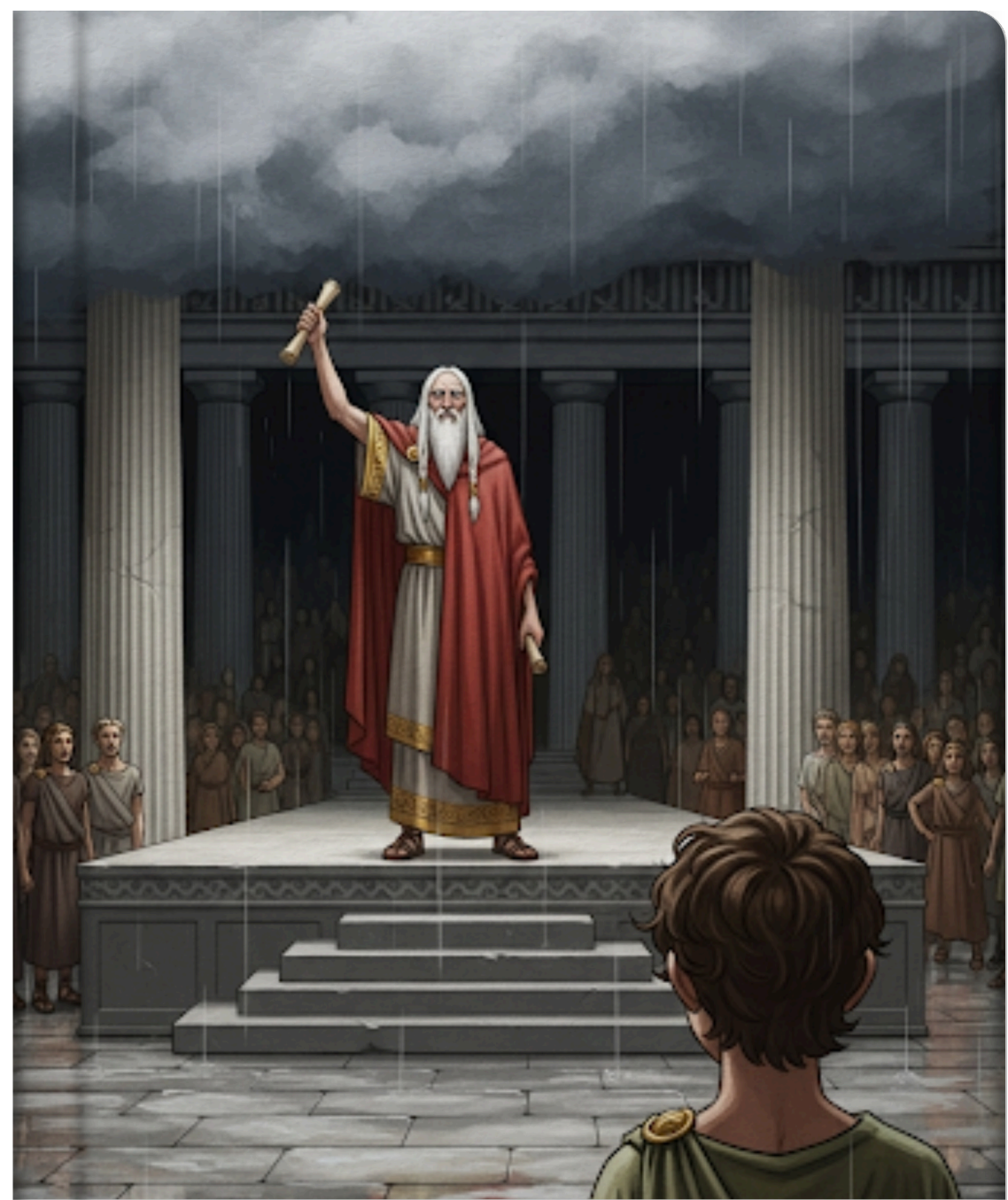




The Tribute of Alex



As the cold sun peeped slightly through the dim sky, charcoal-grey clouds devoured the thick air around it while water cascaded through the rain-swollen streets of the area.



Alex's eyes glowed with excitement before he burst out of his thin duvet covers. He rapidly bounded downstairs, unaware of what the day would bring.



Entering the living room through the crooked door, Alex watched his unbothered sister slump onto the sofa before turning his gaze towards the dark corner of the room.



His mum's blood-drained face stood out to him as she sat stiffly drinking her already-cold coffee. Every ten years, five innocent children were selected to Crete's warrior tribute event.



He read from his father's newspaper.
Alex realised he had been entered into
the tribute pot.



As he nervously entered the city square, he had to squeeze through packs of people huddled together from the silver rain. The desperate atmosphere made him shiver while thick rust-grey clouds consumed the midnight sky.



Peering curiously at the drenched platform, he noticed tall pearl-grey pillars that adorned the stage around him. His joy melted while his excited smirk faded into pure regret.



Emerging from the grand curtains, Alex got a clear glimpse of a dark figure. King Garos held a gold vase in his pale hands. The awe-struck crowd shuffled back in horror as thunder roared behind him.



Taking his time, Garos reached into the large pot, pulling out the innocent child's name. CLARE MATOS read the paper. "NO!" she shrieked. Clare fell to her knees and sobbed in regret, looking up at the King. He clicked his fingers and she was taken away for the rest of her life.



As the crowd erupted in uneasy whispers, King Garos had already dipped his bony finger deep into the tribute pot. Alex's chest tightened as the next name had been called out. It was his name. It was ALEX.