, speechless. One of the glass doors has shattered. How the hell did that happen?

Why is my hand warm.... And wet?

Despite myself, I give another quick yelp of pain. I have a huge gash on my palm.

There's lots of blood. And bone, is that bone? That better not be bone.

Spots cloud my vision.

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