



A Noble Heritage

By Barbara Handshy Anderson

And of the Gadites there separated themselves unto David into the hold to the wilderness men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains;

1 Chronicles 12:8(KJV)

“If I asked you, would you tell me the truth, Father?” Vincent asked.

“Of course,” was Father’s immediate reply.

“Am I a man?” Vincent asked searchingly.

Father hesitated. He could hear in Vincent’s voice how important his answer would be. He looked to the distance as if he was searching for just the right words and finally, haltingly answered, “Part of you ... is.”

“And the part that is not...?” Vincent pleaded. “That part that ... takes over ... that the man in me cannot forget ... cannot ... close his eyes in peace ...?”

¹This image is a digitally modified screen cap.

Father shook his head. “I don’t know the answer to that, Vincent.” Then standing and shaking his head, he continued, “I honestly don’t know.”

The glimmer of hope in Vincent’s eyes faded. “You have educated the man. You have nurtured the man. Read him poetry, taught him to love,” he said. “But the other... the other... you don’t understand. You don’t understand its power.” Just speaking of it, giving voice to the words, brought a wave of fear and despair that washed over him.

Father could see how these thoughts affected Vincent. Approaching him he said, “Vincent”

“Father, I cannot control my thoughts,” he sighed heavily. “Father, I’m afraid.”²

Father put his arms around Vincent’s broad shoulders. He desperately wanted to comfort him, to give him something to assuage his fears. But Father didn’t know. Father couldn’t know. The knowledge of Vincent’s bloodline, the knowledge of Vincent’s noble heritage was lost long before Father. Long before Father’s father. Long before even Father’s father’s father. How *could* he have known? How could Jacob Wells have possibly known what was lost to the knowledge of men more than 2000 years before he was even born?

But Jacob had shown courage. More courage than most men. He had nurtured Vincent. He had indeed educated Vincent. Most importantly, he had loved Vincent.

And yet still in the deepest part of him, Jacob had never fully conquered the fear, the fear that lives in the deepest heart of a man when he does not comprehend what he sees before him.

As a result, Vincent had not conquered the fear either. How could he? When he did not know who he was. When he did not know *what* he was. He couldn’t conquer the fear, because could not comprehend ... himself.

In ancient times, thousands of years ago, there was a tribe of men, a tribe of Israel, known as the tribe of Gad. These men, these Gadites, were men of honor, men of valor, men of strength. They were faithful men who were mighty in battle, able to bear buckler and sword and shoot with a bow, and skillful in war. Their faces were like the faces of lions, and they could run as fast as a deer upon the mountains.³

In those days these men did not hide their faces in shame or fear. They did not live in the dark or cower in the shadows. They dwelt among their fellow men and were looked upon as noble protectors and defenders of the kingdom. They were not feared by those who knew them. They were not hunted like animals. They lived as other men lived, and they loved and

²Beauty and the Beast Season 2 Episode 20 “What Rough Beast”

³The Holy Bible 1 Chronicles 5: 18 and 1 Chronicles 12:8

were loved as other men loved. They were looked up to as heroes. But those days eventually came to an end.

In the year 723 BC, the Gadites were conquered by Pul and Tilgath-pilneser, both Kings of Assyria and taken away captive, destined to disappear in the mists of time.

They were among the first of 10 tribes of Israel to become lost. Lost to Israel, lost to history, and eventually lost to the memory and knowledge of all men ... except in one place. The place where they continued to live. Where they exist still ... to this very day. These fierce, noble, lion-faced men ... still live among us ... in the realm of myth and fairytale, of fantasy and folklore.

Some mistakenly believe that the inhabitants of this world of myths are imaginary creatures who have only ever existed in the dark corners of men's minds. It doesn't occur to them that these beings did indeed once live, once loved, once had hopes and dreams much like our own. It doesn't occur to them that these beings were once driven to extinction by small minded, cold-hearted, ignorant men who could only allow others like themselves to survive. Men like us.

In ancient times when peoples were taken captive by conquering armies, if their lives were spared, they were enslaved by their captors. Captive men were castrated, put to work, driven and sold as chattel until they died. Captive women, especially the beautiful ones, were taken as wives and concubines by their captors and assimilated into their new society. Thus the bloodline of these conquered people would survive.

It was no different for the Gadites. The enslaved, lion-faced, Gadite men eventually became extinct. But the women lived. And because the women lived the unique genetic code that made the men of their tribe so fierce and so mighty, continued. As the bloodline of the Gadites became mixed and diluted with the bloodlines of gentiles over the generations and over the centuries, the births of these lion-faced men became more and more rare. Over time the existence of these mighty men was all but forgotten.

But still, even into the Dark Ages, from time to time in remote villages of the Mediteranian and Eastern Europe, a child would be born. A child that struck fear into the hearts of all who laid eyes upon it. A child whose face and hands bore witness to that ancient forgotten tribe of mighty men.

The Dark Ages was a time when ignorance, fear and superstition ruled in the hearts and minds of men. Any perceived evil would be dealt with swiftly. It was commonplace for those who were perceived to be evil to be imprisoned, stoned, burned at the stake, or at the very least driven and purged from their homes and their communities. So of course when a Gadite child, was born, they would be immediately destroyed. Community leaders would assume that such a child was proof that the child's mother had lain with a beast or demon of some kind, or possibly even with the Devil himself. Such a woman must also be destroyed. Often relatives of the woman would also be shunned or driven away and members of the community forbidden to marry into such a family.

But the instinct to survive and to procreate is the most basic instinct that exists. It lives in the very cells of every living, breathing thing. And so it was for the families that carried the blood of the Gadites within their veins. In their ignorance, these families saw themselves as

cursed. They had no idea why such evil would be visited upon them. They also knew that they themselves were not evil and they were determined to survive.

So they learned. They learned to keep their curse hidden. Their women learned to travail and give birth in secret and in silence. And they learned that if and when such a child was born to them, they had no choice but to dispose of it in secret.

But a mother's love is an awesome thing. And a mother's desire to protect her children can be overpowering. How could a mother be expected to murder her own child? Especially when she knew that the child was not the product of any sin or depravity on her part. And yet, such a child could not be allowed to live for fear that the retribution of the community would mean the destruction of the entire family. Such was the dilemma of the mother of any unfortunate, lion-faced, Gadite infant in the Middle Ages.

So it became tradition among these families to place such children back into the hands of the God who had created them. After the child's birth, his mother or a close family member would wrap the child warmly and lovingly in a blanket. In the dead of night, they would take the child into the forest and leave it in a protected spot such as the hollow of a tree or a small cave. *Thus letting God Himself decide whether or not the child would live or die* and absolving themselves of murdering their own child. Left to the elements, these children usually died quickly of hypothermia or were devoured by wild animals.

But from time to time one would be adopted by a pack of wolves or a bear that had lost her cub and would somehow manage to survive and grow to manhood. Though not as a man, and not truly as a beast, but as a tortured creature that was something in between. If he ever came in to contact with another human, the hunger, the longing to be loved, the need to belong would stir within him.

These tortured "man-beasts" would linger in the forest, watching humanity from a distance. If their longing became too great for them, they would abduct a young child or a young woman. Not to kill them, but simply for companionship. Usually such a beast would eventually be hunted down by the community and ripped to shreds by the very people who had given him life in the first place.

Sometimes these abandoned lion-faced children were discovered by hermits, who for one reason or another had also been cast off by humanity. Out of loneliness or out of compassion they would raise the child and educate the child as best they could. But he would still be doomed to live a life bereft of human contact and love. For the very sight of a full grown Gadite man struck fear into the hearts of any and all who beheld him. And in those days, just as now, men tended to fear the things that they did not understand, and they ultimately destroyed the things that they feared.

Over the centuries stories of these "man-beasts" that roamed the forests of Europe became common around campfires, hearths and dinner tables. They became characters in cautionary tales for adventurous and disobedient children who might be tempted to roam the woods alone. They grew into legends of Ogres, Giants and Big Bad Wolves. They even became tales of forbidden love between beautiful maidens and hermits who were half man, half beast.

Eventually those stories became some of the fairy tales that we know and love today. But most of us never realize that those stories have their beginnings thousands of years ago, with a valiant race of men who did indeed once truly live.

Alexei and Elena Markov had lived in New York City most of their lives. They had come to New York as children, with their parents and grandparents with the wave of immigrants fleeing the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in the early 1920's. They had grown up in the same neighborhood and gone to the same schools. They had always been friends and they had always loved each other. It was only natural that they would one day marry and have a family.

Alexei had come home from World War II to find that Elena had waited faithfully for him. Finally, in the summer of 1946, they were married. The early years of their marriage had been happy and filled with love and hope for the future. But by 1952, that happiness was beginning to be overshadowed by an unspoken sorrow. Their love had not produced the children that they both longed for. Even though they loved each other, the silence in their home was deafening. Especially when all of their friends were busy raising children of their own. Then finally it happened.

In August of 1953, Elena came home from the doctor with the news that their home would be blessed with a little Markov sometime in March of the following year. Elena did all of the things an expectant mother does. She prepared the nursery. She crocheted little baby blankets and knitted sweaters and booties for the child. And she dreamed of a little Alexei running around their small apartment. Their dreams were finally coming true. They had no way of knowing that those dreams were destined to be crushed.

In the afternoon of January 12, 1954 Elena began having labor pains. She knew something was wrong and a feeling of dread seized her heart. Her first instinct was to send Alexei to get her mother and her grandmother. When they arrived they banished Alexei from the apartment and went to work.

Elena had grown up hearing the old family legends about frightening half beast children that were sometimes born into the family. None of her relatives had any memory of it actually happening, so Elena had filed it in her memory as an old wives tale. But the tale always began with the expectant mother going into labor well before her allotted time. She could see the concern on her Babushka's face as she bustled about the room.

Elena looked to her mother for reassurance. "Mama, shouldn't we go to the hospital? The baby is too early. It will need a doctor."

"Shh, Elena. We cannot take that chance. If the child is ... normal ... we will take you both to the hospital as fast as we can. I promise," Mama said.

Elena began to cry out as her contractions became stronger.

Babushka quickly covered Elena's mouth with her hand. "Elena, Elena. You cannot cry out. The neighbors cannot hear you. If they suspect that you have had this child, it will only cause trouble."

Elena had never heard such fear in her Babushka's voice. She had never seen such fear in her eyes. Elena did not cry out again.

It was all over in a couple of hours. Elena did not need to look at the baby to know. She could see the look of horror on the faces of Mama and her Babushka. "Is it a boy?" she asked,

"It is a boy, Elena," Mama answered. But Mama's voice was so strange, so quiet, so frightened.

"Give him to me, Mama," Elena begged.

"No, Elena," Mama whispered. "No"

Elena was on the verge of hysterics. She was determined to see her child. "Give him to me, Mama," she whispered through clenched teeth, "or so help me, I *will scream* and then all of the neighbors will know."

Elena's mother and grandmother looked at each other and Babushka nodded. "Give her the child," she said.

Mama wrapped the tiny baby in an old linen dish towel and gently handed him to his mother. Elena was afraid for a moment to reach for him. But as soon as she looked into the face of her newborn son she was filled with an overwhelming sense of love for him. She had expected to behold the face of a hideous monster. Instead she beheld the face of a tiny angel. His features were different, that was sure. But they were gentle and beautiful, in their own way, much like a kitten. But unlike a kitten that is born with its eyes sealed shut, his eyes were wide open. He looked up at her with piercing blue eyes. Eyes filled with hope and eyes filled with trust. Elena began to weep. After a few minutes the child began to whimper so Elena offered him her breast.

As he began to suckle, Mama said, "NO, Elena, don't." She attempted to take the baby from Elena's arms. But Elena looked at her mother with such a look of anger and warning that her mother and her Babushka decided to leave her alone for a time to calm down.

For two hours Elena wept as she cuddled the infant. Mama and Babushka could hear her softly singing an old Russian lullaby to the child. They were heartbroken for Elena and Alexei. But they were practical women and they knew that what must be done, *must be done*.

As Elena cuddled her beloved child, her heart was also broken. Because even as she allowed herself to fall in love with the tiny angel in her arms, she could hear the words of the fearful tales her Babushka used to tell ringing in her ears. She knew as she sang to the child and let him suckle her what she must do. What she must find the strength to do. She must put the child back into the hands of the God who gave him to her and let him decide if the child should live or if the child should die.

As Mama and Babushka sat, quietly discussing what to do, Elena came into the living room. Alexei was sitting at the window. He couldn't even look at his beloved wife. He didn't even have the courage to look at his newborn son. Elena had dressed herself and wrapped the baby lovingly in the sweet little blanket she had crocheted for him. She reached into the closet for her coat.

“Elena, you don’t have to do this. You just gave birth. Let me take him for you,” Babushka said. “I will do it.”

Elena’s voice was calm. “No, Babushka, I will do it. It is my responsibility. God has put this child into *my* hands. I will be the one to put it back into His Hands. God will decide ... if he is to live or if he is to die.” She slowly put on her coat and reached for the door and walked out into the night.”

Elena was weak after giving birth and it was the coldest night of the year. She knew there was no forest or cave for her to take the child to. The closest thing to a forest in New York City was Central Park. But Elena knew that she was in no condition to walk that far. So she walked the streets aimlessly. Her grief made her oblivious to the cold and to her pain. She wasn’t sure how she got there, but at some point she realized she was standing outside of St. Vincent’s Hospital.

She stood there thinking that on this very night there were husbands inside somewhere pacing the waiting room floor. There were women holding their newborn babies in their arms for the first time. There were new parents smiling and crying happy tears.

But that was not meant to be for her and Alexei. Yes, she had her baby, but there would be no happy tears for *this* child. He was wrapped in a blanket inside her coat. She could feel him wriggling. He was content and warm in his little cocoon. Elena knew what she must do.

She went into the alley behind the hospital and sat beside the dumpster. *This is a good spot*, she thought. *Perhaps someone will come and find him when they take out the garbage.*

And then she whispered a little prayer, “Please God, have pity on my tiny angel.” She reached into her coat and let the baby suckle one last time while she sang him an old Cossack Lullaby. As she sang and as she wept it began to snow.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJsTB-yB-uk>

*Sleep, my darling, sleep, my baby,
Close your eyes and sleep.
Darkness comes; into your cradle
Moonbeams shyly peep.
Many pretty songs I'll sing you
And a lullaby.
Pleasant dreams the night will bring you....
Sleep, dear, rock-a-bye.*

*Muddy waters churn in anger,
Loud the Terek roars,
And a Chechen with a dagger
Leaps onto the shore.
Steeled your father is in gory
Battle.... You and I,
Little one, we need not worry... .
Sleep, dear, rock-a-bye.*

*There will come a day when boldly,
Like your dad, my son,
You will mount your horse and shoulder,
Proud, a Cossack gun.
With bright silks your saddle for you
I will sew.... There lie
Roads as yet untrod before you....
Sleep, dear, rock-a-bye.*

*You'll grow up to be a fearless
Cossack, and a true.
Off you'll ride, and I'll stand tearless,
Looking after you.
But when you are gone from sight, son,
Bitterly I'll cry....
May the dreams you dream be light, son;
Sleep, dear, rock-a-bye.*

*Thoughts of you when we are parted
All my days will fill.
In the nighttime, anxious-hearted,
Pray for you I will.
I'll be thinking that you're lonely,
That for home you sigh....
Sleep, my son, my one and only,
Sleep, dear, rock-a-bye.*

*I will see you to the turning,
And you'll ride away.
With my icon you will journey
And before it pray.
Let your thoughts in time of danger
To your mother fly.
Close your eyes and sleep, my angel,
Sleep, dear, rock-a-bye.⁴*

After Elena left the apartment, Alexei knew he had made a terrible mistake. He had let his beloved Elena carry the burden of what must be done alone. As he sat wallowing in self-pity, his conscience convicted him. *You are a coward, Alexei. What kind of a man would let his wife go out into the cold in her condition? You didn't even have the courage to look at the child. What kind of a man are you? What kind of a man?*

⁴ The English translation of the song was at the following link. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bU8rB_Sswdo

Alexei grabbed his coat and ran out into the night to find her. He knew she couldn't go far. She was too weak. He walked the streets surrounding their apartment building and soon found himself standing in front of St. Vincent's Hospital. As he stood there he saw a taxi pull up. A man stepped out and gently helped his very pregnant wife navigate the icy pavement as they entered the hospital.

That should have been us, Elena, he thought. And he began to worry anew about Elena. "Where are you, Elena? Where are you?" he whispered.

As a light snow began to fall, Alexei turned to walk away when he thought he could hear strains of an old lullaby his mother used to sing to him. He followed the sound of the music around the building until he saw Elena sitting next to the dumpster singing and weeping. He sat and put his arms around her and they wept together.

When she had finished singing, Alexei said, "May I look at him, Elena?"

"No, Alexei, you don't have to," Elena said through her tears.

Alexei nodded. "Yes, yes I do. If we must do this, then I must look into the face of my son before I do it."

Elena reached into her coat and brought the child out. Alexei took him gently in his hands and looked into the beautiful blue eyes of his newborn son. He didn't care that the child looked different, his heart was filled with love for him. "He *is beautiful* ... in his own way," he whispered.

"Yes," Elena said softly.

At the same time Alexei's heart was filled with fear. Ultimately his fear of what would happen to them if anyone knew that they had such a child was stronger than his love for his firstborn son. He kissed the child on the forehead and handed him back to his wife. Looking into his wife's eyes he said, "We must do what we must do, Elena."

She nodded. Elena had already resigned herself to what must be done. But the words of the lullaby rang in her heart:

*Thoughts of you when we are parted
All my days will fill.
In the nighttime, anxious-hearted,
Pray for you I will.
I'll be thinking that you're lonely,
That for home you sigh....
Sleep, my son, my one and only,
Sleep, dear, rock-a-bye.*

Alexei looked around the dumpster and found a sturdy cardboard box. Elena kissed the child one last time and placed him in the box. Alexei reached into the box and began to unwrap the blanket.

As he did so his son wrapped his tiny hand around Alexei's finger and looked up at him and as if to say, "Love me, Papa."

Alexei could feel the strength in that tiny hand. He stopped and looked at his son for a moment, as if he was reconsidering. But try as he might, Alexei's love could not overcome his fear. He shook his head and whispered to the child, "I can't." Then he continued to unwrap the blanket.

Elena put her hand out to stop him. "Alexei, no, it's too cold. He'll ..."

Alexei looked up and touched her hand. "We must take this, Elena. If anyone traced this back to us ... we cannot leave it." He stuffed the blanket into his coat, stood up and put his arm around his wife. And with that, Alexei and Elena Markov turned and walked away from their firstborn son. They left the tiny, lion faced, Gadite child wrapped only in an old linen dish towel in a cardboard box in the snow behind St. Vincent's Hospital.

It was the 12th of January, the coldest day of the year ... Anna Pater didn't care. She loved to walk in the streets Above. She loved the lights of the city. She loved the smell of the city. She loved to watch the people of the city, even on a night as cold as this. A light snow was falling as she walked. A strange noise drew her into the alley behind St. Vincent's Hospital...



The Beginning...

**Thank you Judith for your kind encouragement and advice.

5This image was found on the internet and has been digitally modified by the author.