

# **The Girl**

## **Chapter Twenty-Six**

The rest of the day passed since arriving back to the Southern Islands, and it was well into the deepness of the night. Jakob sat alone, enjoying a moment of solitude amidst the sounds of the town. With a cigar in hand, he blew smoke rings and watched as they swirled around him. The warmth of the smoke filled his mouth as he exhaled, bringing a sense of calmness to his restless mind. In these stolen moments of isolation, Jakob found peace, temporarily escaping the nagging voice of doubt and uncertainty.

**“You did the right thing Tato, you left. They are better off without you.”** He tried to convince himself that he was content with the choices he had made and the life he led. Though deep down, he knew it was a lie he told himself. As he sat there, absent of mind, suddenly, Smiffy came around the corner, his excitement palpable as he jogged towards Jakob. He slowed down to walk as he got closer. Shaking Jakob's hand in their crew secret handshake, he couldn't contain his excitement as he spoke,

**“Tato, you better come through, slime! There's this bad chick out there, straight up guzzlin' like it ain't no thang right there wit Jerms.”** Jakob took another puff of his cigar, unimpressed. He had grown accustomed to Jerms getting drunk and causing trouble, often leading to fights. Having been in his fair share of brawls defending Jerms, he wasn't in the mood for another confrontation tonight.

**“Nah, I ain't even playin.”** Smiffy insisted, **“This girl walked in, talkin' 'bout hirin' foo's to go to the Legion Nation, and then Jerms straight up pressed her.”**

**“The Legion Nation?”** Jakob's interest was piqued, and he extinguished his cigar. The Legion Nation mentioned twice in several days it couldn't be such a coincidence.

**"And check this out, she straight up said she lookin for this dude named Jakob, and the way she described him, it was like she talkin bout you. You the only jit I know with them grey eyes, ya feel me?"**

**"Could it be?"** He thought to himself before he asked, **"What's her name?"**

**"Celeste."** Smiffy replied, his words hanging in the air. A flicker of recognition crossed Jakob's face as he pondered the possibilities.

**"Could it really be her?"** He wondered. He knew that she would be the only one who would know his name. Without saying another word, Jakob followed Smiffy, his heart pounding with anticipation. The saloon was bustling with activity, loud shouts could be heard from outside. Jakob burst into the room.

**"It's been so long, if that was really her earlier, man she looks good."** He thought to himself. There was a crowd of people surrounding a table, where Jerms sat. Across from him was a girl, the same beautiful brown almond shaped eyes that burned in his mind from years ago.

**"It was her!"** Jakob recalled. It had been seven years since he last saw her, she grew from a young girl to a grown woman. He was mesmerized, he made slight eye contact, before she continued back to the dead eye drinking competition she was in. Jerms and Celeste sat facing each other intently, a dozen or more empty shot glass scattered on the table in front of them. Jerms shirt was already off as usual, gold chains swung from his neck. Celeste had a heavy sweat across her brow, seeming as if it was harder than what she was making it look. The strong aroma of whiskey filled the room. She had a glass in her hand, the room went quiet, with steady hands she pounded it back, licking the glass as she finished. The room went wild.

**"You got this Jerms, you got this!"** Someone yelled from the crowd of people.

**“Calm down mate, calm down, I won let some bloody whench out drink me.”** He leaned in locking eyes with Celeste.

**"Ya see this ring, lassie? 'Tis made o' pure Atmas Gold, mined from the depths o' them bleedin' mountains. The Queen o' the Gypsies herself gifted it to me, she did, after I saved her from them rotten bandits. We drank ourselves daft for three bleedin' days, celebratin' like proper mad Cree, before she couldn't resist fallin' head over heels for me."** he boasted, his voice swelling' with a mix of pride and a touch of exaggeration.

**“Hurry up and take your drink, Leprechaun!”** Celeste responded with a playful smirk, interrupting his monologue. Jerms accepted the challenge, the crowd roaring in anticipation. With a gulp, he finished his drink and stood up, arms outstretched as he screamed in victory.

**“If you dinnit know, I'm the boss 'round these parts, a true terror of the Quarter, a bleedin' legend of chaos. I strut me stuff with Atmas gold, cos I neva fold.”**

As Jerms sat down, his demeanor slowly began to change.

**“Are you sure you're alright there Mr. Gold?”** Celeste said calmly. But as he sat back down, a sudden change washed over him. His movements became sluggish, his eyes drooping, and the room fell into an uneasy silence. In an instant, he collapsed from his chair, prompting Celeste to leap to her feet, a victorious cheer.

**“That's what I thought!”** She roared. Jakob couldn't tear his eyes away from Celeste as she stood there, radiating confidence and strength. Her beauty had only intensified over the years, every inch of her captivating his attention. Their eyes met, and for a moment, it felt like the world around them faded into the background. But soon enough, the noise and commotion

returned, and everyone went back to their festivities. Simko, always the dependable friend, came to Jerm's, helping him back onto his seat and gently waking him up from his daze. Sefu and Jabbari closed in, their curiosity piqued by the familiar connection between Celeste and Jakob.

**"Celeste?"** Jakob called out.

**"Jakob? Is it really you?"** Celeste stepped forward, and they embraced each other tightly. He had missed her warmth more than he had realized, the familiarity bringing him comfort

**"I knew it was you when I saw you. It's great to see you."** Jakob said, a smile spreading across his face. With genuine curiosity, Dukes interrupted,

**"Hey, what's all the excitement about?"**

**"It's been so long. How have you been?"** Celeste asked, her eyes filled with both concern and happiness. Jakob brushed off her question, eager to introduce his friends to her.

**"Smiffy, come over here!"** he hollered, motioning for them to join him.

**"Celeste, this heres Smiffy, a longtime friend."** Jakob introduced a hint of pride in his voice. Smiffy offered a warm greeting, however he still questioned,

**"Hol up. You know him, and she know you?"** Smiffy questioned.

**"We go way back, in another lifetime and all that,"** Jakob explained, **"Anyways, Lest, let me introduce you to some of the Men of Mayhem."**

**"Jerm's, you've already met. And that's Simko, lending him a hand,"** Jakob pointed out, introducing his rough crew one by one. Jabbari, Sefu, and Dukes received their proper introductions.

**"And are you the captain of this wild bunch?"** Celeste asked, her admiration evident as she stared at Jakob.

**"Oh, no, not me. He's the one,"** Jakob replied, directing Celeste's attention to a dimly lit room where a lone figure sat, nursing a bottle of his own.

**"That's Gabriel, and let me tell you, he don't mess around when it comes to drinkin'. It's like a serious business for him, you know what I'm sayin."** Smiffy chimed in, unable to resist adding his two cents. Finally, a gentleman strolled over and casually wrapped his arm around Jakob.

**"And this,"** Jakob introduced, motioning towards the man, **"Is the local legend, Nando Enriquez."** Jakob emphasized his last name. Nando, a slender and stylishly dressed individual in a well-tailored tunic, had a thin mustache outlining his upper lip and a neatly trimmed goatee. Known by his nickname Fern by his brothers, he projected an air of sophistication. With respect, he leaned in and gracefully took hold of Celeste's hand, planting a kiss on it, a gesture of respect.

**"Pleasure to meet you. Anyone who is a friend of Tato is welcomed here,"** he spoke in his suave eastern accent.

**"Hold the bloody boat, who the Fook is Jakob?"** slurred Jerm, still reeking of alcohol as he slumped over a chair. Jakob didn't respond, feeling the weight of everyone's attention as long-held secrets began to unravel.

**"I can't believe you've been here all this time. Just wait until the world finds out."** Celeste couldn't contain her excitement, **"What will Aleki say? What will Tita think?"**

**"She doesn't need to know, no one does,"** Jakob replied, a hint of desperation in his voice.

**"Of course, they do! Everyone thinks you're dead,"** Celeste admitted, her head bowing slightly.

**"They do?"** Jakob's voice cracked with disbelief.

**"Fred told us about the flood."** Celeste revealed her words hanging heavily in the air.

**"He did? What else did he say?"** Jakob pressed, worried about what truths Fred revealed.

**"It doesn't matter what else he said. You're alive, and that means you can reclaim your rightful place as the king,"** Celeste exclaimed.

**"Hold on a minute, hold on a minute. You never mentioned you were royalty, Tato,"** Fern interjected, his words laced with sarcasm. **"It's an honor to meet you, King!"** Fern added, mockingly bowing his head.

**"No, I'm not ... Maybe I was supposed to be, but that's ancient history."** Jakob began to distance himself from the group, feeling overwhelmed.

**"Jaysus! Lemme just wrap me head 'round this, will ya? We've been stumblin' through them filthy slums, holdin' each other up, and all along, you've been swimmin' in a pool of gold, ya bloody eejit. Pass me another pint, I need to let this sink in."** Jerms said as he grabbed another glass from the table.

**"Look, I'm still the same guy."** Jakob felt the world swarming.

**"But with power. Wait, what nation are you king of?"** Dukes demanded.

**"Can you guys give us a few moments to catch up?"** Celeste interjected, reading the tension in the room.

**"Nah, nah, whatever she has to say, she can say in front of all of us,"** Simko interrupted. Smiffy returned, his voice calm and collected,

**"Ayo, listen up, y'all. Hold up for a minute, let them have some space, you feel me? Just give 'em a little time, let 'em do they thang."** Giving Celeste and Jakob a chance to exit the saloon together

**"That's the crew for you. You gotta learn to love 'em,"** Jakob commented as he held the door open for Celeste.



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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