

## The Lost One

*Gideon laughed as the ground around him erupted in a shower of rubble and flames. He rolled out the way easily, his movements sure and smooth. Getting up, he drew his bow and shot in one continuous movement, almost without looking. He knew he'd hit. He always did. His sword was out in a heartbeat and he was pivoting, blocking the blow that was coming at him from behind, twisting his wrist, the blade glinting and flashing. Another enemy down. He shook his head, throwing his long hair out of the way. His heart was racing, adrenaline coursing through him, his muscles taking the exertion easily. He was covered in soot and mud and blood. None of the blood was his. There were more enemies coming, flowing into the city over the breached walls, but Gideon just grinned. He could do this. He liked these kinds of odds...*

"Gideon?"

Gideon blinked, looking up. His Latin teacher was looking at him with a weary, resigned frustration plastered on her face. He heard a sigh from somewhere in the back of the class, and could practically feel the predatory stares of his fellow classmates. There was nothing that brightened one's day quite like the suffering of your fellow man, after all.

His mind racing, he skimmed his eyes over the sentence on the board. Caesar. Talking about...um...soldiers. Almost the entire thing was in indirect discourse, and was that a relative clause in the middle?

"Uh...Yeah. Absolutely. What was the question, again?"

Mrs. Evans took off her glasses with a weary sigh, rubbing the bridge of her nose between her eyes. Gideon could practically hear her counting the days left until her retirement. He could tell that the resulting number was significantly larger than she would've liked.

"The verb, Gideon. Parce it for me."

"Ah, yeah, the verb. It's...um...present subjunctive, active, third person singular."

"No. Future indicative. So, moving on..."

Gideon sighed, slouching back in his chair. This was boring him out of his mind. *Why do I even need to know any of this stuff? Future? Subjunctive? Who cares?* He applied himself to digging the tip of his pen into the surface of his desk, scratching lines into the wood, and let whatever Mrs. Evans was saying fade back into a monotonous drone in the background. He didn't care if people thought he was an idiot, dammit. He knew he wasn't. That was all that mattered.

It was hot. Even sitting by the open window with a breeze coming in was doing nothing to help. He could feel a trickle of sweat running down his back, and he shifted uncomfortable, his shirt and tie too tight. He stole a glance at the clock, and then almost wished he hadn't. Had really only three minutes passed since the last time he looked? He wasn't sure he'd survive another two hours of this. And then the hour of soccer practice, fumbling with the ball, panting, out of breath, stumbling, yelled at, on the brink of being thrown off the team... He sighed, his pen slipping out of the deep groove

he had been carving out and scratching across the surface. *Yeah. My day's only going uphill from here.*

*"There's no way out. We're trapped. We're all going to die here."*

*"Not if we go through Barad Khadesh," Gideon said quietly. His companions looked at him wildly, eyes full of panic, full of fear. Gideon met their gazes calmly.*

*"Barad Khadesh? Are you insane? Only five people have ever gone in and made it out alive."*

*"Four, actually. One of them did it twice."*

*"How do you..."*

*"Because I was the fourth. Now, do you trust me, or not?"*

*"If we go in, we'll almost certainly die."*

*"And if we stay here, we're already dead. I'll take the almost, I think. The question is, are you coming with me, or am I going alone?"*

*He phrased it like a question, but there was really no question to ask. Turning around, he picked up his sword...*

Gideon twitched as the alarm jerked him back into reality, cutting short whatever he would've done next. The fired alarm continued to blare as students shuffled to their feet, amidst the scraping of desks. Everyone filed out of classrooms and let themselves be silently herded towards exits. The sense of relief at subtracting a few precious minutes from the class period was almost palpable. Gideon got up, heading obediently towards the door and down the stairs with the rest of the crowd, blinking as he stepped out into the sunlight. It was always the same; they'd wait here for a few minutes, then be told to head back inside. The whole thing barely took even ten minutes. It was always the same.

Except this time it wasn't.

"Get down now!" a voice roared, just as something massive crashed into the asphalt, digging it up like it was a patch of sand on a beach. It - whatever *it* actually was, because dragons didn't exist - uncurled its armored wings and bellowed, ripping up the ground with wickedly sharp claws. It shook its neck, trying to shake loose a figure clinging to it. The figure wrapped his legs around its throat, and drove his sword right through the creature's skull.

"Well, don't just stand there!" the man staggered off the back of the dead...thing, breathing heavily. He was wearing clothes that looked vaguely medieval, and his long hair and beard were dripping with sweat. "There are more coming, and they're coming fast. You all need to get to safety *now*."

His eyes scanned the crowd, as if looking for someone. The warrior wove through the crowd of panicked high school students and frantic teachers as the whole school rapidly continued to descend into chaos. Someone was crying. There was a lot of shouting. Suddenly, his gaze stopped on Gideon.

"Gideon... Thank goodness." The people around Gideon stepped back as the man headed towards him. "Look, I know why you had to leave, but you have to come back. We need you."

"Um..." Gideon's mouth had gone dry, and his heart was pounding. Words seemed inordinately difficult. "Er... You're confusing me. With someone else. I don't, uh, know who you are."

The other man was looking at him with something close to awe.

"You really did forget. By the eleven powers, I didn't believe it when they told me. You really did forget."

"Forget...what?"

"You're Gideon Rainpath, son of Rask, hero of Kardaba, champion to the emperor, survivor of Barad Khadesh. The Lost One."

"I... I don't know what you're talking about."

Gideon felt a sharp pain stabbing him just behind the eyes. Images from his daydreams, flashing through his mind, so real...

"Gideon? Do you remember me? Do you remember any of it?"

"No.."

"Please. I know if you return, you're a wanted man. But we need you. The war has finally begun. You have to remember."

"I don't..."

"Don't you ever feel you're made for more than this? Don't you ever feel restless? Yearning for something you can quite grasp? Don't you ever miss the danger? Gideon, this isn't you."

The man's voice was urgent. He was looking at Gideon, looking at him like a friend, like he knew him... His eyes darted over Gideon's shoulder and he muttered something in a language Gideon didn't understand.

"They're here."

Gideon turned, and saw a mass of dark shapes on the horizon, approaching fast.

"Please, Gideon," the man whispered. "Please, come back."

Gideon gasped, dropping to one knee, his body seized by a spasm of pain. He felt a scream of pain struggling to get out. It hurt. It hurt...

And he remembered. Suddenly, in a blinding, searing moment of clarity. Light exploded around him, power burst out from his body like a tidal wave. People were thrown back. Cars exploded. Windows shattered.

Gideon laughed. Threw back his head, letting the memories wash over him, rush back in, like a river finally breaking through a dam and coursing happily back into its banks. He could feel his body changing and getting taller, his muscles growing stronger again. But most importantly, he remembered.

The light faded, and Gideon grinned at his older brother, clapping him on the shoulder in something that half resembled a hug.

"Well, what on earth are we waiting for? This battle won't win itself."

Ellys laughed, the relief plain on his face.

"Need a sword?"

"Nah." Gideon flexed his fingers, feeling the raw power pooling in his hand, "I don't need one. Let's finish this, shall we? And after that, we can go let the others know. I'm back."