

The Flood

Chapter Eighteen

"Bam, Bam," Jakob initially mistook the sound for a figment of a dream, but as it repeated, he realized it was real. He felt a jolt as someone shook him forcefully.

"Wake up, Tato! Wake up!" Jakob slowly opened his eyes, finding himself in a disoriented state. The world seemed to spin, and his head throbbed, perhaps due to the kava he had consumed the night before.

"We need to leave!" someone urgently shouted at him. His pupil strained as he eyes to identify the person talking, but the intense morning light burned.

"What?" Jakob rubbed his face, attempting to clear his foggy mind. **"What's going on?"**

Gradually, the confusion subsided, and he recognized Gabriel as the one who had been yelling at him. Distant crashes and bangs filled the air, prompting Jakob to survey the room, only to find the boys and girls from the previous night in a state of panic, rushing around frantically.

"We need to get out of here, now," Gabriel commanded. Suddenly, the piercing sound of a siren echoed in the distance. A sense of fear and anxiety filled the air, as everyone exchanged worried glances. However, Jakob remained clueless about the significance of the sound.

"Bloody hell!" Jerms exclaimed, his voice carrying from a short distance away.

"What does that siren mean?" Jakob asked, wincing as the high-pitched noise pierced his ears. He struggled to maintain his balance as he took his first few steps.

"The Convent are coming," Gabriel's voice trembled as he uttered the words.

"Who is The Convent?" Jakob asked, his knowledge of the Twelves militiamen still limited. He couldn't fathom what could be worse than what he already knew.

"You don't want to stick around and find out," Gabriel concluded, raising his voice. **"Everyone, move!"**

Jakob swiftly gathered his composure as chaos erupted around him. He trailed behind Gabriel, making their way through the backstage entrance towards the main theater room. However, just as they entered, the front door was forcefully kicked open, and a swarm of men flooded out. Without wasting a second, they pounced on several children, forcefully pinning them to the ground and restraining them to ensure they couldn't escape.

"This way!" Gabriel led Jakob to an old rusted circular staircase that led to rooftop of the building. A strong smell of fire immediately grabbed his attention. The Hoods was engulfed in flames, with billowing black smoke filling the sky. The air was bursting with deafening screams and the sound of crashing, overpowering the blaring siren.

"Tato wait here, I have to go back down."

"Then what are we going to do?" Jakob asked Gabriel.

Gabriel turned around with a look of fear on his face and responded, **"I don't know."**

This was first time Jakob sensed that Gabriel was unsure of himself, since their first meeting, he led the way and was optimistic about the way they lived but now it was different. Jakob paced back and forth, flinching at every sound. Suddenly he was blindsided and forcefully pushed, causing him to slide on his chest towards the edge of the building. As he dangled his head over the edge, he looked down to the deep drop before turning around to figure out what

had just happened. The sight of Roman, the weird boy from the hallway, made Jakob's heart race, and he immediately began scrambling to defend himself. With a cold and wicked expression on his face, Roman pounced on Jakob, overpowering him and viciously clawing at his neck to strangle him. Caught completely off guard, Jakob rapidly lost control as Roman tightened his grip, suffocating the life out of him. Jakob's vision blurred, and darkness started to encroach upon him.

"I can't go out like this," Jakob muttered to himself, but then the voice emerged from the depths, responding, **"Kill him."**

Jakob closed his eyes, and everything turned pitch black. However, he suddenly felt a weight in his pocket. It was the gold knife he had discovered on his way into the city. Without hesitation, he thrust the knife into Roman's chest. Gasping for air, Jakob watched as Roman convulsed, coughing up blood. Breathing heavily, he quickly scanned his surroundings for any other threats. Gabriel, Rico, Smiffy, and Jerms appeared, observing the scene as if they had just arrived. Overwhelmed with panic, Jakob's fear intensified as the gravity of the situation sank in. He glanced at Roman's lifeless body and, with trembling legs, slid away.

"He... he attacked me." Jakob's hands instinctively grasped his head, pulling back his hair in sheer terror.

"Accept the darkness." The voice from within echoed once more. Jakob's gaze shifted downwards, and he had the fresh stains of blood on his fingertips. Frantically, he attempted to rub it off, desperately trying to rid himself of the evidence.

"Pull yourself together, mate!" Jerms slapped him, snapping Jakob out of his daze.

"Yah killed tha little weasel. It may be your first, but it won be your last. He was a bloody weirdo anyway." Jerm's rose to his feet and coldly kicked Roman's lifeless body off the edge of the building. Jakob, shaky on his legs, managed to stand. A peculiar sensation swept over him, replacing his panic.

"Bury it," the voice within reassured him. It was as if darkness had taken root where fear should have resided. All Jakob needed to do was take a step forward and surrender to it. He recalled the words his uncle,

"The Shadow teaches us resilience, shaping us into our true selves. Embrace the darkness."

If Jakob wished to be liberated from the pain that weighed upon him, along with the shadow he had carried since his mother's loss, perhaps the darkness was the only path to salvation.

"You can never return to who you once were," Jakob declared in his mind, directing his thoughts with conviction. He took a breath and asked,

"Where do we go?"

"I think I have an idea." Rico supposed.

With a sense of urgency, all the boys bolted into action, their feet pounding against the pavement. They swiftly descended a nearby pole that stood tall beside the building. Jakob kept up the pace, staying hot on their heels. In the chaos of the Hoods, the boys maneuvered their way through the city's streets. Many roads were barricaded, buildings engulfed in flames, and thick smoke filled the air, stinging their eyes. The Convent were in relentless pursuit, hunting people down. The boys sprinted with every ounce of strength their young bodies could muster.

“We have to get to the carriage karts, that’s our best bet to get out of the Hoods.”

“Won’t there be guards.”

“Maybe we will get lucky.”

The group of boys sprinted up the unforgiving incline, determined to reach their destination - the karts. As they approached the top, they veered around the final turn, only to be met with an obstacle. A solitary guard stood in their path. Rico exchanged a knowing glance with Gabriel, silently conveying an "I told you so" message as they quickly sought cover. Peering cautiously around the corner together, they laid eyes upon the guard. He was unlike any they had encountered before. This was no ordinary security personnel; he belonged to an elusive group known as The Convent. The boys had only heard tales of their existence, whispered among the locals. The Convent was a secretive military unit employed by the esteemed Grand Reserve, called upon solely in times of extreme measure. Throughout the centuries, they had come and gone on crucial missions, leaving a mark on the region's history.

“I’ll distract him, then you and Tato sneak behind him. Take out his legs first and then get his chopper.” Gabriel pointed to Smiffy and Jakob.

“I’ve never used one.” Jakob answered.

“Don worry I’ll slide.” Smiffy answered giving Jakob a nod.

The plan was set, and Gabriel snuck through the backside of a few buildings and started yelling to get the guards attention.

“You’re going to die here filth.” The man shouted as he started to walk towards Gabriel. Without hesitation, Smiffy and Jakob launched themselves towards the guard, aiming

for the vulnerable spot behind his knees. Their coordinated attack brought the guard crashing down to the ground. Smiffy wasted no time and made a beeline for the chopper, but the guard managed to grab hold of his legs, preventing him from escaping.

"Tato, get da chopper!" Smiffy urgently shouted, struggling to break free from the guard's grip. Reacting swiftly, Jakob dove towards the chopper, determined to retrieve it. However, as he lifted it up, he realized it was much heavier than he had anticipated. Standing tall over the fallen guard.

"Wait, kid," the man voiced cautioned behind his mask.

But Jakob couldn't afford to wait. Without thinking, he pulled the trigger. The resounding sound reverberated in his ears, and the recoil from the chopper struck his shoulder, causing a sharp pain. Strangely, Jakob couldn't feel anything else, not even the weight of his actions.

"Man, that fella is as cold as ice. Taking down two blokes in a single day, no sweat."

Jerms exclaimed, his excitement evident in his voice. Jakob, on the other hand, had already moved on mentally. He joined the rest of the boys as they quickly hopped onto the carriage kart. At first, silence enveloped the group as the kart started to move. All eyes were fixed on Jakob, a mix of shock and amazement displayed on their faces. Suddenly, a loud crack echoed through the air, followed by an explosion. The boys instinctively turned their heads towards the source of the sound. It was the Dam, the barrier that held back the Southern Sea. It had burst open, unleashing a violent stream of water that extinguished the flames of The Hoods, their home. The boys peered over the edge, witnessing the destruction unfolding before their eyes. Their emotions began to surface, etching a cold and heartbreaking expression on their faces. This place, where they had grown up, was now being swallowed by the relentless waves. Some of the boys were

consumed by anger, while others were overwhelmed by sadness. But for Jakob, it didn't hold much significance. Having already experienced so much loss, he had reached a point where nothing seemed to matter anymore. At least, that's what he believed.

"What are we gonna do?" Gabriel exclaimed. Smiffy and Rico chimed in with their own concerns, questioning where they would go next. Jakob interjected with a glimmer of hope.

"I have an idea, but it's a long shot," he said. The others turned their attention towards him, eager to hear what he had to say.

"Do you remember that big guy we saw yesterday? The one with the massive ring?" Jakob asked, seeking confirmation. Gabriel nodded in recognition.

"I was supposed to meet him and give him this coin if I ever needed help," Jakob revealed, holding up the mysterious coin for everyone to see. Jerms couldn't contain his frustration.

"Bloody hell, mate! Why didn't you mention this earlier?" he exclaimed, snatching the coin from Jakob's hand. He examined it closely before Gabriel intervened and returned it to Jakob.

"I've never seen this before, but it's worth a shot," Gabriel said, his voice filled with determination. **"Lead the way, Tato."**

With the other guys trailing behind him, Jakob couldn't help but feel a sense of nervousness. He now had the weight of responsibility on his shoulders, leading these guys and making sure they listened to him. It was something he had always tried to avoid, but in that moment, his instinct took over and he stepped up to the challenge. As the kart came to a stop, Jakob wasted no time

and led his new friends. The boys followed closely behind as they made their way up to the rooftops. Jakob moved with agility and confidence, as if he had lived in the city his whole life. He was now familiar with the layout and easily navigated through the streets, occasionally slowing down to allow the others to keep up. They exchanged playful banter along the way, trying to lighten the tension. Unlike the chaotic Hoods, the other parts of the city were relatively calm, although still patrolled by Twelves militiamen. Jakob led the group to the same pub they had visited the day before. The scent of a fresh fire filled the air as they approached. To their shock, the building was engulfed in flames as they turned the corner.

“Damn it!” Rico let out.

“Hey fellas?” a voice spoke to them, and they all turned around. It was Gene.

“Gene, how the hell you slide out that place? That's some next-level maneuvering right there. I ain't even see ya?” Smiffy questioned.

“That's not important right now. What are you guys doing here, the city is crawling.”

“We were trying to find the guys from yesterday, Tato has a plan.” Gabriel answered.

“I saw them down at the Newport docks, you guys better get there before Twelve come down.”

“You aren't coming?” Jakob asked.

“This is my city. I gotta stay.” Gene finished with confidence. With a round of handshakes and farewells, the boys bid each other goodbye and resumed their journey. They

descended towards the bustling Docks, where the usual hustle and bustle carried on as if oblivious to the turmoil engulfing the Hoods. It seemed that the local Wardsmen, undoubtedly bribed, turned a blind eye to the affairs of this ward. This meant that the boys had to exercise even greater caution, for the Docks had gained a notorious reputation for its ruthless nature, a place where people vanished without a trace. Jakob's eyes darted left and right, scanning the crowd in search of Gary. After what felt like an eternity, he finally caught sight of him, seated among a group of individuals.

“There he is let’s go!” Jakob said, leading the way.

Their progress was abruptly halted, as if fate had conspired against them. A bald man intercepted their path, none other than Art who had dared to challenge the Twelve yesterday to a game of Roshambo and bore the scars of defeat on his face. The boys found themselves encircled and swiftly apprehended. Each of them had a rough sack placed over their heads, obscuring their vision, and were whisked away to an unknown destination. The journey was filled with jolts and bumps, heightening their anxiety. Eventually, they arrived at a cramped, dimly lit backroom, where their blindfolds were removed. The sight that met their eyes was unsettling - the room was decked with what appeared to be skinned animals hanging from the ceiling, leading Jakob to assume that it was a morbid meat locker.

“Who sent you boys. Was it Gamboa? He’s using kids now?” Gary commanded. while he had a machete in his hand that he was swinging around.

“We are here to see you!” Jakob announced. Gary stopped swinging the machete and looked at him dead in the eyes.

“I am here to see Gary Cornegay”. Jakob continued confidently.

“How do you know my name boy.” Gary pointed the blade at Jakobs face, it was rusted with blood at end and smelled of iron.

“Tyranaz sent me.”

“Is that so? Do you have any proof?” Gary’s demeanor change, he even had a slight smirk on his face. Jakob reached into his pocket and handed Gary the coin.

“I was told there was only one of you. I don’t know if I have room for you all here.” Gary demeanor changed even further. Jakob got up from his knees and stood with conviction that amazed his new friends.

“If they don’t come with me then I’m not going.” It was Jakobs only shot to start a new life, but he couldn’t leave behind the boys who welcomed him.

“We have an accord, get these fine young chaps up. We are headed for the Quarter.” All the men let out a cheer and began to help the boys stand up, dusting them off with no hard feelings.

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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