

Fords Accommodation

Chapter Eleven

As night fell, a rainstorm swept over the Palace, the steady rhythm of raindrops against the stone surfaces was the only sound that echoed through the halls. With the break of dawn, a new day unfolded. Jakob awoke early, feeling restored and well-rested. His purpose was clear, and his heart unwavering. He was determined to make his parents proud. Anticipation bubbled within Jakob as he expected to say goodbye to his friends and embark on his new journey. As he sat up in his bed, Jakob noticed that the room appeared darker than normal, leading him to wonder if he had awoken too early. It seemed as if it was still nighttime, Jakob rose from his bed and made his way to the window. His eyes were met by a somber, dark grey sky, devoid of the usual brightness. He turned towards the spot where the sun should have been, only to find a subtle glow peeking through the clouds. He extended his hand outside and felt the gentle prickle of raindrops on his skin. Jakob was interrupted by Tita, who entered the room carrying his customary breakfast. A spread consisting of steak, eggs, and raw liver. Although he could do without the liver.

With a much brighter demeanor than the previous day, Jakob warmly greeted Tita and decided to experiment with a few new phrases in the native language. Realizing that he would need to become capable in the language for his upcoming travels throughout Hyperion. However, he wondered whether the five nations still spoke the language or if it had changed over time. His attention quickly shifted when he realized that Tiberius was nowhere to be found. Jakob had hoped to bid him farewell, but he assumed that Tiberius was off on one of his usual adventures, likely in pursuit of rats around the Palace. Eager for an eventful day, Jakob quickly dressed himself, nearly forgetting about the breakfast that Tita had brought. He was focused on his goal

of reaching the Grand Hall before his father—a feat he accomplished solely due to his anticipation.

As Jakob patiently waited for the arrival of the King, he engaged in conversations with numerous people. Initially, he had been somewhat hesitant about his role as the future king, but now his perspective had shifted. He was eager to share the news of his appointment as the Guardian, having grown considerably more at ease with all the attention that came along with it. Upon the King's arrival, he reminded Jakob of some pressing matters that needed to be attended to at Ford's Accommodation before their official departure. He had never ventured that far out in the Legion Nation territory. Although he had extensively studied maps of Hyperion countless times, he knew that true knowledge could only be gained through firsthand experience. As Jakob delved deeper into his learning, he discovered that Ford's Accommodation comprised a cluster of small towns situated alongside the Fords Rapids, which flowed into three smaller rivers: The Williams, The Buisson, and The Susie. These towns and holdfasts were considered the outskirts of the Legion Nation territory, often vulnerable to raids by Outlaws. With the looming possibility of the Ogres' return, the King was determined to address any potential challenges before embarking on his journey with his son. It was an unprecedented move for a King of the Legion Nation to venture far from the capital for an extended time. However, for the sake of Jakob, the King made the decision to accompany him and the Vantis Guard on their new expedition.

Just before their departure, Jakob took the chance to bid farewell to Celeste and Aleki. Being best friends for as long as they could remember, they knew that things were about to change. However, they were all filled with anticipation for the exciting adventures that awaited each of them. Jakob would deeply miss Celeste. They shared an unspoken bond, and she had always been there to support him. To Jakob's pleasant surprise, Celeste even planted a gentle kiss

on his cheek before he and his father set off on their journey, knowing this would be the last time she would see him.

After the heartfelt farewell, Joseph began to brief Jakob on what lay ahead in their journey. The first destination, once they left the Fords, would be the northwest region known as the Forest of Alizarin. Jakob met Hoashi Tatsuya the leader of the Simions at the celebration yesterday and was looking forward to seeing the burgundy leaves of the forest where the Simions built their kingdom. Jakob had read extensively about their home and the possibility of encountering a Grizzly made it more fascinating. Sensing Jakob's growing impatience regarding their upcoming plans, Joseph redirected the conversation to focus on the present day, emphasizing its significance. Today the King is supposed to meet someone important to the Fords, maybe a mayor or something, Jakob wasn't really paying attention. He was just excited to be out on a new adventure. The remainder of the ride was silent, nothing had to be spoken. The tough conversation last night helped him step into his new role. With his father guiding him, it made him more relaxed than anything else.

Despite the effortless journey to the Fords, Jakob struggled to stay on course as his eyes repeatedly wandered. The sight of endless rolling hills, with a carpet of green grass, mesmerized him. However, the weather remained gloomy, concealing the sun behind a thick veil of clouds. Various shades of gray dominated the sky, hinting at an impending storm brewing on the horizon. To Jakob, it was a sight of pure beauty. While most people disliked this kind of weather and even disliked the rain, he enjoyed it.

After several miles, they eventually reached an outpost atop what appeared to be a partially constructed dam. Jakob couldn't help but laugh to himself as he observed the dam's unfinished state. As the Stangs reached a halt, Joseph told Jakob that the dam was serving as a

temporary barrier for the water of the Williams River. This measure was taken to assist in the construction of a new town, which would soon be raised downstream. The King approached a Legionnaire guard who was leaning over the bridge's edge. It took a moment for the man to realize that it was indeed the King, and he quickly composed himself. The King reprimanded the guard, expressing his anger that only one person was on duty when there should have been multiple Legionnaires present. After yelling at the guard, Joseph turned to Jakob,

“I’m going to drop you off here, wait for your uncle. He should be arriving shortly. Do not go down to the riverbed.”

Jakob knew he wasn’t going to listen but still responded, **“Okay Dad.”**

"It won't take me long. Maybe I'll even run into Master Hanes and grab some elk for the journey," Joseph said to Jakob as he mounted the Stang and rode across the bridge into town.

The Legionnaire tasked with keeping an eye on Jakob was too preoccupied with watching the King ride off, giving Jakob the perfect opportunity to slip away unnoticed. Swiftly and silently, Jakob maneuvered through the outpost, making his way towards a descending slope. He instinctively felt drawn towards the riverbed, hoping that the slope would gradually deepen, allowing him to eventually make his way into the riverbed. Curiosity compelled Jakob to approach the edge, underestimating the depth of the riverbed below. Typically, these waterways filled but with the dam in place, he could see all the way down to the bottom. The river stretched out before him like a miniature canyon, snaking its way for miles. As he descended further, Jakob couldn't resist stealing another glance over the edge, momentarily tempted by the idea of leaping down. Though the ground appeared soft, the height still gave him pause. There must be a

path down. His gaze swept across the river canyon until he spotted a cluster of rocks to his right, a potential route to descend. Jakob hurried towards the rocks and carefully scaled down, leaping, and landing gently on the ground below. He crouched down, allowing his hand to graze the riverbed's surface, which felt surprisingly soft and damp. Perhaps recent rainfall was to blame, or the rivers simply had this unique texture. It was almost as if a perfectly constructed road lay beneath him. Amongst the smoothness, he even noticed a few fresh fish bones.

He continued to walk down the riverbed picking up any tiny rocks he could find, throwing them around. He didn't continue to walk for too much longer, he didn't want to go that far in and get lost. It wasn't the day for Jakob to get his dad anymore upset, he just wanted to come down to the riverbed for a few moments and get back before his father found out. The path of the riverbed swung from left to right and got deeper the farther he walked. Jakob stopped when he noticed a decent sized smooth stick, he imagined it was a sword. As Jakob replayed the events of the pirate attack from the day before in his mind, he couldn't help but immerse himself in a vivid daydream of engaging in a thrilling sword fight against them. With each roll, dip, and swing of his makeshift stick-sword, he unleashed a fury that transported him to the heart of the battle. Lost in his own world, Jakob was completely oblivious to his surroundings, failing to notice a small rock protruding from the ground just behind him. As he took a step back, his foot caught on the rock, causing him to lose his balance and tumble to the ground, landing face-first in the dirt. With his face buried in the earth, Jakob's ears caught the sound of his uncle's voice cutting through the moment of embarrassment.

"Well, let's hope you never find yourself in an actual sword fight."

Jakob, still lying on the floor, turned himself around to see his uncle walking up from the path.

“How’d, you get down here?” Jakob asked.

“Several miles up there is a clearing. I parked my rover there and walked. I knew you’d be down here.” Fred Stone replied.

“Well, how did you know I’d be down here?” Jakob said sarcastically, pressing his uncle with more questions as he lay on the floor. Fred walked closer and helped Jakob up,

“It’s you Jake, you never follow the rules.” Fred finished with a smile.

“Just like you.” Jakob said hugging Fred. Together they walked and sat down on a nearby small log. Jakob persisted in bugging his uncle with more questions,

“Where have you been uncle?”

“I’ve been traveling Hyperion, looking for answers.” Fred answered staring off into the gloomy sky.

“Answers to what?”

“To the great mysteries of life.”

It was quiet for a second and they broke out in laughter. Jakob knew his uncle tried to be serious with him. He didn’t treat him like a child, but often it would just make him laugh.

“Your funny uncle.”

Jakob nudged Fred with his elbow, a gesture of their bond. Among Jakob’s relatives, Fred was the one he connected with the most, as they both dared to think differently. Jakob admired Fred's guts to even change his last name from Stryder to Stone. Fred had a desire to embark on adventurous journeys, often leaving for extended periods of time. Jakob eagerly anticipated his

return, not just for the small trinkets and souvenirs Fred would bring back, but for the valuable knowledge and information he would reveal. Despite the suspicion that Fred might be involved in some questionable activities, Jakob didn't mind. He cherished the thought that they shared a special bond built on their shared secrets, a connection he couldn't quite establish with his father. However, in recent years, Fred's visits became shorter and less frequent, leaving Jakob with a lingering sense of unease. Something seemed off between his uncle and his father. It appeared that Fred no longer enjoyed being in the Capital, something Jakob could relate to. Fred wasn't just an uncle to him. He was an older brother figure who would reveal truths and expose Jakob to knowledge beyond his years. Yet, Jakob couldn't help but wonder if his uncle was aware of his destiny as the Guardian and why he had kept it a secret.

“I have a few more questions for you uncle and don't lie to me. You always said secrets don't make friends.” Jakob insisted.

“You have questions and I have answers, like always, but first let's get going. I have something to show you that you might like.” Fred said, enticing Jakob.

“What is it?” Jakob smiled.

Fred got up from the log and walked away, looking back with a grin,

“Do you want to see a dead body?”

“A dead body?” Jakob lifted from the log in excitement.

“If a fossilized Scorpius counts as a dead body, then we should hurry up before your dad gets back.”

Jakob caught up to Fred as he was about to make a left continuing down the riverbed.

“So, you’re the big bad Guardian now huh?” Fred said sarcastically.

“And the future King. Pretty soon you’re going to have to start taking orders from me. But don’t worry you can still travel all you want when I run things.” Jakob said arrogantly as he tried to take large steps in front of Fred.

“Who’s said I was going to listen to you?” Fred said, trying to trip Jakob, by slightly kicking his foot.

“You don’t listen to anybody.” Jakob smiled catching his balance.

“Kind of like you huh.”

They laughed together for a moment, but then Jakob fell silent. He really wanted to be serious and ask his uncle some important questions. Jakob lowered his tone and asked,

“So how long did you know I was the Guardian?”

“I’ve known since you were born.”

“And you never told me?” Jakob said with frustration.

“I couldn’t.” Fred lowered his head.

“What do you mean?” Jakob pressed.

“Your mother made me promise not to.”

“My mom?” Jakob answered confused.

“I was the first person she told.” Fred continued.

“Really, I didn’t know that you guys were that close.”

“I knew your mom before your dad” Fred stated, as Jakob looked up to him eager to know more.

“I met your mom when she was a young girl, she had just arrived in the Legion Nation with her father, seeking citizenship after leaving the Cree Quarter. From the moment I laid eyes on her, I knew she was the most beautiful person I had ever seen. Our bond grew quickly, and we soon became inseparable, like you and Celeste. She was not just my best friend. She was my confidant, the one with whom I shared every secret. Through my assistance, her father secured employment as the King's cupbearer. Tragically, her father met an untimely death when she was still a child. However, the King, your grandfather allowed her to reside in the Palace, granting her a haven. That brought us even closer. However, over time, she also grew closer to your father, their bond strengthening with each passing day. I was left to watch in envy. Unfortunately, I was sent away to train with the Vantis Guard in Ashwood Forest. Years passed, and I poured my heart and soul into honing my skills, hoping that the distance and the trials of training would dull my pain. But even as I trained, the magic of the light failed to respond to me. Upon my return home, I discovered that she and your father were to be married.” Fred recounted the tale with a vividness that made it feel as though it had transpired only yesterday.

This was new information to Jakob, but it made sense now why he always felt so comfortable talking to his uncle about his mother.

“I never knew that, were you guys still close before she died?” Jakob asked.

“We were very close. I was with her before she died. She told me the truth about your destiny after you were born and made me swear not to tell you. She didn't want you to

be the Guardian. She even contemplated running away back south.” Jakob was completely shocked and lost for words. Everything that his dad told him felt like a lie. He didn't know what to believe. Jakob lowered his head and Fred could tell that news bothered him.

“Look Jakob your mom's gone. I loved her too but it's okay, I know you will make her proud either way. Guardian or not.” Fred always spoke the truth to Jakob and even though it was hard to hear he could appreciate the honesty that he was looking for. He wasn't sure what to believe.

“I miss her so much.” Jakob felt himself about to be overcome with emotion, but he held it back.

“I miss her too.” Fred put his arm around Jakob as they continued to walk.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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