

Men of Mayhem

Chapter Twenty-Five

As Jakob laid his eyes on the ship that had become his home, a moment of relief washed over him, a temporary respite from the events that had unfolded throughout the day. During the years of adventures and conquests, The Dauntless underwent a remarkable change under the leadership of Gabriel and Jakob. Transforming the ship to an even more impressive vessel, elevating her status as a fearsome pirate ship. The hull, which was once painted in a faded shade of red, was now reinforced with sleek black iron plating, enhancing both durability and resistance to enemy attacks. The ship's size has also grown, with an additional deck added to accommodate the expanding crew and plunder. The prow of The Dauntless now features a magnificent figurehead, replacing the old shark with a menacing kraken. The intricately carved coils around the prow in a deep black, its scales glimmering in shades of silver. The eyes of the kraken glowed with fierce red captivating all who gaze upon it. The sails replaced with new ones, crafted from a sturdy yet lightweight fabric in a matching deep black. As for the ship's exterior, the once-gold moldings have been replaced with silver accents, tracing along the edges of the vessel. Inside, The Dauntless has undergone extensive renovations. Luxurious cabins were added for the captain and crew. Thanks to the weapons trade, the ship's armory was expanded, with an impressive collection of cannons, swords, and choppers.

However, the reputation of the Men of Mayhem surpassed even the transformations made to the pirate ship. As Captain and War-Chief, Gabriel and Jakob skillfully carved out a name for themselves and their crew in the southern waters of Hyperion. They were both respected and feared, their crew fought bravely for their survival in an unforgiving world. As Jakob rode onto the ship and parked his Rover, he was greeted by the familiar faces of the crew he had come to

know and rely on. First stood Matt Simko and Darrell Chamberlain. Both esteemed members of the crew were prepared to receive the rovers.

"Simko, I need you to check the Rover's radiator. It was making a hissing sound," Jakob requested, knowing little about mechanics himself but relying on Simko's expertise. The once lively, fair-skinned boy had now grown into an imposing figure and showing signs of balding. After Jakob passed Simko, he encountered the twin sons of their former crew member, Larry Cleghorne, who retired a few years prior following the tragic loss of Gary. Sefu and Jabbari, nearly identical twins, stood there. Sefu appeared slightly smaller and leaner, while Jabbari had a stockier build and was taller in height. Jabbari sported a beard, whereas Sefu had a clean-shaven face. Jakob shook their hands and then heard another voice.

"War Chief, the captain said table in five." a voice called out. Jakob turned to his left and saw Cassi Enriquez, the sister of another crew member who was awaiting their return to the island. She was only a few years younger than Jakob, petite in stature with straight black hair pinned up neatly. Having recently joined the crew as a prospect several months ago, Cassi always carried herself with respect, but being a Gemini, one had to be cautious on her off days. Jakob gave her a nod before he continued towards the stairs. The crew, a tight-knit family, had weathered the storms of time together. Yet, their journey had not been without sacrifice. Over the course of seven long years, they had bid farewell to a handful of courageous souls, forever etching their memory in the journeys of their seafaring adventures. But alongside those losses, they had gained fresh hope in the form of new recruits, eager to prove their mettle on the vast expanse of the southern waters of Hyperion. Before Jakob made his way to the captain's quarters, he stopped by his own humble cabin. His once dusty hammock had been transformed into a cozy space, just for him. He rummaged through his belongings, searching for something specific.

“Where is it?” Jakob pondered to himself, his hands searching around. **“Ah ha!”**

He finally found it. The ring, once belonging to his father, had been carefully concealed for years. But the events of today served as a reminder of his father's presence and influence in his life. The ring had not aged a day, its silver still gleaming with purity. Jakob gazed at it intently, contemplating whether he was truly ready to wear it. Despite his lingering uncertainty, he chose to slide it onto his finger, finding that it fit perfectly, sending shivers down his back.

“It’s not your fault. You did the right thing by leaving.” The voice inside whispered, urging him to bury his anger. He brushed it off and kept the ring on heading back to his duties. He finally emerged from the deck below as he stepped out, he caught snippets of Gabriel's booming voice scolding Jerms, though the exact words he could not hear. The only thing Jakob caught was Jerms returning fire yelling,

“Tha little weasel!”

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew bustled around, tirelessly preparing for their upcoming voyage. Jakob made his way towards the captain's quarters, the designated meeting place for the crew. Within those walls, the pirates gathered around a sturdy table, with maps, charts, and various trinkets collected during their adventures. In the captain's quarters, Jakob knew the crew would convene to address the challenges that lay ahead. Just as Jakob was about to enter the cabin, another member of the crew greeted him. Semisi, the boy from back in the Colonies who introduced him to Kava, years ago. When the Twelves attacked The Hoods, chaos ensued and many of the boys were separated. It seemed like a cruel twist of fate, and the boys feared they would never cross paths again or worse. But destiny had different plans. One year on a trip back to The Colonies, Jakob and his crew unexpectedly ran into Semisi, and without hesitation, they

recruited him to join their crew. Like most boys from the south, Semisi was an orphan, but his heritage was traced back to the Tokoz clan of the Kanui nation. This became evident in his towering stature and broad shoulders, surpassing the size of any other man on the crew. He embodied the strength and resilience passed down through generations. On his skin, a tapestry of intricate tattoos told stories of his ancestral roots. And atop his head, he sported a thick mane of dark, nappy hair, adding to his striking presence. Semisi was not only a kind-hearted man, but he also possessed a fierceness that mirrored his imposing physique.

“I reckon ya had a day?” Semisi asked

“Uce!” Jakob embraced his friend, **“Sure was a day.”**

“Yeah, I hear ya, Uce. I came across this bloke earlier, a real lazy bugger. Almost had to give him a good whack, if ya know what I mean,” Semesi added, still struggling a bit with his common tongue accent. They entered the captain's quarters together, followed by the rest of the crew. The meeting went well, with updates on the rum supplies, treasury accounts, and the progress of the weapons drop. During the meeting, Jakob found himself repeatedly bombarded with questions. However, his responses seemed distant and detached, as if his mind was elsewhere. He couldn't help but feel disheartened by the entire situation, and he was still contemplating the information he had recently acquired from Gene. After the meeting concluded, the crew gathered for dinner, still following Gary's traditions. However, Jakob decided to call it a night and went to his quarters early to ease his mind. Gabriel noticed that something seemed off with him and asked,

“You good Tato?”

But Jakob simply shrugged it off and quietly made his way to his room. He grabbed a bottle of rum on the way, settling into bed and staring at the ceiling as he drifted off to sleep. In the years following his father's death, he often woke up screaming from nightmares, drenched in sweat. His crew mates grew accustomed to his nightly terrors. Over time, he learned to suppress his emotions, and the dreams subsided, typically he would close his eyes and then suddenly awaken, as if only a moment had passed. However, tonight felt different. Jakob's body drifted through the eternal abyss, surrounded by darkness. He sensed the warmth of water enveloping his body, his mind questioning his whereabouts.

“Where am I?” Like fragments of a distant memory. It had been ages since he last experienced a dream like this. A sense of recognition stirred within him as he delved deeper into the darkness, memories flooding back and familiarity. A comforting thought echoed in his mind,

“This is just a dream, you're okay, it's not real.” assuring him of his safety in this unreal realm, as if whispered by a distant companion. Slowly, the darkness began to subside, revealing a glimmer of light. The receding water and the pressure against his back indicated his return to this long-forgotten staircase. He had returned, transported back to a place he had long abandoned in his mind. The platform atop the staircase, once pristine white bricks with black outlines, now transformed into black with white lines. The same two doors floated on each side of the circular platform. With cautious steps, Jakob approached the closed white door, his eyes catching sight of the cracks that marred the door. Just as he neared it, his heart skipped a beat as he caught a glimpse of his father's reflection, only to watch it swiftly vanish. However, even in the midst of this eerie encounter, an undeniable force tugged at him, pulling him towards the darkness that lay beyond the black door. He stepped towards the darkness.

"You ran away!" a voice emerged from the depths, startling him. In an instant, the sound of rushing water began to rise, and a colossal wave loomed menacingly above Jakob. Panic surged through his veins as he attempted to flee, his heart pounding. The wave crashed down upon him, leaving him gasping for air, consumed by the suffocating darkness. Deep from his slumber Jakob pulled himself from the clutches of the dream. The chill of dampness surrounded him, he felt his body wet, wondering if the dream was real. But as he looked towards his legs, he discovered the truth. The very rum bottle he had clung to during his restless slumber had betrayed him, its contents spilling across his lap in the dead of night. With hushed determination, he composed himself, drying himself off. In the dimly lit crew quarters, he reached out for another bottle of rum, a comforting elixir to numb himself, before venturing above deck. He would rather spend the entire night awake than succumb to the clutches of his dream once more. Emerging onto the deck, Jakob's eyes however were drawn to Gabriel, who stood alone in contemplation, leaning against the starboard side of the boat. Gabriel heard Jakobs' footsteps drawing near.

"Trouble sleeping?" Gabriel inquired. Jakob brushed off the question and immediately noticed the mess on the deck, accompanied by a large pool of dried blood.

"What happened here?" Jakob asked, his curiosity piqued.

"Jerms wanted to test the new recruit. Turns out, Edgar had better boxing skills than he expected. We stepped in before things got too bloody." Gabriel explained, his tone calm but serious.

"Too bloody?" Jakob questioned laughing, attempting to hand Gabriel a bottle of rum.

"No thanks, I'll save that for later," Gabriel declined, gently pushing the bottle away. They stood in silence for a while, their gazes fixated on the vast expanse of the southern sea. The shimmering stars mirrored on the ocean's surface, seamlessly blending with the horizon that seemed to stretch into eternity. The Moon of Luehtaz, a constant presence, illuminated the night sky with its glow.

"So, what held you up earlier?" Gabriel turned to Jakob, breaking the silence. Jakob simply shook his head, a knowing smile playing on his lips, and both men burst into laughter.

"You were with a brunette girl, huh? You definitely have a type." Gabriel teased.

"Just like you were with Tiffany," Jakob retorted, a playful look in his eyes.

"That's purely business," Gabriel replied, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"Of course," Jakob smirked, the laughter still lingering in their shared moment.

After a brief pause, Jakob posed an unexpected question to Gabriel.

"Do you remember your mom?" Jakob asked, his mind wandering to his own mother, forever linked to the moon in his memories. Thoughts of the past had consumed him throughout the day, a mixture of longing and haunting nostalgia for the people he had lost and the life that could have been.

"When I really focus, I can remember moments with her. Why do you ask?" Gabriel responded, his voice filled with empathy.

"When I was younger, I used to look at the moon and think of my mom. I guess I haven't really looked up in a long time." Jakob took a sip from the bottle and continued, **"She**

used to tell me stories about the creation of man and all the legends of the Ancient Hyperion's. Jakob shared his voice with a hint of sadness. **"It's just... sometimes I struggle to remember what she looked like or even how she sounded."** A solemn silence hung in the air between the two men, the weight of their emotions was palpable.

"Well, now I might have to go find my own bottle of rum to drown my sorrows," Gabriel chuckled, playfully nudging Jakob. The silence hung in the air for a moment, Jakob was rubbing his father's ring before he finally spoke up.

"I've travelled the world, sailed the Southern Sea, explored uncharted territories, battled against the Syndicate, and lived a life of luxury. I am free to do as I please but there are moments when I can't shake this feeling, this feeling that something is missing." Jakob confided in Gabriel, knowing that he was always the one he could open up to without hesitation.

"Well, I'll have you know, the crew said you did great today," Gabriel said.

"I already know where you're headed with this," Jakob responded, turning away.

"What? I haven't even said anything yet," Gabriel raised his arms in defense.

"I know what you're about to say," Jakob knew Gabriels intentions.

"Well..." Gabriel began.

"Here we go," Jakob leaned back against the edge of the boat.

"You would have made a great captain." Gabriel said.

Jakob threw his hands up in frustration. **"I knew it."**

"Tato, the only reason I'm the captain is because you said no. The entire crew voted for you after Gary was gone. We have all witnessed what your capable of. We chose you to lead." Gabriel explained.

"I didn't want the responsibility." Jakob expressed his frustration.

"But you have a natural talent for it. We would have followed you to the end of the Hyperion if you had asked. We believe in you," Gabriel tried to convince him.

"GD, you know better than anyone why I couldn't accept it. You know my history" Jakob retorted.

"I understand, I know exactly who you are, but sometimes I need to remind you of your greatness. We've been through so much together, facing countless challenges and great things have come from that. We have never run from a fight." Gabriel stood tall and continued, **"This is the life we have chosen. I just try to find the good things in every situation."**

"How do you do it, with all the weight of it all?" Jakob asked, inside he still questioned himself.

"The key for me is to focus on the present, not dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. What matters is what's right in front of us. So, why worry about anything else? Whether things go left or right, it's exactly as it is supposed to be. So, I choose not to worry. The battle lies within our minds Tato." Gabriel concluded.

"Hmm." Jakob mumbled, finishing the last drop of rum in his bottle before tossing it overboard. As the sun started to rise, Gabriel gave a command.

"Everything will work itself out. Wake the rest of the crew," he ordered, and Jakob set off to fulfill his duties. However, his mind continued to dwell on Gabriels words. Over the next two days, the crew sailed steadily towards the Cree Quarter, each member following their routines with practiced efficiency. The early morning sun, bathed the ship's deck in a warm golden glow as the pirates hustled about, making sure the sails were properly adjusted and checking their navigation charts. Jakob took in the familiar sights, and sounds of the journey, but his mind was elsewhere.

"My Uncle? The Source? I'm so confused." Jakob thought silently, a weight pressing upon his chest. Amidst the lively banter and laughter of the crew, an atmosphere brimming with liveliness, Jakob remained alone. Despite his detachment, the crew understood Jakob's need for space, allowing him to navigate the journey in his own way. As they approached the island, as usual Bobby skillfully maneuvered the ship to their secret dock, while the rest of the crew disembarked onto small boats. The transition was seamless. It had been several weeks since they last set foot on the Southern Islands. The majority of the crew were eager to partake in the joys of their hard-earned spoils. However, Jakob felt the need for solitude, longing for some time away from everyone. He needed to clear his mind and find solace in the silence. He couldn't shake the dream from his mind's eye.

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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