

## GIDEON: THE BEGINNING

In the last few months you have been having a recurring dream...

You are running through the wilds but far too quickly. Darting in and out of the brush. The fresh scent of blood and earth fills your nostrils. Leaping over log and stream you race on all fours chasing a strange scent. Something familiar about that scent. Your brothers call to you telling you to stop, to turn back and join them in the hunt. That scent though draws you on. Through burning brush now you run, ever faster and more determined. The smoke of burning timber waters your eyes and dulls your senses but still you press on. Your sides heaving you do not know what drives you but something about that scent, cutting through all of the distractions you have passed. The pack, the fire, fresh game... nothing will turn you from your hunt. Finally when you are sure that you will run until exhaustion forces you to collapse you break into a sunlight clearing, songbirds taking flight on the cool morning breeze. Standing in the center of the field is a beautiful female standing on two legs. She is clothed in leaves and earth and smells of wildflowers and fresh rain. Though she is furless and without sharp teeth she seems formidable and even... familiar. Vaguely you remember a time when you were like her, cloaked in a weaker form, instincts fading into reason. Her turning toward you tears your thoughts away and brings them back to her. Drowning in her eyes you cannot help but lower yourself before her. Something familiar about all of this...

The dream always ends the same way. You waking covered in a cold sweat as if you had been running for hours. Your eyes burning and a faint smell of smoke on your clothes. The last thing you remember is a soft and musical voice saying to you "Hello old friend".

Gideon sat cross legged across from his father with a small fire between them used for warmth and to burn the ceremonial herbs and grasses used to create a meditative state. He had sat in this position for at least an hour trying to feel the presence of the beast within him. Slowly he let himself relax the way his father had taught him and methodically let his arms and then his legs go numb until he could not feel anything except the beat of his heart. Slowly his heart started to beat slower until it was not noticeable. As he sat there on the edge of sleep barely breathing he heard a distant howl in his head causing his heart to quicken, but just like numerous times before he quickly controlled his breathing and concentrated on the calling of the beast once again. The howling turned into a low growl that filled his head and became louder over the next several minutes until it sounded like the beast was directly in front of him. He could feel a hot breath on his face and feel its whiskers brush slightly against the side of his face but he continued to keep his eyes closed as he was trained. His heart started to slightly race but he quickly calmed it again. He had prepared for this moment for years, ever since coming of age, to face the beast and to follow the will of Tau.

"I smell you son of Sythis and I sense the Blood running through your veins. Are you afraid pup?" The beast slowly walked around him smelling his scent and looking for the slightest hint of fear. Gideon could sense the beast standing in front of him inches from his face and as it spoke again he could smell blood on its breath "Gideon of clan Storm Chaser, you are to travel to the realm of man and live among that race for 15 winters to learn their ways. There is a storm coming to the realms of men and in order to preserve the clans we may need to save the man from himself. The fate of the clans is tied to the survival of man. In time we will talk again but until that time you must travel this road that no other can. If the maiden of dreams presents herself to you beware but do not be afraid." Gideon senses the beast turning away and moving away from him slowly until he can no longer sense its power. As he opens his eyes and makes contact with his father's eyes looking back at him through the smoke of the small fire he realizes it's time to leave this place.

The journey to Ariea City was not an easy one. A group of particularly persistent bandits followed Gideon for almost a full day before finally giving up. The weather was warm for this time of year, too warm. The heat slowed travel down and forced Gideon to go miles out of his way to find water. It was on one of these forays that he met the old man.

It was nearly sundown when Gideon found the banks of a small river. The heat was beginning to lessen though still unseasonably warm. It didn't take Gideon long to remove his clothes and jump into the cool river, washing away the grime of the road and wash off the sweat and oppressive heat of the day. The clearing he was in was alongside a small grove of trees and far enough away from the road to ensure privacy. A slight breeze had kicked up this evening also promising a good night's sleep after a cooling bath. When the old man got there was not clear, but catching movement out of the corner of his eye, Gideon stood in the waist deep water and stared at the old man presumably setting up camp just a few yards from where he bathed.

Gideon wiped the water from his eyes to get a better look at the man who had surprised him and wondered how he had gotten so close without being noticed. It had been years since someone had sneaked up on him so easily without being smelled or heard. The old man did not appear threatening and if he meant Gideon harm, he already would have attacked. Slowly Gideon looks around for signs of others with his eyes coming to rest on his sword and crossbow leaning against the tree next to the stranger. The man had made a point to set up his camp next to Gideon's weapons which was smart and to send a message. Gideon felt the beast pacing nervously in his head growling a deeply, but he suppressed the urge to react. Slowly Gideon walked through the water to the shore, pulled himself up onto the grassy bank using a small tree, and looked at the stranger a few yards away.

If the stranger wanted to harm him, he would already be dead thought Gideon. The man possesses a great deal of skill and like a wolf he is only seen because he wishes to be seen. Gideon bends down and crouches next to some twigs he previously collected and starts to build a small fire to warm up some water for tea. Gideon does not talk to the man but does look at him as he goes about donning his clothing and drying his hair, trying to smell his scent and observe his body language. He looks at the man's hands, boots, and clothing trying to figure out

as much as he can using all of his skills and senses. Minutes go by without any words being exchanged as the two of them get ready for nightfall in silence.

The long silence was finally broken as the old man said "Going to be cold tonight... especially after the heat of the day."

Turning slightly in the firelight, Gideon got his first glimpse of the gnarled, old man. Reminding him of an old oak, the man was weathered brown with sparse, thin white hair and a full white beard that caught in the breeze. He was wearing common leathers and his only weapon appeared to be an old walking stick almost as gnarled and misshapen as the old man himself.

"The river was cool and refreshing was it not? Clean and crisp. Enough to wash away all of the memories of your journey. Remember it as you continue on this road, memory is like an old friend. Even though you may not see her for a very long time all it takes is one visit and it all comes back to you."

Not understanding a word the old man said, Gideon decided to test his senses again, closer this time. The old man smelled of wood and water, leather and campfire smoke. Though the beast inside was still on edge, it seemed to ease a bit as he studied the man. Not noticing before but the juices of two skewered rabbits sizzled over the fire and made Gideon's stomach growl, reminding him he had not eaten since this morning.

As the old man turned from the fire to face Gideon, there was almost a moment's dramatic pause. The world taking a deep sigh. Something familiar about that face and yet he was sure he had never met the man. It was the old man's eyes that caused Gideon to start. They were bright blue like the sky and held a sparkle not common on someone so old. Looking into them though, you could almost see the river, the trees, the ancient stones that time had forgotten.

"You going to join me and have a meal or stand there staring all night?" the old man finally said.

Gideon looked into those blue eyes and nodded before sitting down on the hot ground next to the cooking rabbits. The smell of the cooking meat was slowly wearing down his sense of caution and the old man did not seem very threatening at the moment. Gideon reached over the fire, removed the smallest rabbit and then reached behind to pull a flask of whisky from his pack. "Well since you haven't tried to kill me yet I might as well offer you a drink". Gideon softly tosses the old man the flask to judge his reflexes and then tears off a piece of the hot meat from the skewer. "These woods have become more dangerous since last time I passed this way. A small group of bandits have been pursuing me most of yesterday and now old men with walking sticks mysteriously show up out of the woods and cook me dinner after I bathe. If you are looking to soften me up in order to share my company through these woods then the answer is, maybe. On the other hand if you are hoping to slit my throat in the night and make off with my belongings then I need to warn you this will be your last meal". "As for memories, I have many and you're right, they do come back like old friends but I hope water does not wash

the memories from my mind as you say". "Memories of beautiful woodland maidens clothed in leaves and smelling of innocence are the best memories to have". The wolf seemed to be silent in his head at the moment, a good sign as he tried to figure out who this stranger was and what he wanted.

"Well at least you remember the value of a good stiff drink", the old man said as he spryly snatched the whiskey flask out of the air.

"Washing away you say... well I suppose it can do that too. I have no interest in your company through the woods; where would I go but that would take me away from here and I should point out that it might be difficult to get revenge upon me after I slit your throat. That of course is not my intention. I don't remember the caution from you? Maybe that's new?"

Taking a long swig from the flask, the old man casually tossed it back to Gideon and pulled a long stemmed pipe from a pack sitting next to him. Carefully and methodically he packed the pipe and went about lighting the sweet smelling tobacco.

"Beautiful night this is going to be. You have nothing to fear here, in fact might be the last good night of sleep you get for some time. I suggest you enjoy it. Bandits will give you no trouble here, though when you leave I can't promise anything. Probably gave up anyway."

Inside the wolf stirred quietly and then slept. It was almost disconcerting for it to be so quiet. It seemed lonely inside his head, as Gideon contemplated the resting beast, something that had not happened in a long time.

"So for the meal and my fine company all I ask is that when you come back this way you bring me some more tobacco. Hard to get out here, at least the good stuff. Should be able to find some in one of those fancy cities of the chosen. Called Elder Leaf as I understand it. Comes from the south somewhere."

The old man stared at the river and through a waft of smoke Gideon could see a small smile forming on his face. He didn't seem to be talking to Gideon or to anyone for that matter. His voice seemed far away and so did his thoughts. "Seems we are all in this together. Beast and man alike. The time has come it would seem. All these long years waiting and now it's here... suppose I should be relieved. I could use some rest, man gets tired of watching and waiting you know. Maybe you will remember and maybe you won't, either way I get to finally rest."

Gideon stared at the old man through the smoke of the fire, his yellow eyes reflecting the firelight. He did not know what to make of this blue eyed man who spoke in riddles. In Gideon's clan there were members known as forest walkers who live solitary lives away from the clan and some claimed they could talk with trees and such. Gideon never met a forest walker and never gave them a thought but looking at the old man he couldn't help but wonder if this person could talk to the trees. "What is your name grey beard and how did you come to live out here? What do you mean the time has come for beast and man? You seem to know much

more than this simple woodsman does and you speak in riddles about waiting. The night is long and the flask is full my new friend.

"That seems to be the way of it with old men, doesn't it? Riddles and nonsense. Well I am sorry for that, after enough years people and places seem to run together, get all jumbled up.", the old man replied. He stared up at the quickly darkening night sky and was quiet for a moment.

"Name is ... Well my name is... ah, you can call me Quinn. Guess that's as good as any, eh? Been out here for so long don't quite remember how I got here but think I'll stay just the same. Some things take waiting to know, don't mean nothing now, might mean something later. Like if I was to tell you that the key to Hammerfall Gate is to know Hendel's greatest creation, well... you would just look at me with that blank stare. Kind of like your doin' now." An amused look passed across the old man's face quickly and then he set about tapping out his pipe and settling more comfortably on the thick log he was using as a seat.

"What brings you back here? Gonna go stir up some trouble somewhere I bet? Well, as to that... gotta do what you gotta do, I guess. It all is leading to the same place but nobody wants to hear that do they? A wedding or lost princesses or a stolen book, what difference does it make? Gotta start somewhere. Just hope you remember your name at the break of dawn, be doin' good then. We may have more time to talk later, when things make a little more sense. For now tell me about yourself, at least what you can remember." The old man chuckled softly after the last statement and turned his discerning eyes on Gideon waiting for a response.

Gideon stared at Quinn for a moment and then his yellow eyes looked into the fire before them, contemplating how much to tell this stranger about himself he felt at ease around the man and the beast was not raising any warning to the man's questioning. In fact the beast was surprisingly silent at the moment which was a good sign.

"Well, there isn't much to tell. My name is Gideon from clan Storm Chaser in the Fey Wood. It is custom in my clan to live among other races for periods of time to learn their ways and to return to the clan after a number of years. Our elders believe this is important to the survival of the clan and it gives us a chance to stretch our legs a little and experience the world around us. I was currently on my way to Aria city when you found me just now." Gideon stretches his legs out before him and starts lay on his side facing the fire, the challenges of the last few days finally taking its toll on his muscles. As he tried to get comfortable on the ground he looks over at Quinn and catches the slight smirk on the old man's face. "That's probably not what you were wantin' to know was it? Let's start this story over again shall we, and I'll try to fill in a few more details."

"My race originates from an elder bloodline of shape changers, what some folks call lycanthropes in the common tongue." Gideon could feel the beast raise its head in alarm in his head, its unblinking gaze filling his thoughts with caution and danger. Ignoring the warning the creature was giving him, Gideon continued as the beast started to form a low growl in his thoughts "Becoming the head of my clan is my only desire in this life so I left to learn more of

the outside world and to explore the beast that flows through my veins. By traveling the world I hope to discover myself and learn how to live and accept the thing inside of me. The beast and I are separate and somehow I need to learn how to meld the two into one. This joining of souls must be done before I can become the leader of my clan. I feel it to be true and cannot explain it any clearer than that. One reoccurring thing in my life is a dream that comes to me in the night, of being a wolf running free through the woods with all the instincts of the beast and coming across a maiden standing in a clearing. This maiden has a penetrating gaze and is dressed only in leaves but the most amazing thing about her is her eyes that penetrate through me and put me to ease like a pup nestling by a fire on a cold night. Somehow I believe this maiden is the key to helping me accept the beast and I must seek her out."

Gideon stares at the old man through the fire, anticipating Quinn to get up from the fire and disappearing into the woods never to be seen again. Secretly Gideon feels at ease after telling the man these secrets. If he is going to complete his quest among the race of man then he is going to need help. Perhaps this man will be the first of many to answer these questions he has been living with his entire life. The beast's howl became louder as he told his tale to Quinn and now he could almost feel the hot breath of its maw upon his face. The wolf was angry and would be upset for some time.

## **The Wolf Clans of Aria:**

**History:** 2000 years ago, during the rise of the races, the god Tau grew envious of the other gods knowing that the races were not acknowledging him as much as they were the other gods. Without the approval of the gods Tau merged a small reclusive tribe of fey humanoid creatures with his favorite of the woodland beasts, the wolves, in an attempt to create a race that would worship only him. During the titan wars this Lycan clan roamed what is known today known Aria. During that time the Lycan tried very hard to distance themselves from the other inferior races which eventually proved crucial in their survival during the titan wars and subsequent war of the races. During the time of troubles between the titans and the other races the clan traveled deeper into the fey wood and took great measures to keep their existence hidden from those outside the borders of their realm. For thousands of years the clan roamed the fey wood, establishing three separate hunting areas which they called Winter Home, Summer Home and Spring Vale all named after the season the clan spent their hunting and raising off-spring. As the clan grew in size they began to cross paths with the other great race of the Fey Wood, the Sylvan. Tau and Ehlora both agreed that their followers must live in peace with one another if both peoples were to prosper so The Accord was reached between the more powerful Sylvan and the less advanced Lycan clan resulting in the clan splitting into 3 distinct groups with each clan claiming one of the original Fey Wood hunting grounds. In agreeing to split the clan into three groups the sylvan agreed to protect the Lycan from any threats and to aid the Lycan if summoned. Clan Stormwalker chose the western fey wood and claimed Winter Home as their main settlement. Clan Red Fang located in western fey wood and claimed Spring Vale and clan Sliver Mane located in southern fey wood laying claim to Summer Home. For thousands of years the Lycan have lived in peace alongside of the Sylvan into the current age. The Accord was carved into the bark of the Life Tree by Ehlora's own hand and is located deep in the fey wood, binding the sylvan and Lycan to this day. The Life Tree is considered sacred by the Sylvan as it is the only thing that has been touched directly by their goddess.

**Religion:** The Lycan clans of Aria all worship Tau with great reverence and consider him the father of their bloodline. Each Lycan clan is ruled by a council of nine elders who are both the spiritual leaders and the governing body for each clan. It is a long held belief among the clan's spiritual leaders that Luna approached Tau and offered to make him the most powerful among the gods if he would be her companion. Together with their combined power they would rule over the other gods and force their will on the races. Upon learning of Luna's plan, Ehlora, Taos mother, informed Tau that she would stand against him if he chose this path as it would upset the balance between the gods that had existed for many millennia. Tau listened to his mother's wisdom and chose to expose Luna and her plan to the other gods. After Luna learned that Tau had rejected her she was furious and in a moment of rage she cursed Tau and used dark forgotten magic on him, causing him to act like the beasts he controlled and becoming devoid of all rational thought. Luna's curse did not only affect Tau but also his most devoted priests and priestesses causing them to become half human and half beast at the sight of the symbol of her power, the full moon. Upon learning of her sons fate Ehlora instructed her

followers, the sylvan, to hunt down and kill Tao's perverse priestesses and priests whom Luna had cursed. To this day the sylvan are mortal enemies of the lycanthropes and continually hunt down and destroy the beasts where ever they are found in the realms.

Even though Tau's conscience was taken from him and he now runs with the beasts he once controlled, the Lycan clans still worship him as their god. When Tau was cursed by Luna and the bond with their god was severed, this caused the clans to search endlessly for Tau in an attempt to find their god once again. When the clans talk about their search for Tau they refer to this as "Seeking that which was lost". When members of the clan reach 18 years of age they are sent out from the clan for 2 years to "Seek that which was lost" and return to the tribe at the Festival of Eventide with news of their search. **Gideon is now at the end of his search and since meeting Ehlora and learning that he is her champion he is now ready to return to his tribe and tell the tale of his search. Gideon now believes that Tau is indeed still alive but lost to his people. Faith in Ehlora is the only way for his people to become greater than their ancestors and take their place as equals to the dominant races of man. Gideon needs to convince the council of elders that Tau is still the father of the Lycan clans but Ehlora is also now their mother. It will be hard for him to convince his people to forget their customs and faith in their god but this must be done for the bloodline to continue. Gideon believes that the dream he had of running through a forest fire to find Ehlora in a clearing symbolizes the burning of the world. The only way the Lycan clans will survive the future destruction of the realms is to accept Ehlora as their goddess. It will not be easy to convince his people to forsake the god that they have worshipped for two thousand years but they must accept Ehlora or perish.** There is the risk that he could be expelled from the clan for heresy or worse.

**Social Structure:** Each of the three Lycan clans is patriarchal with an emphasis placed on the care and raising of as many offspring as possible to ensure the continuance of the clan. Each clan consists of about 500 members and has a hunting area of a 50 mile radius from the clan homes. Males and sometimes females who are expert hunters are often given a higher status within the clan as they are seen as the key providers for the people. Being a hunter for the clan is an honor and the responsibility is taken very seriously. Sometimes the clan's most respected hunters are given the opportunity to make decisions along with the council of elders on matters that affect the clan's security. Once a year the clans unite at the summer solstice for the Feast of Eventide held in Winter Home, where Tau is worshiped, offerings are made in his name and the members of the clan dance and celebrate. The next feast and gathering of the clans is a month away and it is at this feast that the clan members who are out in the realms seeking that which is lost return to each tell the story of their travels and tell the elders if they found the bond they were seeking. **It is at this feast that Gideon plans on telling of his encounter with Ehlora, the vision of Ehlora and Tau and the severing of the souls, the conversation with Ehlora who appointed Gideon as her champion and the knowledge that the land is in blight due to the current condition of the king. Gideon will also inform his father and the council of elders of his intention to take Lilly as his companion.**

**Winter Home:** Winter Home is situated at the base of the mountain range and occupies a large cave in the foot hills of the mountains. The clan's temple to Tau and ruling council of elders reside in the large cave at the edge of the settlement. Outside the cave are numerous small



houses made of wood and thatch which make up the Lycan settlement. The Lycan are only allowed to use the wood from the forest floor and are not allowed to harm a living tree per the accord with the sylvan. Most homes resemble human settlements except these consist of a single room where the whole family lives, sleeps and eats. Most dwellings are modest but stoutly built with all decorations depicting an effigy of Tau or woodland scenes. All Lycan settlements are able to produce fine and masterwork leather or hide armors and clothing but must import anything made of metal since they do not have ability to mine minerals and refine the various ores. Rare herbs are also exported by the Lycan clans to various traders on the outskirts of the fey wood.

## AND SO IT BEGINS...

Damn his office is big for a captain of the watch Gideon thought to himself as he stood leaning against the wall of the office waiting for the captain. The taste of pipe smoke and whiskey still fresh in his mouth reminding him of his long night working with the city watch in trying to determine why the thieves guild and some assassins from Tarsis would want to kill a member of the nobility. The Dawnbringer family was highly respected inside and outside of Aria and with the merging of Clan Silerborn the Dawnbringers would only become more powerful. Gideon hoped that the thieves guild would not retaliate for the deaths of so many of their members, but that was wishful thinking. The thieves guild would not wait for long to retaliate for last night and he hoped it did not start some sort of guild war between Dawnbringers/Silverborns and the thieves and assassins guilds. The captain told him to report here this morning to discuss the events of last night and to brief Gideon on any additional information he had turned up since then. The man was smart and one of the best captains he had ever worked with. An honorable man. He could not help but wonder why someone in Tarsis would want harm to come to a noble family in Aria unless this person also had their sights set on Clan Silverborn and their riches. It would be only a matter of time before the watch contacted the military to ask for Gideon's further assistance in tracking down who was responsible for this inside of Tarsis. Hopefully this was going to be a one man job.

Galen entered the room in a rush, his eyes heavy and bloodshot as if he hadn't slept in days. So determined was his demeanor that he almost didn't notice the man leaning against the wall.

"Good, you're still here. I had feared you were gone already, I heard there is a handsome bounty for the one who kidnapped the Harrington girl. Well, no matter. The events of the last couple of days have the city in an uproar and I understand the queen herself was sneaking about the noble district last night, as if I didn't have enough to worry about already."

"I asked you here because I need your help, or more accurately Sythin Dawnbringer needs your help. They have a lead on the guild from Tarsis who sullied my city last night and as I understand it, they have a lead on another target in Valencia. I know you work alone, but I am afraid this small group of heroes is going to find themselves lost in the woods without proper help."

Gideon walks over and grabs the small spittoon sitting on Galen's desk and properly spits his chew that had suddenly taken on a ransid flavor, thinks for a moment and then turns to Galen.

In a Clint Eastwood tone of voice he says, "You know I saw the bodies in the street around the temple and it looks like Lord Dawnbringer can actually skin that steel he carries on his back and doesn't just walk around with it for show, as for the other I'm not sure but I have never seen a builder that didn't know how to fight. The rumors have already started that this is a religious feud between the temples since one of the priestesses was assaulted just a block from her temple. Some are sayin' there has started a fight between the merchants guild and the thieves guild. Whoever hired this killin' already knows that it has failed. The assassins will want revenge for the hurtin' Dawnbringer put on their honor and the thieves guild will want blood for blood. The killin' aint over, not by a far cry and as I see it those folks are going to need all the help they can get." "The gates to the city will be watched so we need to get out a different way, once out I'll take them to Valencia or Tarsis the long way through the woods and then overland. I'll make contact with you the usual way once we get to either of those cities. I don't like this

one bit Galen. There could be a number of nobles who would want to see House Dawnbringer crumble but there are only about 5 or 6 houses in the realms who could afford to pay off the thieves guild and hire some of the best assassins out there. Anyway, I have completed my duties with the new recruits outside of town, teaching them survival skills, stealth and such. Corporal Mallet can continue their advanced training, scouting, and mounted combat. We are going to need a few supplies before we leave, heavy oiled cloaks of black, forest green, and tan, food and water,....." Gideon starts to write down a list of supplies on a piece of parchment on Galen's desk, mumbling to himself and then looks at Galen. "I don't know what will happen out there once we leave but I wanted to let you know that I will protect those folks with my life." He then picks up the spittoon again, takes the chew out of his mouth, wipes it on the edge and walks out of the room. "I hope they don't give me any trouble when I show up at Lord Dawnbringer's gates or this will be a short trip, take care friend".

Galen continues to watch the doorway and after 2 or 3 seconds his friend backs back up into the doorway and says with a smirk, did you say something about a bounty? And what exactly are these leads they have in Valencia and Tarsis?

Galen moved slowly toward a table covered in sheets of parchment and sighed deeply while settling into a padded chair that looked as if it rarely saw use. "One more thing Gideon." Galen reluctantly sighed. "I will get you a private meeting with Dawnbringer and an invitation to the wedding. You could do me a favor, of course you may have to put on the uniform to make it look official. I need an extra set of eyes in the courtyard to watch for anything out of place. We may have gotten rid of the brotherhood of serpents for now but the guild may try to make a statement."

Handing Gideon a signed document, Galen settled back into his chair and rubbed his temples. "That should cover any questions anyone has about your authority for the time being."

"I will get you whatever supplies you need, of course. Your usual rate."

"I am afraid there is more going on here than I know and this has the stink of a much larger plot. Your question about who could pay off the guild and hire the brotherhood is a good one. You should keep that in mind as you go east. We could sure use the good will of the queen of Valencia should we manager to help them. She has enough problems of her own right now."

Gideon turned his chair toward the window and settled into a long and nearly uncomfortable silence. Finally after what seemed like hours, he turned slowly back toward his guest and quietly spoke, "You know what bothers me the most about this. The tower is pulling everyone home to the island. They know something is up and even my... my... friend won't tell me what that is. There is a storm coming. I only hope we are ready for it."

Gideon places the document on Galen's desk without looking at it with a serious look on his face. He walks around the desk, opens the top drawer and pulls out a bottle of whiskey and two shot glasses without removing his eyes from Galen. He pours two shots, takes one for himself and sits down in a chair opposite of Galen. After taking a few sips of whiskey he stares past Galen and out the window with a distant look on his face. "You know I haven't worn the uniform since your brother's funeral. Its been what....5 years now? I told myself I would never wear the colors of the first regiment again. I will wear them if it is necessary for this meeting with Dawnbringer but I do so with a heavy heart. I know you

have forgiven me for that night but I cant forgive myself ". He finishes his whiskey and pours himself another one, noticing Galen has not touched his. "I remember your sister beating my chest and asking me why it had to happen and I remember holding her tight, perhaps too tight, trying to explain why I wasn't there to protect her brother ". Gideon lets out a long sigh and sits in silence for a short period and then shakes himself out of his thoughts.

"The past is behind us my friend. We have enough to occupy our thoughts without second guessing ourselves. My brother was a brother to you as we'll, I have not forgotten that and neither did Lilly."

Tipping the dirty glass to his lips, Galen turned away from his desk and resumed staring at the few early risers moving about outside his window. The solemn silence that settled in was finally broken by a knock at the door.

Galen softly spoke, "Enter."

It was a young soldier that entered the room. He too looked as if he had not slept recently, though his uniform was impeccably clean and he smelled of freshly oiled metal and clean earth.

"Captain, forgive my disturbance sir but... A representative from the royal palace has begun posting notices around the city. The wedding is to be accompanied by a city wide celebration. Alms will be passed out, the merchants are closing for the better part of the day and the royals are funding food, wine and entertainment for all."

Galen silently looked at the young soldier as if waiting for more. "Spit it out lad, you are going to burst holding things in like that."

"We'll sir, ... Shortly after those notices went up a few of the royal guards were posting notices of their own. The lower districts are not invited and more over are required to submit for questioning about recent events. The gates into the city proper are to be closed until such time as those responsible are found."

After a short pause the soldier bravely spoke up again, "They will starve sir before they give up the guild, to say nothing of the resentment they will have watching their neighbors celebrate."

Galen turned to his guest, "We have much to do my friend."

Gideon gives Galen a knowing nod and quickly wipes out the shot glasses with the edge of his cloak and places them neatly into the desk drawer with routine precision. "My friend, when I was at the Pit and Boar the other night I noticed a number of shop keepers with new canvas awnings that look reinforced, there are new cloths lines stretched between buildings, a number of brick walls have ben repaired to allow for very discrete handholds, I have also noticed a number of roofs being repaired with heavily tared tiles for traction and the eve troughs on a number of buildings have been modified and reinforced. They have slowly been modifying the city to make it easier for their members to move about. There seems to be many moving pieces in this puzzle of late with a lot of players. Should I go to Lord Dawnbringer now and get him and his friends out of the city before things get rough or do you need my help with these other issues?"

"I am afraid you are not going to pull the Dawnbringer fellow out of the city until the wedding is over. I am working on a plan to get clan Silvershine out of the city the night following the wedding with an escort back up to Silverton. You can probably get out the same night and head to Queenstown. The first priority I am afraid is to get to the Queen and let her know what is going on. Maybe even unravel a little more of this mystery. I will try to keep things in order as best I can here."

"When you get those supplies for me just send them over to the Dawnbringer estate and I'll handle it from there. I'll get over there promptly and make my presence known to Lord Dawnbringer and see if I can't get a little more information out of him before the wedding. Aye, I'll be your extra set of eyes at this business venture they are calling a wedding and hopefully the brotherhood doesn't do something stupid. Keep this in mind friend, I wouldn't worry about the thieves guild too much, they like a captain of the guard that is fair and honest because then they know where you stand on things. Watch your back when it comes to the nobles and even the royals, I suspect they are the ones behind all of this. If you get a knife in the back, it'll probably be encrusted with jewels." Gideon stops and looks at his friend one more time before he leaves and really looks deeply into Galen's eyes, grabs him by the forearm tightly and says "I love you like a brother, may the nine be with you my friend and until we see each other again in this life or the next, stay strong and stay silent." With that Gideon turns and walks away from his long time friend and heads to Dawnbringer manor with Galen's writ of recommendation tucked inside of his cloak. He wonders if he will ever see his friend again in this life. This Dawnbringer family had better be worth the blood that has been spilled in the streets of Aria. Hopefully Dawnbringer has an ace up his sleeve, getting an audience with the queen is no easy task. Gideon's walk turns into a run as he feels the beast inside of himself start to howl, he starts to run.....faster.....

Gideon arrives at the garrison just outside of the noble district a short time later, soaked in sweat and feeling refreshed after the morning run. The animal tenseness inside of him now gone he walks up to the soldier standing beside the large oak reinforced door fashioned into the side of the three story brick building. The soldier stiffens and salutes Gideon when he approaches, holding the salute until Gideon nods in acceptance. No words are exchanged as Gideon enters the barracks and instinctively travels down the various halls to the officers quarters. The smell of woodsmoke, sweat, and oiled leather is still in the air from last night as he makes his way to the one place in this city where nobody will bother him, his cot. The officers quarters are empty this time of the morning which is just the way he wants it as he unlocks the small chest at the foot of his bed. Typical items such as oils, socks, trinkets, clothing and such are quickly removed and neatly placed on the floor as he works his way to the bottom of the chest to find his uniform. Crawling around on the forest floor for days, climbing, hunting, and training the men in all types of wilderness survival skills doesn't require one to be dressed properly which is one reason he took the job after his last deployment. He catches a glimpse of the navy blue jacket through the clutter in the chest and slowly pulls it from the bottom of the chest. How long has it been since the funeral, three years? He could almost still smell Lily's tears on the right shoulder where he held her for what seemed forever, whispering words of condolence into her ear. His hands shake slightly as he holds the uniform which is embossed with the signia of the first brigade over the left breast. The uniform is placed with care onto the cot as Gideon methodically starts to place all of his possessions into a well oiled back pack. It will be a relief to finally get back into the safety of the woods where you can hear your enemy and you don't need to worry about a knife in the back. The uniform is neatly placed into the pack and then with a few quick tugs, he secures the pack and carries it out of the room.

Gideon peers up ahead at the Dawnbringer estate coming into view through the morning haze and wonders why humans build such large dwellings and show of their wealth in such a manner. In his village lycans have small mud brick and sod homes which are used solely to protect you from the elements and to store some food during the winter. A lycans self worth is determined on how well he performs on hunting parties, the ability to track game and provide security for his family. Some of the human traditions will always be foreign to him no matter how long he spends among them. He feels for the paperwork from Galen which will get him an audience with dawn bringer and listens to the paper crackle under the pressure of his touch. Adjusting his pack, he walks up to the guard house adjacent to the front gate.....

.....As Gideon walks to the Dawnbringer estate he keeps thinking about the wolf dream with a smile on his face and a lightness in his step. The dream makes him feel very alive and for days afterwards he can hear the wolf howling a lone yearning howl that begs the maiden to return to his sleeping thoughts. Someday he will find a way to unleash the beast that courses through his veins and occupies his very actions. As he walks through the morning streets of Aria city his heightened senses start to smell the overwhelming scent of warming horse manure in the morning sun, see flies starting to land on garbage in the alleyways and hear the slight disturbances of people waking in their beds in the numerous small residences that line the streets. He closes his right eye slightly as he feels the maidens touch on the right side of his head and remembers her sweet voice as if she had actually spoke in his ear. He growls in frustration at the sudden ending of the dream which causes a nearby dog to yelp and run away down an alley.