

The Boys

Chapter Seventeen

As Jakob stepped out into the cool nighttime air, he felt a rush of joy for this fresh chapter in his life. He had control, he could do whatever he pleased. However, at the same time, he was unsure of what steps to take next. He had located Gary, the person who was supposed to give the coin and assist him in getting started. But today was so amazing. He had finally eaten and made some new friends. He longed to embrace his new identity as Tato, as this could potentially be his chance for a fresh beginning. Before continuing their journey, there was a proper introduction to be made with Smiffy. Smiffy was noticeably shorter than the other boys and sported a red bandana that held back his nappy, curly hair. He also had a noticeable gold nose piercing.

The four boys climbed together onto the rooftops and made their way eastward. The nightlife in The Colonies was a breathtaking sight, with the city still abuzz with activity even after the sun had set. Jakob trailed closely behind the boys initially, but as they continued their free running across the city, he soon found himself surpassing them in skill. Even though he had to slow down to let them lead the way, he could sense their admiration for his abilities. During their run, Jakob overheard the boys mentioning something called a Gaff. Curious, he asked Smiffy to explain. Smiffy clarified that it was the term they used to refer to their home, or rather, their secret hideout. After their long journey, they all finally came to a halt, marking the end of their adventure. The boys stood side by side, their eyes fixed upon a sight that left Jakob awestruck. Spread out before them lay a ravine of urban decay, the roughest part of the city seemed to have been swallowed whole by a sea of structures. The scene was a chaotic jumble of stacked buildings cascading downwards with their worn, makeshift rooftops crafted from scraps of metal and plywood. As they surveyed the landscape, Jakob couldn't help but notice the

presence of several dogs, as if they were guardians of the rooftops. Despite the darkness that enveloped the area, the place was far from lifeless. Lights flickered and gleamed sporadically, scattered throughout the maze of decaying structures, revealing pockets of activity and existence of those who called this place home. His eyes traveled across the ravine where buildings clung to the opposing side, seemingly built right up to a towering wall that loomed in the distance. It was the Wall of Omari, a formidable barrier that encased the entire territory, serving as a fortress from the outside world. The wall stretched far as the eye could see, reaching its apex at a dam to the south that guarded the city against the ocean. In that moment, Jakobs mind was flooded with amazement, as he realized the magnitude of the world he was about to enter. The sight spoke volumes about the struggles and resilience of the people who inhabited the rugged place. Everything seemed captivating, until an unpleasant odor reached his nostrils.

"Ew, what's that smell?" Jakob exclaimed.

"That's the smell of them broke folks, foo." Smiffy replied, giving Jakob a comforting pat on the back. **"You gon' get used to it, foreal, foreal."**

"Well Tato this is the beginning of the Hoods." Gabriel finished.

"The Hoods?" Jakob didn't understand what he meant.

"Most of these buildings are covered with blankets, quilts, or even plastic. They keep the sun from beaming down on us when it's hot and it keeps any rain out when it comes down hard. Like a giant hood that cover us, The Hoods." Gabriel answered and everyone laughed expect Jerms.

“Tis is the most dangerous part of the city, mate. Lost a few good chaps down here. Gotta keeps your wits about ya and watch your back. It's a rough neighborhood, no doubt about it.” Jerms chimed in.

“You see these wires? They used to be for deliveries, but The Republic abandoned this part of the city so now we use it to get back home quickly. All you have to do is swing and hold on” Gabriel clarified.

“Come on, GD, he gets the idea, you feel me?” Smiffy said walking towards the wire.

“Is there any other way?” Jakob was glancing around to see if there were any other ways.

“They have two guarded carriage carts, but they don’t run past midday. I’ll show you tomorrow.” Gabriel said pointing out the locations.

“Has anyone died?” Jakob asked, he was nervous about it, but it wasn’t that much different from the delivery systems back home.

“Yes!” Jerms butted in laughing.

“Shut up Jerms!” Gabriel punched him in the arm.

“You’ll be fine, just follow us, we do it all the time.” Gabriel said to reassure Jakob, walking towards the edge of the building. He grabbed a metal rod with a latch that looked like it was covered in thick leather, he latched on to the wire, rocked back and forth and began to glide off the building. Smiffy and Jerms followed behind. Jakob’s heart was racing, he trusted the delivery systems back home, but this was completely new. There was a pile of bars stashed away

and he sifted through them to find one that looked safe enough. He closed his eyes and rocked back and forth, pushing off the floor as hard as he could. Jakob yelled at the top of his lungs, but he couldn't hear himself, he was going so fast, all that he could hear was the wind. The cold of the night gave him a jolt of energy. Jakob came flying to the landing spot and was caught by the boys. Even though Jakob was shivering from the wind chill, it was exciting. Jakob followed as they continued on their route. They walked a few blocks up steep worn-down streets and one long final road, coming to a large opening where a huge stone building sat alone with broken trees and brush that surrounded, the Wall of Omari towered behind the building. The place gave Jakob the creeps.

“What is this place?” Jakob asked as they began to walk up to the building.

“It used to be a prison.” Gabriel answered, like he was a historian. **“Much of the building was destroyed and has been abandoned for a long time. It actually was a theater before it was a prison, you’ll see.”**

The room they entered was vast, with two staircases that intertwined, leading to the second floor. The stairs, though now worn and ragged, once had a luxurious red carpet. A rusted chandelier hung from the center of the room; it was a relic of the past. Chairs, tables, and scattered papers littered the space. The windows were now boarded up from the inside, as if desperately warding off an unseen threat. Jakobs eyes darted across the room, taking in the scene, until they landed upon a figure. A young boy stood motionless on the staircase, his gaze fixed upon the ominous black writing etched upon the wall, which read **“Heisenberg”**.

“Ah, bloody hell Roman! Keep ya hands off ma art! It took me feckin' weeks to track down tha paint!”

Jerms yelled at the boy. The small boy slowly turned around and did not say a word, he locked eyes with Jakob and stared without blinking.

"Don't ya worry 'bout that weasel, mate. He's nothing but a bleedin' weirdo, I tell ya!" Jerms said irritated. They continued under the staircase and the boy's eyes followed Jakob until they passed. Gabriel continued to explain the layout of the building.

“Through that left door it leads to some underground tunnels where the old cells used to be and a staircase to the roof. Through this door is the theater.”

Jakob stepped into the towering room. It looked like it was once a venue for spectacles and performances, now aged. A musty scent of neglect and swirling dust particles filled the room, creating a hazy atmosphere. To his left and right, rows of seats stretched out, remnants of their former glory now reduced to destruction. Chairs lay scattered and broken, amongst the debris, a group of young boys sat, their eyes turning towards Jakob as he entered. A silent welcoming nod passed between them. A fallen chandelier caught Jakob's attention, shattered it lay on its side across the front rows. Despite how it looked, a shine of beauty still clung to its rusted and broken surface. The walls, with banners, revealed glimpses of the past. Some displayed the words.

"Welcome to Kino Prison". Other banners proclaimed boldly, **"The Clergy is Salvation."**

“Slime, you eva heard of the Phantom Butcher?” Smiffy asked. Jakob quickly nodded his head, as he continued to look around the theater. Gabriel led them towards the stage while Smiffy went on to tell the story.

“Foo, was straight up a serial killer, no kizzy!” Smiffy began.

“Ooooooo.” Jerms tried to make a scary noise in the background.

“He was goin' around the south, takin' out people from every Ward, I even heard lil buddy popped a Ranger.” Smiffy continued.

“No way, a Ranger couldn't get killed.” Jakob chimed in.

“I ain't fa da cap foo. O'll boy got caught and thrown in prison, but then he let all em prisoners loose, causin' straight mayhem. He end up holed up here, and thats where he had his final go. Some say he got smoked right here in this theater. I swear fo gawd.”

Smiffy finished.

“Yeah, but they never found the body and there are people who still follow his cause called the Butchers Servants. Some people say he is still alive, eternally hungry to kill. Late at night when its real quiet here, you could still here him.” Gabriel continued and Jakob felt a chill run down his spin.

“That's fake doesn't listen to them.” Another kid interrupted.

“This Slime right here is Bruce.” Smiffy said pointing to the boy.

The boy leaned against the wall, concealed within the Shadows. His arms crossed and a toothpick casually twirling in his mouth. His appearance set him apart from the others, as if he

had experienced more of life's hardships. He wore a tattered vest and a worn coat, his attire bore a striking resemblance to the man they had observed earlier, an attempt to copy the distinct style.

“The names Gene.” The boy said in a low tone.

“Where'd ya get that get up? Ya look like one of the Syndicate, mate.” Jerms interrupted.

“Ha, maybe I am one.” Gene responded with sarcasm.

“You change your name all the time, first it was Chris, then it was Bruce, now its Gene.” Gabriel shook his hand, introducing him to Jakob. Gene joined the group as they all exited the back of the stage to another part of the prison. As Jakob descended the steps, he surveyed the partially destroyed room before him. Its walls were crumbling, and debris littered the floor. To the left, a fire emanated a dim glow, casting eerie shadows on the worn-out furniture. Five boys were gathered around what appeared to be a makeshift stone bowl, containing a mysterious brown substance. One of the older boys stood at the center, diligently stirring the concoction with a large spoon in his hand.

“No ke aha i lō'ihī ai 'oe?” The large boy looked up and said to all of them.

“How many times have I told you Semisi, I don't understand you when you speak you native.” Gabriel shook his head, taking a seat around the large bowl. Although Jakob knew what he was saying. The boy was asking them why they took so long. Jakob quickly responded.

“Uce e hoike mai ana lakou ia'u i ke ala. 'O Tato ko'u inoa.” The native tongue came smooth out of Jakob lips, Tita would have been impressed with his annunciation. As soon as the words left Jakob's mouth, everyone stopped and stared at him in shock.

“How in the bloody hell do you know how to speak native.” Jerms was shook.

“I just know a bit.” Jakob was nervous. He didn’t want to be prodded with questions.

“A man of mystery. You’ll kill it with the ladies.” Gene alleged.

“I like dis guy.” The larger boy laughed and came around to give Jakob a big hug cracking his back. The rest of the night went great, the boys sat around and enjoyed some food, laughing and talking about their day. A few other boys eventually joined and even Rico caught up with them. Jakob sat quietly and observed them all. It was an unfamiliar environment for him, the kids sitting around talking about nonsense. None of them had any real reasonability’s, it seemed like they were free.

“You ever had Kava Tato?” Rico asked.

Jakob had heard Tita explain it once, it was a root of a plant native to the Kanui Nation, its grinded up to make a powder and then strained over the course of a few days in water, to make something of a similar sort to wine. Rico grabbed a small bowl and offered Jakob a taste of the liquid. Initially, Jakob declined, but under the pressure from the other boys, he eventually gave in. Jakob didn't want to risk being kicked out of the first place where he had felt welcomed. With that in mind, he took a deep gulp of the Kava, even though it tasted absolutely awful. It was like swallowing dirt with a hint of water, but he made sure not to let his distaste show on his face. Almost instantly, his tongue began to tingle, and his face went numb, causing him to smile for no apparent reason. The boys around him cheered, realizing that the Kava was starting to take effect. Jakob, feeling a bit lightheaded, asked,

"So, where are all your families?" Perhaps the Kava had hit him harder than he had anticipated.

“This is our family.” Gabriel responded.

“I mean like your parents.”

There was a short pause and Gene answered.

“We are all Orphans.”

“So am I, my mom and dad are dead.” Jakob let out a small tear.

“Ahh, here we go, lads. We got ourselves a drunk crier, don't we?” Jerms laughed.

“Shut up Jerms, you know what it's like.” Gabriel came to his defense and Jakob composed himself as he scooped another cup of kava.

“My parents are dead. They were killed by Twelves.” Gene came in.

“I never had the chance to know me Ma or Da, mate. Left me in some bloody group home, and you won't believe it, those bloody outlaws thought it'd be a grand idea to burn the whole place down. But check this out, this bloke right here, he's the one who came through and saved me from that chaos.” Jerms pointed to Gabriel.

“After my mom died, my dad joined the church and left to the east chasing religion, and I never seen him again.” Rico shared his story.

“Damn foo, my folks, they out there in them Wards, you know? But damn, they hooked on that calcite dust, like fiends. They straight up traded me away fa dat. So here I am, all alone. Just thugged it out ya feel me.” Smiffy said, lowering his tone.

“What about you GD, where's your family?” Jakob asked.

Gabriel paused and took a long drink of Kava,

“I had a mom, dad, and a sister. My sister was kidnapped when I was young and not to long after my sister was gone, my mom spiraled and got in with the wrong people. She was shot and killed right in front me. My pops, well I only seen very little of him when I was growing up. He was always coming and going. My dad came one last time to see me after my mom died but that was it. This all happened when I was young so it’s all a little hazy. But I remember my dad’s face the most vividly.”

From the point of Jakob meeting Gabriel, he was a positive kid, this was the first time he sensed some real pain in him, that Jakob could relate to.

“See Tato, you aren’t alone. We are all orphans, and we all turned out okay.”

Gabriel finished on a more positive note.

“Not this lil boy” Smiffy said elbowing Rico.

“Shut up fat boy.” Rico said laughing.

“Your one of us now Tato.” Gabriel said as they all held their drinks up. Jakob looked around and joined them as they all took a deep drink of the Kava. The tales of the other boys provided comfort. He realized that he wasn't alone in his struggles and that there were others who had experienced loss and pain. Seeing how they were able to cope and move forward gave him hope that he too would be alright, and that there was nothing wrong with him. He could relate so much to everyone there. Each of these boys has been deeply affected by life, bringing a sense of harsh reality to their world. The carefree games of childhood were no longer within their reach. In just one night, Jakob had grown up. Suddenly Jakob heard whistling from all around.

“There here.” One of the boys said.

“Who?” Jakob asked.

“There called The Sisters. It is a group of girls from the north. They come down here often to manage business. There is a little shady, but GD has a thing with Tiffany, one of the main girls.” Rico explained.

Not long after, approximately ten girls appeared out of nowhere. The introductions were brief and a bit blurry for Jakob, as the effects of the Kava started to take hold, and the world began to spin. All Jakob could recall after that was Gabriel left with the girl, and then he found a cozy spot to lay down. Jakob was the first one to drift off to sleep, and the last thing on his mind before his eyes closed was Celeste's face. He fell into a deep slumber, free of dreams, and finally experienced the best sleep he had had in quite some time. It felt as if he had been asleep for days.

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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