

### Chapter Three: Confrontations - Part Two

"Sam..." James began, thinking as he spoke. "I was in Tyken Town for two years, and that beggar the other day was the only person who happened to recognise me. Did you or Den say that I wasn't meant to be recognised? Or something like that?"

Just mentioning the beggar twisted James's stomach. The man had been deranged and clearly needed help, but somehow he had seemed to know James. But when James tried to dismiss the man and get away from him, the beggar had attacked him. He had spouted something about 'making James see'. James hadn't meant to kill the man, just scare him off, but when the rock slammed into the beggar's temple, it was immediately clear from the crack that he was dead.

And yet that wasn't even the worst part.

A moment after the man had died there had been a powerful... vision... was all James could think to call it. He had been transported to a fiery world of death and decay, and it had been in that world where a very dark being had seen him. Thinking about the overwhelming horror he had experienced in that brief vision, and the crippling terror that emanated from the hooded figure in the sky sent a violent shiver through James that shook his shoulders.

Sam kept his gaze forward, concentrating on the path ahead. "You're right that you weren't meant to be recognised. And that we're not sure who the beggar was or how he knew you."

"Sam, come on. Tell me what you're trying not to say."

"There was a spell cast over Tyken Town. A minor spell, which clouded people's perception of you. It made it impossible for someone with previous knowledge of you to recognise you as the person you were. But it did not affect your daily life."

James was taken aback. "How could that not have affected my daily life?"

Sam's focus shifted ahead, and James thought he was trying to avoid the question, until he saw the arched entrance to what looked like a larger space.

They came out to a great cavern, with pathways and protruding rocks around the edges. James looked over their ledge and saw the rock wall fall away for hundreds of feet before it was consumed by complete darkness. Sharp stalactites filled the roof around two hundred feet above them. It reminded him of the inside of a giant skyscraper, if one were hollowed out. The sheer walls were curved slightly, giving the chasm a tube-like shape.

Though it was mostly shrouded in a hazy darkness, near the far end of the chasm he could see a vast, curving bridge that connected the right side wall to the left. Other protruding rock formations and bridges were below and above them, criss-crossing the enormous cavern.

The fire wavered furiously in the strong wind that blew over them, and James was thankful for the cool breeze on his hot skin.

"Looks like we can make our way to there," Sam said, gesturing to their left, where a faint yellow light emanated from an opening in the wall. "If Evan came this way, which I believe he did, then that looks like the only logical route for him to take."

James traced a rough path to where Sam pointed. At various points, steps were carved into the rock, along with pathways and ledges flat enough to walk on. There looked to be no other way to cross the chasm and get to the opening other than by the bridge.

"Why would he have come all the way here?" James asked, voicing his thoughts.

"Let's find out," Sam said simply.

They stepped to a lower section and began making their way along the wall.

"You were saying, Sam?" James asked, eyeing him closely. "What did this spell do exactly?"

Sam looked troubled, searching for his words. "It meant that you could be forgotten easily, and not regarded much. It was safer for you to live a life of anonymity."

"Wait, hold on," James said. "Are you saying that people couldn't remember me? That I was nothing to them?"

"Of course not."

"I could be forgotten easily, you said," James went on, growing with anger. "What kind of a life was that, Sam? No one being able to know me? Tam knew me, though, right? I mean..." He shook his head, trying to make sense of it all. Their foreman always seemed to know who he was. Didn't he?

"Tam was not affected. Neither was I, or Den Keenosh. We always saw you and knew you for who you were. For others... I was told it was more of a hazy memory, something they couldn't quite place. But when they saw you, their recent memories of you would return, and they would see you as normal. For those that had not seen you in some time, they would have a harder time of placing you. I know it sounds bad, James. But really-"

"What- Sam! Do you know how insane this sounds? How in Meth's Name was that a way to live? What were you thinking?"

"James, it wasn't me. I just followed orders and looked out for you."

"Right, like the good soldier you are," James said venomously. "I must have looked like a severe moonbrain to everyone I knew." He stopped and grabbed Sam's shoulder, turning him to face him. "How could you-they-force me to live that way? I couldn't make any real connections with anyone? What kind of life were you giving me?"

"I can't tell you enough times that I had nothing to do with your memory loss," Sam shot back firmly, his voice rising. "Or the decisions that were made for your new life. Stop *blaming* me."

It was the first time Sam had yelled at him, but James was spurred on, his anger taking over.

"You were the one that was watching over me," James said. "You should have told me who I really was, not let me live a shadow of a life for two years, working with me, knowing who I really was but not saying anything!"

Sam shook his head. "I didn't know how to handle the situation. I just knew that I had to look out for you. I wasn't avoiding you. We did speak. We were friends. I just... couldn't get too close."

"No," James said, now shaking with rage, "Blight Forbid that I ever had a real friend in town—any resemblance to a real life!"

The flame in Sam's hand wavered furiously, although there was no discernible wind.

"What was the long-term plan?" James asked. "That we all lived here together for the rest of our lives, without me ever really knowing your or Den?"

"There was no definite end. Den was waiting to hear from your father. But we didn't know when that would be."

"Why did you decide to tell me the truth yesterday?" James asked. "Just because Den told you to? Because Evan had found me? I bet you would've been happy to keep lying to me indefinitely. I bet you all had a good laugh at how stupid I looked, trying to hide my lack of memories from everyone."

Sam took a sharp step closer. "We told you the truth because the Dark Sorcerer had finally found you."

The words lingered in the tense air.

That hooded figure in the fiery sky from James's hellish vision. Den had told him it was a powerful being known as the Dark Sorcerer, who had been searching for James's location. The spell would have been keeping James hidden from his dark gaze. Until that beggar man had somehow broken through it.

The thought of a dangerous, powerful being searching for James tightened his chest and took his breath.

A vibrating sensation buzzed in James's ears, before a thrumming energy washed over them. He felt the disorientating urge to vomit in that instant. His heart was racing from arguing with Sam, but now it raced harder for a different reason.

A wave of a blue energy appeared around them and shimmered across the chasm, the ends reaching the walls on each side. It grew in size and strength, rippling like a hazy line of water, and for a moment it illuminated the far end of the chasm until it hit the rock wall and disappeared.

Their argument forgotten, they exchanged concerned looks.

"Sam..." James's habit was to ask him for an explanation, but even he knew that his companion could give no answers for this.

The whining of creaking metals came from beyond the walls, this time as loud as if they were inside the chasm.

The whining stopped, leaving lingering echoes. A silence fell on them.

"Let's go," Sam said quietly, as if trying not to disturb the cave.

A deep rumbling came from the darkness below. It changed pitch and became a low, heavy growl. From below came a gigantic rock wall, rising up through the emptiness of the chasm. A cloud of red mist and dirt spread out from the rising mountain, chips of rock and stones falling free.

It was not until the mountain peak shifted direction, rotating to point towards them, that James realised the cracked terrain was not rock, but the scales of a colossal creature. With earth shattering cracks, the summit split apart in a shower of debris and dust. Sharp jagged peaks of rock splintered from the opening, becoming rows of razor sharp teeth.

With forking fissures and booming cracks, the moving mountain lowered its pointed head. It looked as though a rocky summit had turned to them. A strong wind hit them and blew out what was left of Sam's torch. The red mist filled the air, bathing the cavern in a dark blood-red glow.

A cloud of dust burst from an opening on the side, revealing a glistening eyeball the size of a house. The vertical slit of an emerald pupil shifted to them.

James stood opened mouthed and struck with fear, comprehending the sight of what appeared to be a dragon the size of a mountain before them.

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That escalated quickly!

What did you think about James and Sam's heated talk?

What do you think will happen next with this giant dragon?

Thank you for reading!