

A New Beginning

Chapter Fourteen

Jakob hurried down the dock, feeling a renewed sense of purpose and energy. Finally, his own daring and dangerous adventures awaited. Thankfully, Tyranaz had given him directions before he left the swamps, preventing him from getting lost. The old man had warned Jakob to conceal his true name and provided him with a torch for guidance. Tyranaz directed him to a secret tunnel that would lead him through the mountain range, separating the south from the rest of the world. As Jakob made his way south, he couldn't help but recall the bits and pieces of information he had read about the southern mainland. While he didn't have all the details, he tried his best to remember what he could before reaching the city. The fascination of the southern mainland never failed to captivate Jakob. He knew that these lands were once a cluster of towns, which were later acquired by a group of prosperous Cree Aristocrats. They then transformed the region into an expansive metropolis known as The Colonies. As time passed, it evolved into a neutral government that didn't align with any nation. Instead, it became a Republic, inviting all those seeking refuge and thrilling adventures. Even with the religious reforms enforced by The Clergy in the past few centuries, it remained a haven for Cree pirates, Syndicate mobsters, outlaws, and regular folks seeking comfort.

As Jakob ventured through the tunnel, darkness enveloped his surroundings, accompanied by the musty scent of stagnant water. The tunnel seemed to stretch for endless miles, and Jakob was aware that by the time he reached The Colonies at the other end, nightfall would likely have arrived. Jakob contemplated potential names for his upcoming new life.

“Matthew, or maybe Klaus. Hmm what about Derrick, yeah, I like that. It’s common though. And it’s also the name of a Guardian.” Any thought of the Guardian gave

him an ugly feeling. As he reached a fork in the tunnel, his attention shifted back. One path led to an aqueduct that would take him to the central area of The Colonies, while the other path led deeper into the mountain range, leading to the upper sections of the city. The thought of getting wet again didn't sound enjoyable, so traveling through the aqueduct wasn't the best choice. In a deeper part of his mind the thought of drowning was his real fear and he quickly blocked it out, choosing to go left deeper in the tunnels. After a brief stroll, he stumbled upon an abandoned railway, complete with a cart resting on the tracks. Swiftly he put out the torch, leaped into the cart and hurled a rock at the lever, propelling him forward. Initially, darkness engulfed the route, but soon enough, it transformed into a series of expansive caverns with moonlit openings. The light filtered through, illuminating the cavernous ceilings with shimmering crystals. Jakob's shouted throughout the mountainous tunnels as he swerved left, right, up, and down along the lengthy path. Many miles later, the cart came to a halt, and he clumsily jumped out, struggling to regain his balance.

“That was fun!” Jakob said aloud with a huge smile on his face. **“My new life doesn’t seem so bad after all.”** His mind finished. A glimmer of light shined from the tunnel's end, signaling that he had reached his destination. Jakob was captivated by the moonlit sky as he emerged from the tunnel, finding himself on a ridge directly overlooking the city walls. As he directed his attention towards the city, dark silhouettes of buildings dotted by flickering lights resembling tiny fires scattered across rooftops. The city was three or four times larger than anything he had witnessed back home. Below the ridge, a stone wall awaited his descent. However, before making his move, he sought to gain a sense of direction, scanning the landscape. His view wandered to the right, tracing the edges of the mountain range, until it settled upon distant hills and in the center was a magnificent colosseum.

"That has to be the Iron Maiden Colosseum," he remarked, his eyes fixed on the imposing structure in the distance. To the west, he noticed the faint outline of a wall that seemed to enclose the entire region.

"That's the Wall of Omari!" he exclaimed, squinting his eyes to get a better view, but the darkness hindered his vision. **"I think Vanity City is just around the corner. So much room for activities."**

The words brought back memories of Aleki, that was their favorite thing to say right before they were going to get themselves into some trouble. He was determined to embrace this new chapter and honor the friends he missed. The southern path promised an opportunity for freedom, it was whole new world of adventure and the potential for new friendships. Jakob cautiously descended the ridge, sensing that he had reached a significant part of the city due to the look of the stone buildings that surrounded him. As he made his way down, he found himself within the ramparts of a massive wall. Surprisingly, there were no guards in sight, but faint voices could be heard from below. Wanting to remain hidden, Jakob decided to navigate the exterior of the wall, using the mountain's edge as leverage to descend to the ground. The wall seemed to span a considerable portion of the city. Jakob started walking along the perimeter of the wall, taking his time to assess the situation. After rounding a bend, he discovered a small, dimly lit opening. The presence of metal bars hinted at a potential means of slipping through.

"Ahh what's that smell?" Jakob said as he got closer to the entrance, grabbing his nose. It must be their sewer system because it smelled horrible. The bars were barely wide enough for Jakob to slip in and there was a footpath that he could walk down, alongside a dirty river of sludge. It would be a tight squeeze, but it looked like his best option to get in and he didn't want to walk the outskirts of the wall for the rest of the night.

"Tyranaz said that Gary would be down at the docks, so that's where I'm headed," Jakob muttered to himself, taking a moment to compose himself. Inhaling deeply, he mentally prepared for what lay ahead. Carefully maneuvering through the bars without risking a plunge into the sludge, Jakob embarked on yet another lengthy journey. Throughout the walk, he continuously repeated under his breath,

"Don't fall in, don't fall in."

On his walk, Jakob encountered rats scurrying about, accompanied by other weird, small creatures. To make matters worse, something lurked in the sludge, silently swimming with an unsettling presence. Above him, small air vents punctuated the surroundings, their openings revealing faint sounds of conversations and the footsteps of patrolling guards. As he ventured deeper, he scanned his surroundings for any possible escape route that would lead him back up into the city. Eventually, he stumbled upon a circular opening that branched off into multiple paths. Choosing the far-right opening, he noticed that it had a slightly less unpleasant odor compared to the others. After a brief walk, he reached a dead end. On the opposite side of the murky river, he spotted a staircase that seemed to ascend into another chamber. However, to reach the other side, he would have to jump.

"I can do this."

Jakob positioned himself for the leap, realizing that there was no room to gather momentum. He swayed his body back and forth, then propelled himself forward. Miraculously, he landed on the other side unscathed. However, as he took his first step forward, his footing betrayed him, causing him to twist his ankle and stumble into the repulsive sludge.

"Ugghh, gross," he muttered, fighting back the urge to vomit as pain throbbed through his ankle. Thankfully, the river wasn't too deep, allowing him to pull himself from its clutches. Nevertheless, he now found himself completely drenched in the vile, brown sludge from head to toe. He wiped his face, mustering the willpower to push forward. He refused to let this setback break him.

"Come on, Tato, you got this. You can't be weak." He tried to convince himself.

The staircase led him into a small armory, he slowly crept the door open and peeped his head in. It must have been an old armory shack, it was dusty, full of cobwebs and nearly empty. As Jakob cautiously explored his surroundings, his eyes scanned the area for any way out. It was then that he spotted a small, worn-out knife with a golden palm. Without hesitation, he snatched it up and secured it in his waistband for safekeeping. Moving towards the door, he pressed his eyes against a hole in the wall, peering out into a dimly lit courtyard that appeared to be deserted. Taking in his surroundings, he noticed a well-lit bridge leading to another part of the city through a large opening. Jakob pushed the door open, but to his surprise, it emitted a louder creak than he had anticipated as he stepped outside.

"Oh no."

A guard came around the corner,

"Hey! What are you doing here!" The man yelled.

Covered in the foul sludge, Jakob sprinted desperately towards the bridge, his heart pounding in his chest. Behind him, two more guards pursued him relentlessly, their footsteps echoing in his ears. If only his ankle wasn't twisted, the pain slowed him down, jeopardizing his chances of making it across. As he drew nearer to the bridge, a figure suddenly emerged, blocking his path.

With a forceful collision, Jakob collided with the man, sending himself crashing to the ground. Jakob lifted his eyes to the familiar face before him. It was none other than Councilman Angel Espina, the very same man Jakob had encountered during the celebratory gathering. With a swift motion of his mechanical hand, the Councilman hoisted Jakob up from the ground, gripping his shirt tightly, causing a slight pinch on his skin. Jakob remained motionless, silent, as the Councilman scrutinized his face, hoping that the layer of brown sludge would make him unrecognizable.

“Zere's something familiar about you, non?” the Councilman uttered, his voice laced with suspicion. Just as the two guards caught up, panting heavily from their pursuit, they began to explain, **“Sorry, sir, we saw him comi—”**

“Silence!” the Councilman sharply interrupted, cutting off their words. He pulled Jakob closer, their eyes locking in a chilling stare.

“Return to ze gutter where you belong, you filthy dog,” The Councilman sneered, his voice dripping with scorn. **“If I ever catch sight of you here again, you'll meet your fate at ze gallows.”**

With a forceful toss, he flung Jakob to the hard surface of the bridge. Falling to his knees, Jakob quickly gathered himself and sprinted away with every ounce of strength he possessed.

“Seal ze old armory! We don't need any street dogs sneaking around 'ere.”

The councilmen finished. Jakob's heart pounded fiercely in his chest as he sprinted, his body propelled by pure adrenaline. His mind was a blank slate, focused solely on the act of moving. After hastily crossing the bridge, he found himself at a loss, unsure of which direction to take. He darted left, then right, navigating a labyrinth of back alleys and roads, even leaping over fences

in his desperate flight. Suddenly, he stumbled upon a bustling square, decorated with dazzling lights, and filled with confused onlookers. Their stares, filled with confusion, only spurred him to sprint away, his exhausted legs protesting with every step. Jakob had already covered a significant distance earlier, and now, with no end in sight, he pushed himself to run further. The final leg of his escape presented itself in the form of a flight of stairs, nestled between towering buildings. Gasping for air, he ascended halfway and stopped, his body exhausted and on the brink of collapse.

“I don’t know where to go.” He thought as his lungs burned in agony.

A surge of anxiety and panic engulfed him, shattering his once naïve perception of how effortless he thought things were supposed to be.

“Bury it.” Jakob heard a voice from deep within himself. He noticed to his left an even narrower alleyway, barely large enough for him to fit. Squeezing himself through he managed to reach the rooftop of another building. From there, he gazed out over the city, his heart heavy with despair. Collapsing to the ground, surely, they couldn't still be chasing him. His knees throbbed with pain from the councilman's brutal throw, and he glanced down to his ankle, now significantly pink and swollen. It was clear that his escape wouldn't be as simple as he had hoped. He reeked of the vile sludge, his body both physically and mentally battered. Reality crashed down upon him, leaving him alone and shattered. With a roar, he unleashed all his pain, all his anguish, as if it had reached its breaking point. His eyes welled up with tears, tears he tried in vain to hold back, but they broke free, flowing down his cheeks. All the thoughts and emotions he had suppressed burst out,

"Dad..." he cried out in pain, his voice filled with sorrow and regret. **"It wasn't supposed to be like this. It's all my fault."**

He buried his face in his hands, weeping uncontrollably, feeling as though a heavy weight had been dropped onto his chest, making it difficult to breathe. The world around him felt cold and lonely. He remained there for what felt like an eternity, his stomach growling with hunger, every inch of his body aching with pain.

"It's not your fault. It's your father's. He shouldn't have told you that you're the Guardian. You couldn't possibly be, not now." a deceitful voice whispered, offering false comfort and shifting blame. Jakob rubbed his cheeks, trying to regain composure and push away the voice, but the temptation to give up tugged relentlessly at his spirit.

"There's nothing you can do. Surrender to the darkness," the voice continued to taunt. In a fit of despair, Jakob slammed his hands against the ground. He had reached rock bottom, a depth of pain he never could have imagined.

"My life doesn't matter. I don't want to be here anymore. Please, why, Mata?" he pleaded, his gaze fixed on the moon that once symbolized hope but now only represented his losses. He would do anything to be reunited with his parents, everything he had taken for granted, his friends, his family, his life.

"I'm sorry, Mom," he whispered. Jakob slowly edged himself to the edge of the building, peering down at the treacherous drop below.

"Do it," the voice whispered, its sinister tone luring him towards the abyss.

"I have nothing left." he thought to himself as he inched closer, consumed by the overwhelming desire to escape his pain. But in that moment, a memory of his mother flickered in his mind, almost as a final plea. And then, a faint scent drifted towards him, a scent that reminded him of his mom. He took it as a sign, and the chaotic thoughts began to subside as he calmed himself with deep breaths. He recalled his father's wise words, **"You can't make permanent decisions based on temporary emotions."** Suddenly the voice whispered once more.

"This is your life now, Tato. Embrace it. Surrender to the darkness, and you shall find freedom," Some of the pain started to dull. Jakob scanned his surroundings, trying to locate the source of the familiar smell. He must have overlooked it before, but there, hidden in a crawl space, emitted the scent that had caught his attention. With nothing left to lose, he cautiously approached to see what awaited him inside.

A faint yet captivating fragrance of delicate roses came from within. Intrigued, he made the decision to follow the enticing smell. As he maneuvered through the cramped space, he noticed small openings in wall. Though too small for him to enter, these crevices offered a glimpse into the source of the smell. His eyes widened as he watched a room filled with women, accompanied by a few men. The atmosphere within was hazy, an unfamiliar sight that mesmerized Jakob. The women gracefully danced, half dressed, their shawls and undergarments twirling in sync with the soft melody in the background. It was a scene unlike anything he had ever witnessed before. He was hypnotized. However, the prolonged exposure to the heavy scents began to sting his nostrils, snapping him out of his trance-like state. Determined, he continued his crawl, glancing through additional openings that revealed multiple rooms occupied by men and women. Some were alone, while others gathered in large groups. Strange noises, including

distant shouts, echoed from these chambers. He wasn't sure if this was the best place for him to be, nonetheless, he just wanted to get somewhere, anywhere. Jakob came to the last opening that was mostly covered by a piece of wood. However, there was a tiny piece missing from the edge of the wood, that he could take a glance through. Luckily the room was empty, and it didn't smell like anything, this was his best shot.

“Maybe I could break it off.” he thought to himself.

Jakob grabbed the knife that he held on to from the armory and stuck it in the opening pulling the piece of wood free, luckily it didn't make a whole lot of noise. He pulled the wood off completely and slowly went down inside. Jakob landed softly on his feet and scanned the room, it looked like someone's office, there was a bath in the corner, and a small mattress that was on the floor and a desk with a chair. Jakob could stay here for the night possibly, but only if no one was able to get in, so he pulled the chair from the desk and wedged it behind the door and its handle to hold it locked.

“I'll just get a few moments rest, wash up and then be on my way before someone tries to come in.” He told himself.

Jakob took off his muddy clothes and threw them in a corner to get in the bath. There was already water in it, so he thankfully didn't have to turn it on. The water wasn't warm, neither was it cold, but it was the first sign of anything good today. After washing himself off quickly he rummaged around the room to find some new clothes. Inside the desk were a few pieces of a man's garments. Jakob managed to find a white tunic, although it was a bit oversized. Determined to make it work, he rolled up the sleeves to improve the fit. He also used a cloth and

some water to clean his pants as best as he could. After taking the time to freshen up, Jakob felt significantly better.

“I’ve been here too long already.” he said to himself.

His stomach rumbled, he was starving, and food right now sounded so delicious. Jakob sat on the mattress for just a second and laid-back thinking about the last meal he had. Hopefully it wouldn’t be his last. He just wanted a second to relax. The bed was too comfy for him, he simply nodded off. Sleep was his dinner for the night. What Jakob didn’t realize was that he should have noticed the hinges on the door he tried to lock, because it opened the opposite way. Jakob lay asleep and the owner of the establishment came up the next morning to find him. It was an older lady wearing a light robe with flowers, with deep black hair and squinty eyes, she noticed him right away and realized he was just a small boy. She graciously threw a blanket over him to keep him warm, letting him sleep through the night.

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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