



Chapter 1

The lucky number eleven bus puffed out what sounded like an expectant sigh and its well-oiled front door slid smoothly open. Clarita Jackson stepped off the curb, wrestled with two unwieldy mesh shopping bags and heaved her considerable bulk aboard. “Good evening, Gideon,” she smiled.

“Why, good evening to you too, Miz Jackson!” responded the uniformed driver. Gideon loved driving the number eleven, especially at night. On most routes, night was when the crazies came out, but not on good old number eleven. On the eleven, it was regular people getting off the late shift, normal friendly people like missus Jackson. Gideon looked at her bags and then glanced at his other five passengers. Nobody appeared rushed. “Hey Clarita,” he offered. “You want me to help you get to your seat with those bags?”

“Gideon Robinson,” she grunted, “how long have I been riding your bus? Have I ever needed your help with my bags? Just close the door and drive me on home to my children.”

“Yes, Mam,” grinned Gideon, “but I know how many kids you’ve got at home, and neither of us is getting any younger.” Laughing to himself, he shut the door and pulled his bus away from the curb.

Gideon was forty-seven, and he’d been driving nights for the MBTA since he was twenty-eight. For fifteen of those years he’d driven the night shift on the number eleven. For fourteen of them, as regular as clockwork, Clarita Jackson had stood at her stop, pass in hand, waiting to climb aboard. When they were both younger, before all her kids, they used to flirt. Now, they enjoyed a sort of tongue in cheek one-that-got-away friendship.

Approaching the corner of A Street and Wormwood, Gideon spied a shadow waiting in the designated stop enclosure. The door of his bus once again hissed open. He waited, but the only thing that came up the eleven's steps was a sudden goose-bump-raising gust of cold air. The passenger was nowhere in sight. In his mirror, his six passengers were looking forward at him with quizzical expressions. Gideon shrugged. *Hell that was strange.* It wasn't often that he made that sort of blunder.

As the eleven rumbled back into light traffic, he again used his mirror to quickly check on his passengers. That glimpse sent an icy shiver down his spine. There was a man, a man he hadn't seen before, and he was staring intently at Gideon from two rows behind Clarita.

How did that asshole get onboard? he questioned. He knew that he hadn't scanned the man's pass and he knew that the man hadn't paid cash. In fact, he was sure that the man had never even walked past him. The stranger, perhaps thirty, was blond, handsome, and very well dressed.

Just seeing him made Gideon nearly swerve and slam on his brakes. In the minutes that followed, the bus crawled along and his eyes kept returning to the mirror. With each glance, his confusion slowly gave way to a nameless dread. *Lord protect me,* he thought, *that man, that man is evil!*

Gideon wasn't a church-goer, but he believed in God and he considered himself pious in his own relaxed way. The unexpected passenger seemed to drag claws through the core of his fragile faith. Like the sound of nails on a blackboard, the feeling couldn't be ignored. The man engendered in the congenial bus driver a visceral upwelling of spiritual fear and revulsion. The sensation was like nothing that he'd ever experienced.

What the hell? shivered Gideon. *He's just another passenger.* Coinciding with this thought, the man pressed the button to request a stop. Shivering, Gideon directed his bus over to the curb at the corner with Cypher Street. Filled with loathing, he opened the door and watched as the blond stranger strode past him and descended. He was grateful and almost ready to close the door when the man hesitated and looked back with piercing blue-white eyes.

"Thank you, Gideon," he hissed. "Whatever happens next, that is all on you!"

Stunned, Gideon watched in mute silence as the man strolled nonchalantly away. He felt a strange pull, then he stood up. His other passengers stared at him; puzzlement was clearly written on all six of their faces.

“I have to,” he moaned.

The man wasn't a man. He couldn't say how, but Gideon knew with absolute certainty that the passenger was something else, a demon, and an incarnation of purest evil. Unless someone stopped the creature, it was going to do unspeakable things. Gideon stared at the retreating figure. Suddenly, he understood the reason that he alone had seen the monster. God was offering him a cross to bear.

“What the heck, Gideon?” shouted one of his regular passengers as the reliable driver lurched away from his seat.

“What's happening? Where you going?” yelled another.

“Gideon, are you all right?” worried Clarita.

Without an answer, or even a backward look, Gideon leapt from the door of the idling number eleven and jogged off down the street.

At forty-seven, six two and 225 pounds, he was still in good shape, but the demon was quick and it was wily. Although the thing never seemed to hurry, it always managed to stay, tantalizingly, just out of reach. It glided effortlessly down this street and up that alley. It hopped onto the Red Line and then moved from one subway circuit to another. Gideon always knew where it was, but he never managed to get any closer. It was playing with him.

Just before dawn, Gideon gave up his fruitless chase. Upset, muddled, and thoroughly exhausted, he hailed a yellow cab to take him back to his tiny apartment. Inside, he bolted the door, removed his jacket, and threw himself onto his bed, not bothering to pull back its covers.

When he awoke the next day, groggy and tired, he still sensed the demon. It was just ahead of him and he could almost hear its laughter. Tired though he was, he knew what had to be done. He got down on his knees beside his bed and began an earnest rambling prayer to a God with whom he rarely spoke. At length, certain that he'd been heard and chosen, he climbed back to his feet. He grabbed a duffel, quickly stuffed it with his spare uniform, underwear, and socks. Then, he strode purposefully out of his apartment door. This time, he didn't bother to lock it. Gideon knew that he was never coming back.

Fate, capricious and inexorable, had snatched him out of his comfortable life and thrust him into some sort of vicious game. The demon existed. He'd seen it. Now, he had to stop it. God had left him no other choice.

Resolutely, he shouldered his duffle, walked to the corner and waited. As sure as a lighted signpost beckoning in the distance, he felt evil's pull. With a weighty sense of purpose and of impending destiny, Gideon turned west and began to walk.

...Continued in Chapter 2 ...

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