

Gabriel's Eagle

by Mason McKenzie

Gabriel Ludovico knew exactly what he saw fly into the forest that day. It was not his poor vision, cited on several occasions as the source of his confusion, that invented a flock of griffin-headed flying horses. He could take the ridicule of the village boys, something to which he had grown accustomed, but the stifled chuckle of his own mother flooded his body with a rush he had never felt before. Her kindness was the one constant in his sixteen years. Those creatures were living in the caves, and he was going to prove it.

Once the humor had disappeared from her face, Gabriel puffed out his chest. "Come to the woods with me, mother," he said, but she refused. Those woods were dangerous.

Gabriel studied his mother's frail frame. He was not quite the stature of his father. He would not be capable of defending himself and her should the rumors prove accurate. "I shall go myself and bring proof of my discovery." Gabriel's mother forbade it. No son of hers would be associated with the ruffraff rumored to roam those wilds.

"You'll be caught by the Roma in those woods," she said. "Over a silly fantasy."

Gabriel waited until darkness encompassed his room; the house fell completely silent. Gabriel armed himself with his short sword and painting supplies and crept through the house, his path lit by the embers of the hearth fire.

He trotted down the worn path by moonlight to the edge of the woods. The trees seemed to swallow what little light he had. He hadn't realized how dark this journey would be. The derision of his mother's scoff echoed in his ear, and Gabriel pushed on, feeling his way through the forest by the trunks of the stone pine trees.

As the sun peeked in through the canopy, Gabriel saw the clearing and the half griffin, half horse creatures he had come to document.

When he opened his bag, he realized the paint he brought with him spilled. He stared at the family of them, two of the larger ones fawn over the smallest of them. If Gabriel could just get a hold of one of its feathers, that might be enough to prove his sanity to his mother. It might be enough to prove it to the whole village.

When the two adults turned away, Gabriel rushed forward, seizing several of the baby hippogriff's feathers. It cried out, bucking hard and shoving Gabriel into the dirt with its hooves. In the near distance, Gabriel heard the adult hippogriffs returning the distress calls of their baby. He took off like a bolt, weaving between trees and hurdling over fallen branches, the woosh of the hippogriff's wings gained on him.

He made it out of the woods, down the path, and into the house. His mother was waiting for him. When he offered her his prize, she furrowed her brow: "Why do you offer me eagle feathers?"