

BORN SOLDIER

George stood tall and proud, preparing to address his troops on what was going to be one of the greatest battles of all time. His men were the elite soldiers, and George knew that some weren't going to see tomorrow.

“Gentlemen, today we embark on a conquest that will separate man from beast. I send my honor to those who will sacrifice their lives for the glory of victory. What we do today will go down in history generations to come. I have seen the beast, and you have heard its shrill screams. Today, we come face to face with fear. We come face to face with death. We come face to face with. . .”

“Georgie, who are you talking, sweetie?”

Seven-year-old George Turner spun around from his army of stuffed animals placed delicately in order of height across his Batman sheets. His squinted up, making out the figure hovering over him. It wasn't too difficult; George always recognized his mother's voice.

“Mom, I'm busy,” he said.

“Where are your glasses?”

George dropped his head until his chin touched the top part of his tan corduroy overalls. Parents never understand true safety, he thought.

“And why are you wearing a plastic bowl on your head, Georgie?” his mother asked.

George knew it was no use trying to explain to his mother that he was about to sacrifice his young, tender life to a vicious beast for the safety of his family.

George's mom fetched his glasses off the light blue nightstand next to his bed and gave them to him. George slid the giant oval frames across his face. He smiled as the thick glasses rested peacefully against his pudgy cheeks.

"Keep them on," his mother said in her normal, concerned parent voice. She took the plastic bowl off George's head, parted his dirty blond hair to the side, and exited the room with a gentle kiss on his forehead.

George turned to face his men again to remind them of the task at hand.

"It was a week ago when I stood at my window and heard a vicious growl. I looked down, and saw the horrible beast with thick brown hair engulfing its entire body. I gasped, and then the beast stopped and looked at me. Giant fangs hung from its enormous mouth, like a warning. I quickly ran from my window. I assumed the worst for poor Mr. Crassley, and knew it wouldn't be long until it was my family's turn. So, gentlemen, it's time to battle this beast, once and for good."

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George and his men slowly trotted across the battle field. A high ridge separated them from the beast. On the other side, the faint sound of heavy breathing could be heard.

"On my count, we charge."

George stood up with a defiant stare across the world. He was only seven, and was about to sacrifice everything he had worked for so far in his life. Behind him, the army stood still. They didn't move. They didn't blink. In George's left hand was a sharp silver object that would be used to destroy the monster. He had seen his older brother Jake watching movies where silver bullets were used to destroy werewolves. With no bullets or a gun, the dagger would do.

"One . . .," George began in a low voice.

He could hear the beast across the ridge. George's house was too far away now. He was surrounded by high wooden fences that had been just freshly stained by his father. There was no turning back.

"Two." George's voice became more tense. He began to breathe heavily. Small beads of sweat were starting to drip down his forehead. Without his helmet, he felt too vulnerable. He had decided to leave his glasses behind, as a memento for his parents.

As George opened his mouth to give the final word, he heard a loud, clawing noise. The beast was actually trying to break down a high, thick wooden fence. What a monster!

George let out one last breath, and screamed, "Three!"

Before he knew it, he'd crested the ridge. Just below he saw the beast's head sticking out from the fence. As George screamed to enter battle, he realized he was alone. He turned to find his troops halted far behind him. Devastated by the betrayal of his loyal troops, George dropped his dagger, rendering himself defenseless to the beast charging from behind. With the sound of metal rattling in the air, George slowly turned as the beast leaped.

George began to thrust his arms, yelling. With his dagger too far out of reach, and his troops just watching, he was doomed. He felt the heat from the beast's breath scorch his face. The immense weight was beginning to crush his fragile ribcage. George closed his eyes and felt the wet tongue of the monster caress his face. The battle was over.

“Georgie, why don't you have your glasses on?”

George opened his eyes, and saw the blur of his mother.

“Zeus, lay down!” she yelled at the beast.

George quickly sat up, and reached for his mother. She handed him his glasses, again. He placed them on his damp face, and saw the monster face to face, clearly.

“Why is my good fork out here laying in the yard, Georgie?”

The beast leaned forward and licked George's face again. This wasn't a beast at all. It was Mr. Crassley's German Shepard, Zeus. George couldn't believe his eyes.

“And why are all your stuffed animals out here?” George's mother yelled in the background. “What am I going to do with you?”

George reached his hand out, and petted Zeus's head. Maybe George should wear his glasses more often. Maybe.