

Aiden Crafton - Wonderview

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Mrs. Lawson

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Sine Dolore

Prologue

Thinking back about the whole situation is rather bothersome, but for you to understand my life, and its unmerciful ways then I must say what is necessary. Growing up in my family, the small 'thing' that it was, took a toll on my parents. Because of our culture, being Byzantines, and having a very religious lifestyle, we tended to go astray; focusing on things that ultimately did not affect our lives in any other way other than crippling our relationships with one another, unfortunately this is exactly what happened to our parents. I say "our" because I was accompanied in my troubling times by my brother, Leofwine.

This ended up in our parents inevitably getting divorced, which was a very rare occurrence in, well, the entire Byzantine Empire. Not only did it cripple the amount of income and respect towards our family but it also made life, in general, more difficult. But rather than looking upon the grief and chaos Leofwine and I, Tristis, bonded together and honestly became more than brothers. I am not sure how to explain it, but there was just something about our relationship that went further than being brothers; we were great together and did practically everything together. Not like we did anything outstanding though, I was far too ugly, and Leo, which is what I called him, was too full of himself to do anything, like get a girlfriend.

With all of that said, I believe that I am ready to tell you this forlorn story I call my life.

A knock at the door sounded, followed by a man saying “is anyone still awake?” Only I had heard the knock at the time for my father had already gone to bed but my brother and I were tidying up in the kitchen; he was too far from the door to hear it. So, being respectful of the guests' time, I quickly put down the broom and went to the door. When I opened the heavy wooden door, I was immediately greeted by a large man in uniform.

“Hello officer, is there anything I can do for you at this hour?” I said, my mind racing to what he could be here for. I knew that he was an officer because of my father, he had been in the military in his younger years, and fought in many battles, the last of which wounded him. Resulting in him getting some fancy Giatrós work, he had two vertebrae removed from his back; it cost a fortune to do because of the amount of equipment and skill necessary to do this, not to mention the high risk of immobilizing him or even death. In the end, it worked out perfectly, the only downside is he is much shorter than he once was.

“May I speak to your father?” He said, his voice was deep, and his height combined made me feel very small. He followed with “Is he still here, or out on errands, I do know that he is a busy man, but this is of utmost importance.”

“Yes, of course you can sir.”

I went up the stairs making sure to tell Leo that someone was here and to tend to him if necessary. Our house doubled as a blacksmith and bar, with all of the bedrooms and sorts upstairs. After I had gone up the creaking stairs, I took a left and went into the first door on the right, which was near the end of the small hallway. Waking my father up and telling him the scenario, I went back downstairs and began a conversation with my brother and the officer.

A few minutes had passed when my father finally came down the stairs; when he saw the officer and the parchment he was holding, he asked him if the conversation should be in private or not. The officer replied with a nod, and they stepped outside, closing the door behind them.

Five minutes, then ten, twenty, and what seemed to be hours passed, when my father finally came back inside, he had a grim look on his face, followed by the single sentence that began the dreadful thing I call my life. Leo and I had been drafted into The War.

“Says here everything that you need to know,” Father said, gesturing his hand towards us. In it, he held a rolled-up parchment. He had looked in it already as the red cloth that held it together was badly tied, and the seal was messy.

“I wanted to go with you two boys, but the officer said that since I had not only already served, but also been wounded, I was not allowed to go.”

We stood for a moment in silence, neither of us even took the letter; he just stood there with his hand outstretched towards us both. I eventually grabbed the daring letter and opened it, reading allowed the following: “Greetings my beloved people. Due to the lack of men fighting in the current war against The Ottoman Empire, we have had to do the noble act of drafting every able man over the age of seventeen into The War. May God Almighty be with you, Justin II.” Inside there was also a place and time for when we needed to be there.

“But that's tomorrow, isn't it?” I exclaimed, barely able to keep myself calm.

“I am afraid so,” my father said, dreadfully.

My brother did not know what to think; he just slumped next to the wall and slowly slid down. We talked about the situation for a while, and in the end, there was no way around it; my brother and I had to go to the courthouse tomorrow morning. I honestly did not know much about The War, not even who was winning. I could fight, but I did not want to if it were not

necessary. That night I could not sleep, I lay there, tossing and turning, never able to calm my mind, my anxiety, myself. Eventually, though, my eyes shut, and my emotions silenced.

The next morning I awoke to someone knocking at my door, not sure if it were my brother or Father, either way, I told them to come in. The door creaked, followed by a small voice, my brother.

“Tristis, it's nearly time for us to go and you're not even up, time to get a move-on sleepy-head.”

“Yeah yeah,” I replied snarkily, hopping up and out of bed.

I grabbed the shirt off of the floor and put it on, followed by a pair of pants that were worn on the knees. By that time, my brother had shut my door and gone downstairs, I soon followed. When I got downstairs, I did not see Leo or my father; although, I could hear something coming from the kitchen, so that is where I went. When I walked in, Leo had a few slices of bread that he gave me. He then began to leave saying behind him, “I have some eggs cooking on the fire in there for you, dad also bought some berry jam.”

“And where are you going?” I said to him, expressing my question through my voice.

“Dad just wanted me to wake you, we are to go when the shadow reaches eight.”

That was how we told time back then. Now we have the bell towers, which sound a certain number of times according to what time it is. With that, he left, quietly closing the door behind him.

After I ate breakfast, which was dreadful because I knew that I would go to war soon, I walked outside and greeted my father. He and Leo were forging blades, one looked like a spearhead while the other was a shortsword. Father looked up.

“I reckon it is nearly time for you two to go. Please, step inside and let us pray.”

“But your sword, it's still in th-” I tried to finish my sentence but he cut me off.

“I care about my sons more than a simple blade.”

With that, we prayed, and for a long time too. I am not sure if there was a single thing that we left excluded from that prayer, *not that it mattered*. Afterward, we grabbed the necessary things, like the letter, and our caliaiges. We hugged our dad, shed a few tears, and left.

When we had finally gotten to the courthouse, there was a very large group of men who all mostly had letters. Some of them, I assume, were like Leo and me, staying in the same household, therefore *only getting one letter*. The courthouse consisted of one large building with a big case of stairs leading up to the entrance, almost looking like a simplified Pantheon. Many officers took place on top of the stairs, some even at the bottom, to ensure safety. Eventually, our city's secretary of war came out of the building, and slowly, the crowd fell silent.

“I would like to start this off by saying we are so grateful to have you serving in the Grand Army of The Byzantine Empire! Without your efforts we will not be able to win this war, this is why we call on you to help us in battle. Y-”

“Why? So we can die in *your fight*, not ours,” a random voice in the crowd erupted. “We never asked for this!” Several people around him started shouting in agreement, and the guards began hitting their spears on the solid ground under them, in sync so that the sound it produced was ear piercing and made people quiet very quickly.

“As I was saying,” the Secretary began again, this time more sternly.

“You are all to meet at the barracks near the southern wall when this meeting is over. Now, I need you all to form a line; we are going to ensure that everyone is here that is called to action.”

After our recognition, we went to the barracks as instructed. When we got there many other people had already gotten there meandering through the best armor and weapons. Leo and I both got a basic short sword and shield, but we had to get armor that fit our person.

While I was walking over to get sorted out with armor, I overheard some of the soldiers talking, notably, some of them said things such as, “Have you heard the front line is falling?” or “Two of the generals died in a bloodbath. That is why they are calling up all of these shinies to come fight with us.” And even more foreboding, “They are getting closer every day. No way we win this. Not without something major happening.”

I tried not to think about what they said and entered the building to get kitted. When that was all said and done, it was Leo’s turn, but nearly as soon as he went into the building, a horn sounded. Soldiers scrambled around, grabbing all of their tools, armor, and gear. Many of the people who did not yet have the essential gear ran around grabbing random weapons and armor. I did not know what the horn meant, but I knew that it was not good.

Leo left the building with only a helmet and chainmail chest guard. He unsheathed his sword from the scabbard and together we ran out of the barracks.

“You should not fight!” I said over the blare of horns and people yelling.

“You’ve barely got any armor, one arrow and you will die most certainly!”

He responded, “Yes I know, he would not let me get any other gear because it was ‘too late’ or something. I assume that the horn means war, right?”

“That’s all I have gathered from this,” I said, not like we needed to answer it ourselves anyway. By the time we had caught up with the ranks, a large rock of some sort hit the tower on

the side of the gatehouse, crumbling it immediately. Then, another directly on the top of the gatehouse. This made the gate gears undo and the gate doors open, while the metal bars fell onto many of our soldiers, killing them in an instant.

“Well, I think I know what the horn meant,” I said, trying to somehow lighten the mood.

“See you on the other side?” Leo said.

“You bet,” I responded.

The timing of that phrase was spot on; as soon as we said it we heard that enemy cavalry and their army began charging at us. The noise it made was deafening, but as everyone else did, we charged in, hoping for the best.

What seemed like hours had passed, dog fight after dog fight, never seeming to be an end to the number of enemies we all encountered. I had seen and dealt so much death that it nearly didn't even phase me anymore: I had to do what needed to be done. The large rocks ended up going farther than the wall, hitting houses, barracks, and even troops. Crushing everything, even horseback. Eventually, we had to retreat, as one of our flanks opened up.

Then I saw him, Leo, we had gotten split up in the masses of course, but now I could see him. Without thinking I ran forward, only to run directly into an enemy; I quickly recovered and continued running towards Leo. So close, yet so far. Then, *it* happened. What seemed to be the last wave of horseback flooded into the remnant of the gatehouse forcing everyone to move or die- no matter what, and Leo was directly in their path. His chainmail chest guard stood no chance against the spear that jolted through his chest, and out the back. It was so quick that there was practically no way to stop it.

Leo was dead. My mind did not move, I fell to my knees unable to think, unable to act, of all the people, why Leo? That was the first thing that cut into my mind, why? I lay there, and

eventually, I was able to get up, with bodies strewn everywhere, I slowly trucked back home. There was still a war going on. But in my mind nothing mattered. I entered my home: the very place where Leo stood just this morning, and I blacked out.

In the late 1300s, the Ottoman Empire attacked and wiped out the Byzantine Empire. This was a ridiculous thing, as the Byzantines were viewed as indestructible. This resulted in a long 55-day war that forced over 30,000 people into slavery and killed an unknown amount of soldiers. Civilian casualties are believed to be in the 10,000 marks. This bloody war in history is what caused a huge turn in the tide of many historical events, including the beginning of many huge empires' destruction.