



CHUCKLES AND GIGGLES

VOLUME ONE

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Chapter

1

Traffic was stopped along the highway, choked and congested. Much like the occupants of the Hyundai Elantra near exit 34.

“That was DISGUSTING Belle!” The driver of the silver Elantra, Peter, rolled down the window choking from the stench. His brother, Bill and their father, Joe, were doing the same.

“Sorry Daddy.” Belle rolled her eyes, staring blankly out the window. Her eyes were blank for a six-year-old, and her father was worried about her. So worried that he was moving her away from the city of Brisvegas and relocating her to the town where he'd grown up – Pleasantville.

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A young boy walked into a two-storey house some distance away in Pleasantville. He was upset. A few days ago he'd been told that his friend who lived in the house next door had to move as the owner of the house was coming back. It was the fourth friend he'd had in that house, it seemed no family wanted to stay there.

“Charlie! Go and check on your sisters for me please.” His mother, Betty, was elbow-deep in pastry. The boy, Charlie, trudged upstairs to check on his twin sisters, Isabelle and Elizabeth (or as they will be known, Izzy and Lizzy).

“Oh my – GROSS!” Charlie bolted out of the room. One or both of his baby sisters had dirtied their nappies.

Betty sighed, set the pastry aside, washed her hands and went upstairs to tend to her daughters. For a long time no matter how disgusting his sisters were, Charlie had been willing to help with anything. Since the neighbours had moved (again) he'd been distant – too distant for a seven-year-old.

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The Masters family and their now stinky Elantra pulled up to the house in Pleasantville. There still wasn't a fence between it and the house to the East of it – instead there was a very large eucalypt which bridged between the bedrooms and the ends of the houses. Peter wondered if his old friend was still in that house.

He knelt down to Belle's height and pointed to the bedroom whose window opened up to the tree. “That's your new room – where your Aunt Jessie used to sleep.” His eyes darkened as he thought of the sister who had walked out on them a long time ago.

“You mean the little bitch who was so up herself she didn't think we were good enough?” Belle asked innocently.

That sister.

“Yeah...please don't use that sort of language again.” Peter ushered her towards the house, making a mental note to smack his younger brother senseless - who says that sort of thing in front of a six-year-old?!

Belle walked inside the house. It was very open-plan, with the entrance opening out into the lounge room, which was framed with the open kitchen at the back and the dining room next to it. Off the dining room looked to be a bathroom of sorts, and next to it was a bedroom, where Joe was unpacking boxes. Right in front of his door was the stairs, so Belle climbed up them. Upstairs was another bathroom, and at one end was two bedrooms and at the other there was only one. Belle headed towards the bedroom at the East end and found herself in a tiny room, barely big enough to hold a queen-sized bed and a desk. At one end of the room was a HUGE wardrobe though, so it made up for the fact it was narrow.

“Watch out, coming through!” Bill called. Belle skipped out of the way against the wardrobe as her uncle brought in a huge queen-sized double bed. “Er...I guess you can climb on over the end, right kiddo?” He looked at where the bed was going.

“I guess.” Belle nodded. “At least I won't be able to fall out of bed.”

Her father then brought in her desk, which he set up with a mirror opposite the window that looked out onto the big tree. Next to the desk was her big set of drawers, and finally there was about five boxes of clothes and toys that needed to be sorted out.

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Charlie was lying on his bed. His room was big and square, with a desk, toybox and a huge poster of Jackson Blue, the courageous Captain of the Brisvegas Leos. He heard something coming from the house next door, and looked up and through the window to see a little girl with bright yellow hair and brown eyes putting papers into a chest of drawers. He watched her for a few minutes, before heading downstairs.

“Mum, Dad, the new neighbours are here!” He said as Betty Begly was busy playing with the twins.

“Are they?” Thomas, Charlie's father, perked up from his newspaper. “Well, let's go and say hello and see if we can give them a hand.”

“I can't take these two over, they'll just get in the way. Take Charlie and the dog with you.” Betty said. Thomas looked at Charlie, shrugged back.

“Woof!” Charlie called. “We’re going over next door!”

A large Beagle bolted through the lounge room and skidded to a halt next to Charlie. He barked loudly.

“What are we going to do with you Woof?” Thomas shook his head.

The three went over to the other house, and knocked on the door.

“Tom?” Peter answered the door.

“Pete?” Thomas replied

The pair glared at each other, before laughing and hugging.

“You’re weird Dad.” Charlie muttered.

“It’s good to see you mate, I haven’t seen you since Belle was born!” Thomas said.

“Well, you’ll be happy to know I finished my law degree in Brisvegas.” Peter grinned.

“So you ARE a blood-sucking scumbag after all!” Thomas laughed.

Charlie let the men talk. They walked inside and sat down at the table.

“You’ll have to meet my daughter, Belle.” Peter smiled.

“Is that the girl I saw?” Charlie asked.

“Yup.” Peter grinned. “Hey Beauty, someone’s here to meet you!”

“So, did Jill come back?” Thomas asked. Peter shook his head.

“I’d rather not talk about it, especially in front of Belle.” He replied. “How about you?”

“Guess.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No way!”

“Yes way.”

“Another child?!”

"Twins"

"Nice work! Who'd have thought old Tom Begly would be shackin' up with old Booty Betty?" Peter laughed

“I'd rather you not call her by her old nickname in front of Charlie.” Thomas turned slightly pink, but still grinned. “I told you she loved me.”

Just to inform our readers: Thomas Begly is 170cm (still taller than Peter!), rather solid and was balding by the age of twenty. Betty Begly ne Howsat, even after three children, is 180cms, with a gorgeous figure and long red hair.

Just then, Belle walked in shyly. Peter frowned slightly. The last year or so had changed Belle from a very outgoing, sarcastic and loud child to a shy, meek one.

“Hi.” She said.

“Hello there!” Thomas smiled kindly. “Say hello Charlie.”

“Hello Charlie.” Charlie smirked as his father.

“Little...”

“Why do you two go outside and play?” Peter suggested.

“I'm still tidying my room.” Belle replied.

Charlie looked at his father in shock.

“You can finish that off later Beauty, off you go to play with your new friend.” Peter ushered the pair and Woof outside into the joint backyard. The Masters family and the Begly family had been friends for centuries, and the two homes had been built together so the two families could maintain their friendships. The two children made their way outside, where they proceeded to eye each other warily.

“You'd better be as cool as my other friends.” Charlie warned.

“Eh.” Belle sat down and started ripping up grass. Woof sat next to her and sniffed her ear. She waved him off.

“What's wrong with you?”

“Nothing.”

“Why don't you want to play?” Charlie frowned.

“No reason.”

“You're weird!”

“I guess.”

“My Mum says that you should always strive to make new friends.” Charlie tried.

“Mums suck!” Belle suddenly bit.

“Do not!”

“Do too!”

“Do not!”

“Do too!”

Charlie swung a fist at Belle, who dodged easily. Enraged, Charlie tried again, and missed again.

“You're a slow-poke!” Belle teased. She swung her leg to try and trip the boy up, but his leg was too solid and he was too strong. He went to grab her but she dodged again. Woof started barking loudly at the pair, trying to get between them.

“Hey, what's going on here?!” Bill ran outside. “Belle, why are you fighting with this kid?!”

“She said my Mum sucks!” Charlie cried.

“All Mums suck!”

“Do not!”

“Do too!”

“PETER! YOUR OFFSPRING IS FIGHTING WITH THE NEIGHBOURS!” Bill cried.

“Just shout it over the neighbourhood why don't you, you numbskull?!” Peter fumed, running outside.

“Well if YOU would get your act together as a parent-,”

“If YOU had any idea how to BE a parent-,”

“GENTLEMEN!” Joe growled from the kitchen. Thomas, who had run out with Peter, laughed.

“I see some things never change.” He chuckled. “I'll see you guys later.”

He took Charlie and Woof away.

“Charlie, Belle had a really hard time with her Mum. She doesn't know any better.” He said as the pair walked inside.

“But Dad-,”

“Charlie, if Mum decided she didn't love you anymore and left you to die on someones doorstep, wouldn't you think she sucked?” Thomas asked.

“Well, yeah. Is that what Belles Mum did?” Charlie asked.

Meanwhile, Peter was talking to Belle.

“Belle, just because your Mum sucked doesn't mean everyones Mum sucks. I reckon you'll find Charlies Mum is really cool.” Peter said to Belle.

“But Dad-,”

“Belle, Charlies Mum takes care of him. She loves him a lot and would never leave him.” Peter told her.

“She wouldn't?” Belle asked.

—

Belle was back in her room, putting the last of her clothes into the giant wardrobe, with its several hanging racks and shelves along the inside. It was almost a walk-in, except it was much smaller.

She could hear her father, grandfather and uncle fighting in the kitchen about dinner. They could never agree on anything, and were always having arguments. However, Belle knew that if someone tried to hurt her or any one of them, the fighting would instantly stop and the three would become an unstoppable team.

Her family was cool like that.

“Hey, Belle!” She heard Charlie calling from his bedroom.

“Hi.” She replied. She grabbed her chair and sat down at the window.

“I'm sorry about before.” Charlie offered.

“I'm sorry too.” Belle replied. “Can we be friends?”

“Sure!” Charlie replied. He slowly eased himself out of his window and into the tree between them.

“Is it safe?” Belle asked.

“Of course it is!” Charlie climbed across it.

“Oh look, it's monkey boy! And he has a little girlfriend too!” They heard a snide voice from below.

“Daryl Jones!” Charlie groaned.

“Daryl Jones?” Belle asked. “He looks mean.”

“He called you a monkey!” Another snide voice.

“And his little sister Sunny.” Charlie told Belle.

Belle looked down at the Jones siblings. Both had jet-black hair, and both were skinny with fair skin, compared to the suntanned look of Belle and Charlie. The two siblings had icy blue eyes and freckles, and almost looked like twins. There was a small scratch on Sunnys face, otherwise the pair were immaculate.

“You two are mean.” Belle pointed out.

“Yeah, and?” Daryl replied.

“You shouldn't be!” Belle snapped.

“Well too bad. I can so I will.” Daryl smirked.

Charlie snarled at him.

“Stop looking like a twit Begly and get down here so I can thump ya.” Daryl called out.

“NO.” Charlie replied.

Daryls smirk faltered.

“Oh look, a kitten!” Sunny squealed.

Daryl turned around. A little calico-coloured kitten, looking dirty and underfed, was struggling to get out of a drain. Daryl smirked again. He grabbed the kitten out of the drain and put his fingers around its neck.

“Well then, I guess I'm going to have hurt this kitten inste-ARGH!” Daryl cried as Belle rushed over and bit him – hard! He dropped the kitten, which looked confused.

“That was too mean Daryl!” Sunny cried as Belle scooped it up. She turned on Belle. “But you didn't have to bite him!”

She aimed a kick at Belle, catching her in the stomach. Belle groaned and rolled over, trying to protect the kitten.

“Leave Belle alone!” Charlie jumped out of the tree and stood beside his new friend. Daryl smirked at the pair of them, when suddenly a voice called out.

“CHARLIE! DINNER! BRING BELLE WITH YOU!” Betty summoned the children. “Oh, it's YOU two.” She looked down her nose at the Jones children.

“Smell you losers later.” Daryl walked away, taking Sunny with him. Betty looked at Belle and Charlie.

“Are you two okay?” She asked.

“Yeah.” Belle got up, holding the kitten. It meowed.

“Oh the little thing! Get up and bring it inside, we'll get some warm milk into it.” Betty helped Belle to her feet.

Belle smiled at Charlie, who smiled back.

And from that day forth, the pair were the best of friends.

Chapter

2

Belle was allowed to keep the kitten, and soon it was as if they'd had Meow their whole lives. She had the bad habit of chasing Woof, much to the amusement of many.

School soon started, and both children were enrolled into the local private school. Unfortunately, the Jones siblings were also enrolled, as were their posse, and soon Belle and Charlie came to dread school. Worst of all, Mr. Jones, their father, was filthy rich and often donated funds to the school, which made the teachers brush a lot of the siblings behaviour under the carpet. Still, Belle and Charlie had each other, and they had their tree, which the Jones siblings found impossible to scale.

The years went on, the arguments between the Masters men continued, the world continued to be envious of Thomas Begly, and the two children grew into young teenagers. Life was pretty routine, until the day that changed everything.

The children were sitting in the school auditorium for the weekly torture session, a.k.a the Friday Assembly. Belle stared at the principal, trying to remain conscious while he waffled on about school uniform policy.

“You're drooling.” Charlie whispered. Belle shook herself.

“How are you awake?” She whispered back, keeping an eye out for the teachers.

“I heard something outside.” He whispered back.

At the age of 13, Charlie was already starting to grow muscular like his father, helped by his karate and ju-jitsu classes. Unlike his father on the other hand, he looked like he was going to get his mothers height. As Peter said, “The boy will be built like a brick out-house!”

Belle, at 12, while not as muscular as Charlie, certainly had an athletic build, thanks to being a gymnast and her father insisting she learn how to use a gun properly. She was also very fast, and still looked like a clone of her father. As Betty said, “That girl is going to knock 'em out all over the place!”

“I think you're just hopeful.” Belle replied, just as a teacher spotted them.

“HEY, you two, want to share with the rest of us?” He snapped, glaring at the pair. Sunny Jones, sitting next to Belle, smirked. She knew there'd be tears.

Belle stammered. "Uhhh..."

What would have happened next no one could say, because there was a loud bang, and the room was stormed by men in balaclavas and wielding machine guns.

“Oh no. The DVG!” Sunny groaned. “DVG” stood for Death Valley Gang, a thuggish organisation that specialised in robbery and drugs. The thugs quickly knocked out the teachers and one of them held up the principal, while the others kept their guns pointed at the children.

“Masked Revolver!” Sunny shuddered again. Masked Revolver was the leader of the DVG, and a superior marksman. His modified Colt.45 was special, in that instead of six chambers, it had a “lucky number seven” chamber as well. It was said that he never had to use the seventh chamber, as he could destroy any opposition in 6 bullets. The only people who had seen the face behind his black and red mask were dead...yeah, you get the picture. He's a real bad guy.

Masked Revolver only stood by the door however – it was the boy who was holding up the principal who seemed to be running the show.

“Pick up the phone, and call the Head of the School Board. NOW.” The boy commanded. He followed the principal to the phone that was on the wall near the stage, his gun pointed at the older mans back the entire time.

Belle was terrified. She gripped Charlies hand tightly. Were they doing to die?

“Nawww, how cute is this? The Dumb Valley Gang are holding up a SCHOOL!” They heard someone gloating.

“Rack off Marcus you clown!” Masked Revolver snapped at the new intruder. Mobster Marcus with his long, flowing hair was sitting on one of the skylights, peering in at the action.

“Oh great, not the Mob too.” Sunny was really starting to get on Belles nerves. Everyone knew who the Mob were – the Mobsters of Misneach were lead by Mobster Marcus, a proficient swordsman whose five-foot blade was just as feared as the Lucky Seven Gun that Masked Revolver held. It was rumoured that if you dared blink in front of him you'd find your head gone before you opened your eyes again.

Rumours in Pleasantville have a habit of being far fetched.

“My my, such temper! Such petty thuggery.” Mobster Marcus chuckled. “Well, while you play with the kiddies, we're going to go and play with the big boys. Around about now, the Pleasantville National should be overrun with my men.”

“We'll see who's gloating after your men have been shot down by security, whereas I'll escape with a decent ransom from parents who are scared for their little babies.” Masked Revolver grinned.

Mobster Marcus smirked and left.

Charlie looked at Belle. Who had disappeared.

“Belle? Why are you under your seat?” Charlie quickly ducked under the chairs with her.

“They got distracted. So I hid.” Belle replied.

–

“YO, TJ, over here!” Daniel called to his friend.

“CATCH!” TJ bombed the football in Daniels general direction. Daniel grinned and was about to grab it, when little Sammy leapt up on his back and took a speccy.

“Sam!” Daniel laughed, chasing the boy around. He quickly handpassed the ball to his twin sister, Tammy, who kicked it to her best friend Petunia.

“Come on guys, you know I can't play football!” Petunia groaned. Poor Petunia was rather on the overweight side, and much preferred reading about medicine and practising to be a nurse than roughing around with her friends.

“Yes you can 'Tunia, you just got to get up and run!” TJ thumped her back.

“Thanks, Theodore.” Petunia shoved the ball back into TJs stomach.

Daniel sighed. He was the oldest at 14, with short brown hair, thick glasses and bright blue eyes. TJ was next at 12, a pale kid with dark black hair who liked to dress in a Gothic style. Petunia was 11, with long red hair, freckles and green eyes. Finally there were the 10-year-olds Tammy and Sammy, with jet black hair and dark skin. The five were inseparable, and were some of the few students who attended the run-down public school.

“DON'T call me Theodore!” TJ snapped, snatching the football away.

“Naw, don't fight guys!” Sammy whined.

“Yeah, how about we all go and get some ice-cream? I still have my pocket money.” Daniel suggested.

“I love ice-cream!” Petunia cried.

“I can't complain about that!” TJ grinned.

“Ice-cream! Dan, you're the greatest!” Sammy hugged his hero.

Tammy smiled and clapped. A car accident when she was little had robbed her of her voice, but she was highly intelligent.

“Remember, we need to stick together, even if it's daytime there are some Gangsters and Mobsters around.” Daniel reminded them of the ever-present crime threat.

“Actually, I haven't seen any of them around today. Must be bank-robbing day.” Petunia piped up.

The five made their way along the street, when they saw why the coast was clear.

“They're holding up a school? How low can they go?” TJ fumed. He looked towards the small police force gathered at the front of the school. “Why isn't the whole force here?!”

A loud explosion came from the city.

“I'd say because the Mob robbing a bank.” Daniel pointed out.

TJ glowered. His father was an officer in the police force, and TJ thought the world of him. Alas, unfortunately the senior constable was a man called Wallace Dingbat who was completely useless.

“I can't believe it. The DVG will more than likely get away with this because that MORON is in charge!” Petunia looked at the school building. Parents were starting to crowd around the school, all of them in various stages of fury and fear.

“My little girl is in there! I have to save her! Let me GO!” Peter Masters was trying to pry himself free of Bill and Joe, who had him pinned down.

“Mate, you can't do anything, if you get killed what will she do?” Bill tried to calm his older brother down.

“She's my little girl!” Peter cried.

Joe looked towards the building and growled. “We have to wait.”

Peter sunk to his knees and put his scarred face in his hands. Two scars adorned his face, one across his eye and the other across his nose. Both were earned defending Belle. His father had three scars, one across his eye, one across his nose and the other across his lips. Bill got the one across his eye while climbing out of a woman's window trying to escape her husband.

Yeah...

Daniel and the others walked away from the scene. None of them felt like ice-cream any more.

“I wish we could do something.” Petunia said.

“Anything!” Sammy kicked at a stone, missing and stubbing his toe. “OW!”

Daniel looked back towards the building.

“Maybe we can sneak in around the back, get the Gangsters attention, and maybe then the police can come in and save everyone?” He suggested. “Nah, too dangerous.”

“Yeah.” Everyone agreed.

So they went and did it anyway.

—

Belle was thinking. It was the family fault, her father told her, they were cursed to be forever thinking. It was a symptom of rather high IQs.

“Anything yet?” Charlie poked her.

“No.” Belle snapped. The DVG hadn't noticed the two children out of hundreds missing thankfully. The two remained hidden behind some old stage props while the Gangsters kept an eye on the kids, waiting for their ransom.

“If they got distracted again, we could sneak up behind them and take them out.” Charlie said. “Then everyone else could escape and we'd be heroes.”

“Charlie, there are at LEAST ten of them out there! There is no way on Earth we stand a chance.” Belle pointed out. “You're only thirteen, and I'm younger still.”

“I have the Improbability Clause on my side though.” Charlie said. The Improbability Clause was the term the Begly family used to describe their often sheer dumb luck, usually after a Masters had pooh-poohed their plans.

“You're kidding me.” Belle facepalmed. “And would you mind telling me where this distraction is coming from?”

Suddenly there was a loud banging on the windows. Someone was throwing rocks at the South

wall!

“TAKE THAT YOU GANGSTER SCUM!” Daniel called out from underneath the bucket on his head, obscuring his face.

“Leave us kids alone!” TJ threw rocks behind his hockey mask.

“You're mean and cruel!” Petunia called from behind her surgical mask.

Sammy and Tammy just threw rocks as hard as they could, both wearing handkerchiefs over their faces.

“Get 'em you Mighty Knights of the Last Order!” TJ cried, hitting the DVG boy who was running the show squarely between the eyes.

“You were saying?” Charlie grinned at Belle. “They've left one of their guns over there, you can shoot them!”

“You might have the Improbability Clause, but you know that the Masters Code says I'm not allowed to kill!” Belle hissed back. The Masters Code was five rules that every Masters lived by – no killing, always respect your elders, always wear something nice, never hold back and believe.

“Yeah, but the Code says to never hold back too, you can still take their legs out!” Charlie pointed out.

“Oh dear...CHARLIE!!!!” Belle hissed as Charlie rushed out to attack. She followed him, grabbing the gun he mentioned and firing wildly.

“What the-?” Masked Revolver cried as he ducked underneath a barrage of bullets, only to have a rock fly through the window and smack him on the head.

“It's working!” Sammy cried.

“Sir Dark, get the door!” Daniel commanded, looking at TJ.

“Sir Dark? As you command, Sir Lionheart! Sir Hyper, follow me!” TJ grinned at Daniel and beckoned for Sammy to follow him. Together, the pair managed to get one of the doors open.

A barrage of kids streamed out of the room to their relieved parents.

“Watch out!” Petunia knocked Tammy aside as one of the Gangsters fired. “That was close Lady Silent!”

“Thank goodness for you Lady Luck!” Daniel helped the both of them up. “Knights retreat!”

Meanwhile, Belle and Charlie were trapped, taking on Masked Revolver and the boy, who turned out to be Masked Revolver's son. The other Gangsters, sensing defeat, had bolted, most being apprehended by the police outside.

Charlie was making short work of Revolver Jr, the other man having run out of ammo. Belle meanwhile was in trouble. Masked Revolver had pulled out the Lucky Seven Gun, and had already fired two bullets.

“You have Stormtrooper Syndrome or something?” Belle asked.

“Not cool Belle! We're Trekkies here!” Charlie snapped.

“Yeah!” Revolver Jr. looked annoyed.

“My apologies.” Belle bowed her head, before taking off with Masked Revolver in pursuit. Charlie was about to follow, when his foot was grabbed by Revolver Jr.

Belle foolishly climbed up the ladder above the stage, before realising she'd sold herself into a dead end. She looked at Masked Revolver, terrified.

Masked Revolver was having difficulty himself, he couldn't properly balance on the narrow walkways. He steadied himself to fire at Belle.

“It's over now brat!” He grinned. He fired, just as Belle dropped, hanging onto the beam for dear life. The bullet unfortunately hit one of the supports that held the beam up, dropping it about a foot causing Masked Revolver to fall.

He landed head first into the stage, killing him instantly.

“NO!” Revolver Jr. cried, running towards his father. “Where is it?!” He quickly searched the body, pulling off the broken mask. “Where is it!?”

The police quickly swooped in. Belle carefully climbed back down to the ground, when she noticed something shining under one of the curtains.

The Lucky Seven Gun. Without thinking, she shoved it into the pocket of her skirt.

She ran over to where Charlie was answering Officer Dingbats questions. It was mostly rubbish, Dingbat was clearly incompetent.

“Belle!”

“Charlie!”

The two children were swamped by their parents, who proceeded to fuss over them.

“It's not fair Dad! How come Charlie and his family get the ability to completely circumvent logic, but all we get is a silly code of ethics?!” Belle complained as the group made their way back home.

“You're still young yet little one. One day, you'll come to appreciate the Masters Code.” Joe patted her head.

Chapter

3

Life soon returned to normal after the heroics of Belle and Charlie, give or take a few scandals and developments. First of these was the rise of the vigilante group “The Knights of the Last Order” who held their own against the DVG and the Mob. Second of these occurred several years after the incident, when the private school was shut down due to concerns of corruption (now how could that have happened?) which meant the students were all forwarded into the public school, meaning that it finally got the funding it needed and all the students of Pleasantville were finally able to get the education they deserved. Finally, recently another young vigilante had risen up, however he was nameless.

Anyway...

“Will you kindly NOT spread your rubbish all over the dining table!?” Bill growled angrily at his brother.

“Unlike you, I'm trying to better humanity!” Peter snapped back, trying to gather his papers away from his ruthless younger sibling.

“And who do you expect to feed you while you soldier on?! MOVE THIS CRAP NOW.” Bill fumed, trying to serve dinner.

“Will the pair of you shut your traps?! I'm trying to watch television!” Joe yelled at the pair of them.

“Such a healthy environment for a young lady.” They heard Mr. Jones tut-tutting in his yard.

“CAN IT JONES.” The three yelled angrily. Just then, Belle walked in from her gymnastics class.

“Hi everyone! Smells good Uncle Bill! How are you doing today Pa? Hey Daddy!” She kissed all three men in turn. She noticed her fathers papers.

“Are you still working on that?” She inquired.

“Yes, I am still working on it.” Peter sighed in resignation. “I really don't know how to fix it.”

“It's fine Daddy really. It just takes a little practise to get it right.” Belle replied. At sixteen, Belle had a bit more optimism than her father.

“Belle, last time you used the thing you nearly flew head-first into the ground.” Peter pointed out.

“That's because she was showing off.” Joe piped up.

“Yeah Daddy. The Backpack works fine, you don't need to fine-tune anything.” Belle grinned. The Backpack was Peters first attempt at inventing – a jet-pack which ran on carbon dioxide. Unfortunately it wasn't very efficient, only lasting about ten minutes before the user fell victim to gravity.

“I don't know...maybe...” Peter trailed off.

“Well, if you don't want it, can I please keep it?” Belle asked.

“NO!” He uncle and grandfather cried in horror.

“Sure.” Peter replied. “It's in my room.”

“Are you TRYING to get your daughter killed?!” Bill roared furiously as Belle scurried off to claim her prize.

“Are YOU a parent?” Peter fired back.

“I happen to be one!” Joe retorted.

“Yeah, well you're not Belles father, I am!”

“I raised you two!”

“Yeah, and you screwed up one.”

“You stay out of this you brat!”

“Who are you calling the brat, just because you're the oldest-!”

“I thought I raised you two better than bickering!”

“Obviously not from what I can hear.”

“MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS JONES!”

—

“Hi Mum! Hi Dad!” Charlie burst into the kitchen that evening. “Hi Lizzy, hi Izzy.”

“Where have you been?! It's late and Belle got home from gymnastics hours ago!” Betty fumed at her son.

“I had to take the long way home to avoid trouble.” Charlie lied, trying to escape to his room.

“Charlie, come down here now.” His father commanded gently. Charlie knew he was in trouble.

“Charlie, you KNOW it's dangerous outside. Especially after dark. Hell, it's probably dangerous in here too, the DVG are known for breaking into homes.” Thomas said evenly. Charlie cowered in fear. He was REALLY in trouble!

“You also have to think of your sisters. You're their big brother, you have to set an example.” Betty stirred the casserole she was cooking.

“Yeah Charlie. We're young and impressionable.” Lizzy said.

“Yeah, we're unable to rationalise and make decisions for ourselves.” Izzy added.

Charlie sneaked them a grin. He could always count on his sisters, they worshipped him.

“Therefore, we've decided as punishment you're not going to the Brisvegas Leos Charity Ball.” Thomas scowled at the twins.

“Whose dog is that howling? It doesn't sound like Woof.” Joe asked as the Masters family settled down to a chicken curry.

—

The masked crusader was sitting atop a building a few days later. His only weapons were a pair of short daggers, which didn't make him feel too safe but it was all he had. He wore a blue shirt, dark blue jeans and a leather duster, with tough combat boots. To conceal his identity, he wore two blue bandannas, one around his face and the other over his head, almost making him look pirate-like. His tip-less gloves were grey and matched his belt, where his small grappling hook and rope sat.

News had been floating around that a particularly wealthy businessman had been visiting Pleasantville, and was staying in the hotel across the street from where the young man sat. He knew that news like that would draw the Mobsters of Misneach, who were experts at kidnap and extortion. They were certainly better than the Death Valley Gang anyway.

A black limo pulled up in the darkness, and the young man watched the businessman get in. Slowly, the limo pulled away, and the young man followed along the rooftops.

Inside the limo, the businessman was about to relax, when he heard a voice.

“You're in a spot of bother.” He heard someone next to him say.

His head nearly snapped it spun around so fast. Next to him was a beautiful young lady.

“How'd you get in here?!” The businessman sputtered.

“I was hiding under the seat. It's a trick seat you see, something my father had installed before his untimely death a few years ago.” The lady smiled. It was a disconcerting smile, but not nearly as bad as the five-foot blade that sat next to her. “I see you've noticed the Lions Claw Blade. It's been in my family for generations. I'm Marion, of the Mobsters of Misneach.”

“I see. I guess you're after my money?” The businessman tried to regain his composure. Mobster Marion tilted her head slightly.

“You're worth a fair bit more dead than alive, so we hear. Quite the insurance policy on your head.” She tittered.

“I don't understand.” The businessman began to sweat. Mobster Marion pulled forward the seat between them. The businessman gasped when he saw what was in the boot.

His wife and two children were bound and gagged. Mobster Marion's voice turned cold.

“You give us every dollar you have, or we kill you and your beneficiaries, meaning your insurance and your assets go to your nephew...who we have under our control.” She commanded.

The businessman gulped. He was in BIG trouble.

He was about to protest, when the limo swerved sharply and crashed into a tree.

“What the-” Mobster Marion grabbed the Lions Claw Blade and opened her door. She was instantly kicked in the head by the masked youth.

“Get your family out of here, I'll handle the Mob.” He handed a knife to the businessman, who

began to cut the ropes binding his family.

“Ugh...Grrr!” Mobster Marion shook off the kick, and glared at the youth. “YOU!” She spat. “You're the one who's been making the life of my people difficult!”

“You say that like it's a bad thing.” The youth shrugged. He had to act quick when the Lions Claw Blade was swung angrily at him, locking his daggers together to block the attack.

He rolled backwards, letting the Blade slam down on the ground in front of him, barely missing. Mobster Marion swung again, this time the youth was ready and got out of the way with no problems. Thankfully Mobster Marion wasn't particularly fast, so he was able to block or dodge without too much trouble. Unfortunately she was still faster than him, meaning there was no way he could get in a counter-attack while she held the Lions Claw Blade.

“Damn it!” He hissed as she narrowly missed again, so close he could almost feel the blade against his skin.

“You're in over your head sugar.” Mobster Marion pointed the sword at him. “I am the greatest swords-woman in this country, you don't stand a chance against me.”

She lifted the sword again, and swung at the youth, who dodged again. He rolled out of the way of another swing, and felt the cold hardness of a wall against his back.

He was trapped.

Grinning, Mobster Marion stabbed the sword at his head, embedding it in the wall when he ducked. “You're history, sunshine.” She smirked in triumph. “As soon as – OW!”

The youth looked around in shock. Someone had aimed a rock cleanly at the Mobsters head.

“Sir Lionheart!” The youth cried.

“I aim to please.” Replied Sir Lionheart, who had appeared out of no where.

“Why you – OW!” Mobster Marion cried again, this time having been smacked over the head with a pole.

“Sir Dark! How nice of you to join us! Where's everyone else?” Sir Lionheart asked.

“Lady Luck and Sir Hyper should be here soon. Lady Silent is back at the base fixing her brothers armour.” Sir Dark replied, tripping Mobster Marion up.

“So, you're the Knights of the Last Order.” Mobster Marion snarled. “I've heard of you pests.”

“We've heard of you too, we never thought we'd actually see you doing some legwork though.” Sir Dark replied.

“Insolent.” Mobster Marion growled.

The youth grimaced. Mobster Marion was still rubbing her sore head. Then he noticed the Lions Claw Blade was still next to him. He pulled it out of the wall and held it up to the moonlight.

“HEY! Get your hands off it you little – YIKES!” Mobster Marion rolled out of the way as the youth returned the favours she'd been dishing out all night.

“Nice shot!” Sir Lionheart cheered.

“Give her everything you've got!” Sir Dark laughed.

Suddenly, wails erupted and the darkness exploded in red and blue. “The cops!” Mobster Marion cried angrily. She looked towards the youth, but he was gone.

And he'd taken her sword with him.

“We'll probably catch you later!” Sir Lionheart grinned.

“Much later!” Sir Dark laughed. “See ya after your term!”

The two Knights headed off quickly, bumping into Sir Hyper and Lady Luck a few blocks away.

“We missed everything?!” Sir Hyper cried, swinging his crudely made nun-chucks around.

“It wasn't anything much. That stupid idiot in the leather jacket nearly got himself skewered by Marion.” Sir Dark told them as the group headed back to the tip where their base was hidden.

“Is he okay?” Lady Luck asked, concerned.

“He's fine. He really shouldn't try and take them on alone though. He needs a friend.” Sir Lionheart said.

—

Just outside of Pleasantville was the garbage tip. It was probably the most well-managed of the councils facilities, although it was quite big. Big enough for someone to hide in easily.

The youth had escaped back here after his escape from the Mob. Breathing heavily, he pulled off his mask as he shakingly held his new prize.

Charlie Begly was now the master of the Lions Claw Blade.

Chapter

4

Belle wiped her mouth, her split lip bleeding slightly. Charlie was keeled over next to her, gasping for breath.

“An unwanted bastard and a dork.” Daryl Jones smirked.

His friends laughed. Sunny looked angry. She slapped Belle again.

“Unwanted bastard.” She hissed.

Belle growled. It was after school again, and the Jones siblings were enjoying themselves.

Sunny glared at Belle. Even though they were the same age, Belle was still smaller than Sunny. Daryl, while a bit older than Charlie, was no where near as big nor as strong, so he often called on his posse to help him out.

Belle glared back at Sunny. She noticed that Sunny had a bruise around her left arm.

“What are YOU staring at?” Sunny seemed livid, compared to her brother.

“I don't know what I did to you, but bug off.” Belle snapped.

Charlie got up just in time to block a punch from Daryl. The pair wrestled for a few minutes.

“BELLE! CHARLIE!” The pair heard Betty Begly calling for them.

“Go on, run!” Daryl and his friends laughed. Belles eyes met Sunnys.

“Have you two been fighting with the Jones kids again?” Betty asked as the pair climbed into the back seat of the Beglys Toyota Camry.

“They started it.” Charlie said.

“You really need to find some more friends.” Betty said as they pulled out of the school pick-up zone and drove back towards home.

“Can we stop by Uncle Bills new shop and see how he's doing?” Belle asked. Bill was in the process of opening a restaurant.

“I guess.” Betty said warily.

“All I ask is that you help out!” Bill roared at Peter.

“I'm DREADFULLY sorry if I'm too busy working a job to keep YOU in the lifestyle you're accustomed to!” Peter fired back.

“Hi Daddy. Hi Uncle Bill.” Belle bounced in, kissing her father and Uncle.

“Hey kiddo.” Bill hugged his favourite (only) niece.

“Hi Beauty. How was school?” Peter ruffled her hair.

“We got beat up again.” Charlie walked in, dejected. He put his bag on a table, which instantly fell

apart.

“Yeah, that's been happening a lot today.” Peter said sheepishly, looking at the table.

“Because YOU won't pull your weight!”

“I'm too busy earning an income!”

Belle looked around the room. Most of the decorating had been done (80's surf shack), but the furniture was still a mess.

“I don't know what's up with those Jones siblings.” Belle sighed. She went to sit on a chair, thought better of it, and sat on the floor instead. “Why do they continue to pick on us?”

“I'd be looking at their father if I were you.” Betty said.

“Mr. Jones?” Belle and Charlie asked.

“Yup. Anyway, I'm going to go and pick up the twins from music practise, are you coming with me or staying here?” Betty asked.

“I'm staying here.” Belle said.

“I'll come with you Mum.” Charlie got his bag. “Catch ya Belle.”

“See ya Charlie.” Belle waved. She leaned back against the wall. Her thoughts wandered to the news she'd heard about Mobster Marion losing her beloved sword. She then thought of the Lucky Seven Gun. The DVG were furious that it was never recovered. Guilt weighed on her mind – if that gun was found in her possession, not only did it mean her family were in danger, but it was also highly illegal. She'd not only stolen the gun, but had it hidden in the bottom of her wardrobe, not secured safely at all. She was only on her provisional gun licence too – if she was discovered, her father could lose his licence as well.

“Belle! Can you go to the store at the end of the street and get us some nails?” Bill asked, snapping Belle out of her daze.

“You're sending my daughter out alone?!” Peter cried.

“It's neutral territory and still daylight. Not much chance of her getting hurt.” Bill pointed out.

“The DVG and the Mob aren't the only threats out there!” Peter fumed.

“Yeah, but Belle can handle herself. You said so yourself when you let her have that stupid contraption of yours.” Bill snapped.

“There's a difference between flying and having a bad landing and being attacked by idiots who are out for blood!”

Belle shrugged, and headed outside. It was a cool afternoon, and the sun was starting to set in the west. Belle knew where the hardware store was, so she hurried down the road to where it was. She knew it was dangerous, but there was a bit of a thrill to it.

Pleasantville had always had a crime problem, ever since Simon Masters and Louis Begly had dammed up Pleasant Creek and drained Lake Pleasant two hundred years ago. The remains of the Lake still existed, and so did the Creek, which snaked out from the dam to the centre of the city where the Lake formed. Pleasantville really was just a big hole in the ground. A festering hole of crime.

She got to the store with no trouble, and bought two packets of nails. It was when she headed back to the restaurant that things went pear-shaped.

“Hello cutie-pie.” A man stepped out in front of her as she left the hardware store carpark.

“Please leave me alone.” Belle tried to get around him. She felt a hand on her shoulder and knew she was in trouble.

“Why, don't you want to hang out with us?” The other man behind her said. She could almost hear him leering at her.

She sighed, then threw an elbow back into the guy behind her, then punched the guy in front of her and ran. It was fruitless, because three more men were running towards her.

She ducked out of the grasp of one, and weaved into a nearby alley.

Dead end.

“Well, this sucks.” Belle turned around to face her attackers. One of them wore a hooded jacket, and now he threw back the hood.

Belle gasped. Revolver Jr! His fathers mask had been broken down the middle, and now Revolver Jr wore half of it, held in place by elastic around his head. He had long, curly hair that almost looked comical.

“I see you remember me. Do you remember my father?” Revolver Jr asked.

Belle remained silent.

“Can't speak? I don't blame you. You lost me my father and my family gun. But you did leave me the Death Valley Gang. So I took the mantle of Master Revolver, and now I'm going to get my revenge on you.” Master Revolver grinned.

'At least his father didn't have a thing for exposition.' Belle thought. 'Not to mention his grammar sucks.'

“Still silent? I'll happily make you OWCH!” Master Revolver cried in pain. He'd just been nicked by the Lions Claw Blade.

“Seriously? Do you ever shut up?” The masked vigilante asked, standing in front of Belle.

“YOU!!!” Master Revolver cried. “Although I must thank you for getting Marion out of the road.”

Belle saw her chance. She bolted past the men, who were too busy glaring at her rescuer. One tried to grab her, but ended up getting smacked in the face again. She ran back towards the restaurant, the masked vigilante running along the rooftops beside her.

“I wouldn't wander around alone again if I were you!” He warned her. She glared at him before heading inside to her worried father.

—

Belle was sitting in her room that night, holding the Lucky Seven Gun in her hand. The cartridge in the modified seventh chamber looked old, like it had never been fired. So there was some truth to the legend.

She sighed and looked out of the window towards Charlie's room. His light was still on.

“Hey, Charlie!” She called softly.

“Hey Belle.” He climbed out into the tree. She joined him. “I hear you had a close call today.”

“Yeah, Master Revolver wants revenge on me.” Belle sighed, leaning back into the familiar branches. She could hear her family yelling at each other over the television remote.

Charlie frowned. His parents were going over the twins homework inside, he could hear them talking. “With Marion out of the way, he's pretty much got Pleasantville under his control. You could be in trouble.” He said.

“Thanks for that.” Belle glared at him.

“It's the truth.”

Belle groaned. She was REALLY in trouble now.

“You'd better hope he doesn't find the Lucky Seven Gun.” Charlie continued.

Belle buried her head in her hands. “Eh av eet.” She mumbled.

“Excuse me?” Charlie asked, not hearing her.

“I have it.” Belle pulled her face away from her hands.

“YOU WHAT?!” Charlie yelled.

“Is everything okay out there?” Betty called up.

“Fine Mum!” Charlie called back. He glared at Belle.

“You are rightly and royally SCREWED! Get rid of it!” He hissed.

“Easier said than done if Revolver is after me.” Belle sighed.

“I'm going to bed, I have ju-jitsu tomorrow.” Charlie kissed his friend's cheek. “Don't worry too much about it.”

“Easy for you to say.” Belle sighed as she headed back inside. Charlie bit his lip. Listening to Belle talk about the Lucky Seven Gun made him realise he was in a bit of danger himself harbouring the

Lions Claw Blade. When Mobster Marion got out of gaol, she'd be after blood.

Belle drew her curtain and sat on her bed again. She was about to go to sleep when something occurred to her.

The masked vigilante, he'd managed to get Mobster Marion arrested. If Belle could somehow get Master Revolver arrested too, she'd be safe for a little while. Enough time to get rid of the Lucky Seven Gun. It'd be dangerous, and she'd have to be disguised, but she was quick and strong. Plus she had an ability that very few other people had...

She opened her wardrobe. In it, she found a red helmet her father had given her that she refused to wear – it had a big yellow star on it which made her cringe, if she was going out on the motorcycle with her father she was wearing her blue one. She set it on the bed and grabbed a red shirt and some red jeans. Thinking to herself, she grabbed a pair of brown leather gloves and a silly little red cape she once used as part of a Little Red Riding Hood costume. Finally, she got out the Backpack. One advantage she would have over the DVG was her ability, however limited, to fly.

She thought to herself some more. Her father had a normal Colt .45, but she wouldn't use that. She'd grab her grandfathers Desert Eagle and use that instead – a bit faster to reload, and used similar ammo to what the Lucky Seven Gun could take.

She bundled all these things up and hid them together with the Gun in the back of the wardrobe. She also grabbed her old steel-capped boots – they would help provide a bit of weight and stability while using the Backpack, which didn't have any controls, but was controlled using body movement. Belle almost had it perfected, but there were still some issues.

She then allowed herself to go to bed. She would get Master Revolver and put him away.

She had to get him before he got her.

–

Next day was a normal day. Belle and Charlie went to school, got beaten up at lunchtime by the Jones party, and tried to get home as quickly as possible.

Belle went to her room, grabbed the bundle and snuck out of the house. She then ran towards the old tip, keeping an eye out for trouble along the way.

“Hey, where are you going by yourself and in a hurry?”

She was halfway to the tip when she ran into Sir Dark.

“None of your business.” Belle readied herself for a fight.

“It's not safe out here, you should be at home where you at least stand a chance.” Sir Dark warned her.

“I can take care of myself, thank you.” Belle ran off.

Sir Dark shook his head. He then headed back to the city, where he knew he'd be needed.

Belle reached the tip in one piece. She looked around for a bit for a private place to get changed,

and she found one – someone had hollowed out a mound of garbage and used some old sheets of metal to form a sort of room.

She changed into her new outfit, and holstered her guns. She looked towards the city. It would take her a while to get there, and the Backpack didn't have enough power to fly there.

She then noticed a bus about to come flying past the tip. Using the Backpack, she jumped up to the top of a well-constructed pile of cars, then floated down to the roof of the bus, landing as quietly as she could.

Pleasantville's newest hero was coming to town!

Chapter 5

“Where's my daughter?” Peter asked, walking down the stairs.

“Dunno.” Replied Bill, basting a chicken as Meow looked on. “Don't even think about it.” He warned the cat as she licked one of her paws.

“Where's my daughter?” Peter turned to Joe.

“No idea.” Joe continued watching the television.

Peter frowned. He walked over next door.

“Hey Tom, seen Beauty anywhere?” He walked into the Beglys kitchen.

“No. Have you seen Charlie?” Thomas replied, grabbing a pair of beers out of the fridge.

“Nope. They're in trouble aren't they?”

“I'll bet.”

—

Belle jumped off the bus and landed on a roof. She checked the strap of the Backpack where the charge meter sat. Still had plenty of juice, but she had to be careful. She wandered around the city, keeping an eye out for anything suspicious.

Soon enough, she saw two young boys being chased by a pack of thugs.

“Chasing children?! Seriously.” She jumped down between the thugs and the boys.

“Greetings citizens. What seems to be the issue?” She asked.

“Little brats, their father owes us money.” One growled.

“Oh?” Belle asked.

“Move.” Another stepped forward. “Before we call Master Revolver.”

“And what exactly is HE going to do?” Belle asked, folding her arms. The two boys quickly looked behind them gratefully, before rushing off onto the nearest bus.

“Now they're gone! You're going to pay for this Missy!” The first thug growled.

Belle rolled her eyes behind the helmet. She pulled out the Lucky Seven Gun, to the gasps and shudders from the thugs. “Of course I am.”

“Revolvers gun!” The thug stepped back. “You really ARE in trouble!”

“Where IS Revolver? Robbing an old lady somewhere?” Belle asked.

“Actually, yes. A couple of streets over.” The thug said, pointing in the direction of his boss. Belle immediately took off in the direction he pointed in, just in time to kick Master Revolver in the head and stop him from taking the poor womans purse.

“Why thank you!” The old lady breathed a sigh of relief.

“Hold on to me, I'll get you out of here.” Belle said, lifting up the woman and flying her away.

“Come back here!” Master Revolver yelled angrily.

“You hide in here, I'm going to go and deal with Mr. Grumpy Pants down there.” Belle sat the woman up on a balcony next to a small family who had been watching. She flew back over Master Revolver, who shot at her with an old sawn-off shotgun.

He missed.

“Cop this you flog!” Belle cried, pulling out the Lucky Seven Gun again and shooting the shotgun out of Master Revolver's hands.

He growled, watching the young vigilante floating above him. How'd she come to have HIS gun?!

“You're stuffed Revolver, you can't beat-,” Suddenly, the Backpack gave out, and Belle dropped to the ground, her fall being broken by some garbage.

“You were saying?” Master Revolver grinned, advancing on her. Belle pointed the Lucky Seven Gun at him. He laughed.

“Go on, shoot me. I dare you to.” He sneered.

A Masters will never willingly take the life of another.

Darn the Code! Belle couldn't even bring herself to want to kill the man in front of her, ever since she was little the Masters Code had been drummed into her.

She just couldn't shoot.

“Just as I thought.” Master Revolver grinned. He moved forward to attack, only to get smacked in the head with a poorly-made nun-chuck.

“Sir Hyper!” He growled.

“Hi! How are ya?” Sir Hyper asked pleasantly. Belle used the cover to reach back and switch the Backpack into charge mode. It would still be a long time before she could fly again.

While it was charging however, she could still kick some backside! She shot up and tackled Master Revolver to the ground before jumping up and running. Sir Hyper wasn't far behind her, and they both managed to escape before Master Revolver recovered.

“That was nice how you saved that old lady.” Sir Hyper said as they walked down a neutral street. Both were relieved to have escaped so easily.

“I try.” Belle grinned underneath the helmet.

“Anyway, I need to go and find the rest of the Order. Would you like to come with me?” Sir Hyper looked at his watch. It was a big watch with lots of lights on it.

“No thanks. I need to get Revolver arrested.” Belle replied.

“Oh. Okay then. If you like, I can get the rest of the Order and we can help.” He looked up at her expectantly.

“That'd be nice, thank you.” Belle smiled, happy to have some back-up.

“Hold it.”

The pair spun around. The other masked vigilante was back, the Lions Claw Blade strapped to his back. Belle marvelled at its size, it was almost as tall as her!

“It's not safe to go after Revolver. You should know better Sir Hyper.” The disguised Charlie told them off. Belle scowled.

“I don't know who you are, but you can't tell me what to do!” She snapped. Sir Hyper looked worriedly between the pair.

“I'm going to get the rest of the Order, stay here!” He bolted.

The pair stared at each other, neither recognising the other.

“You're just going to get yourself killed.” Charlie warned.

“Yeah, like you're not in danger yourself, Chuckles.” Belle snapped back.

“Chuckles huh? Bet you're just a bag of Giggles. Go home.” Charlie fought back.

“Chuckles and Giggles hey? Either way, you're both going to pay for getting in my road!”

The pair spun around. Master Revolver had returned with five of his best henchmen (which really isn't saying much, since henchmen = cannon fodder, but I digress).

“You're going down Revolver!” Belle readied herself for a fight. Charlie drew the Lions Claw Blade.

“Huh. Two of you huh? Against the might of the Death Valley Gang?” Master Revolver grinned as two shots rung out. They barely missed the two heroes, who bolted and hid.

“Damn him!” Charlie groaned. “He has snipers!”

“We're doomed. Might as well give up now.” Belle flopped down, dejected. This certainly hadn't been her brightest idea.

“I wouldn't say that just yet Giggles, I have a bit of magic on me.” Charlie grinned. Belle rolled her eyes. “I'm serious, if I go out there and fight right now I'd win easily.”

“Chill it Chuckles, you'd be dead within seconds if you didn't take out either the henchmen or the snipers first.” Belle told him.

“There's an unfinished wall over there, one blast from one of those snipers and it will come down

all over the henchmen.” Charlie pointed out.

“The chances of that happening are slim to - WAIT!” Belle cried as Charlie ran out. Almost immediately the shots started. Belle could see one of the snipers from where she was. He was on top of a building nearby, and was too focused on Charlie to pay any attention to her. A sudden beep told her that the Backpack had collected enough CO2 to power her for another ten minutes.

She looked up at the sniper. Taking off as quietly as she could she crept up behind the sniper and kicked the rifle he had off the building.

“Uh...” He threw up his hands as Belle pointed the Lucky Seven Gun at him. She saw a cable nearby and used it to tie his hands together.

Meanwhile, Charlie's plan had worked. The wall had been hit, and bricks showered down on the henchmen. One managed to escape, but his weapon was quickly shot out of his hands by Belle. Charlie then went after the other sniper, who had been on ground level, while Belle went after Master Revolver.

“So. You can fly again.” He growled at her as she hovered maddingly overhead.

“Yup. Give up now?” She asked cheekily.

“No.” Master Revolver was about to pull out another handgun, when red and blue lights flooded the area.

Master Revolver was busted.

Belle quickly flew away from the scene, heading back to the tip. It was lucky that the stupid plan had worked, even though it defied all logic...

Belle stopped in midair. Defied logic? Dumb luck?

That wasn't magic at all. That was the Improbability Clause.

Chuckles was none other than her best friend Charlie Begly!

And sure enough, when she got to the tip, she saw Chuckles taking off his disguise.

“So, Chuckles. How long have you been keeping secrets from your BEST FRIEND OF TEN YEARS?!” Belle fumed.

Charlie spun around. Giggles was standing there, and even though he couldn't see her face, her body language was enough to let anyone know that she was FURIOUS.

“Belle?” He asked. “You're Giggles?”

Giggles pulled off the helmet and there stood Belle Masters.

“Well...I WOULD lecture you on putting yourself in danger, but it would probably be a tad hypocritical.” Charlie stared, dumbfounded.

“REALLY?” Belle snapped. She then giggled.

Charlie shook his head, but he too chuckled.

“Our plans to get rid of the Death Valley Gang and the Mobsters of Misneach worked!” He laughed.

“Yeah, and for a while, we're safe!” Belle grabbed his hands and the pair danced around in circles.

—

Peter Masters wasn't a strict father. He had his expectations of Belle for certain, but he knew it was up to her to choose her own path. He was just there to teach her the skills she'd need to survive and thrive. He rarely scolded her, preferring to talk to her and show her what was expected.

So when Meow, Bill and Joe saw how absolutely livid he was, they both remained as silent as humanly (and feline) possible. A news crew had captured the whole scene, and it hadn't taken Peter long to notice the Backpack and the Improbability Clause.

“Hello Belle.” Peter said as Belle walked in the front door later on that night.

Belle froze. A fear like no other gripped her. Her beloved father only ever called her “Belle” when she was in VERY BIG TROUBLE.

“Hi Daddy...” Belle tried to smile politely. It failed.

“Giggles, hey?” Peter narrowed his eyes at her. Meow, Bill and Joe cringed.

“Yeah... pretty different huh?” Belle tried to joke her way out of the impending doom.

“And that revolver you had was pretty snazzy.” Peter continued the onslaught.

“I...found it.” Belle stammered. Bill gently picked up Meow, and was about to follow Joe out when he felt his older brothers glare on his back.

“Get. Back. Here. NOW.”

Meanwhile, Thomas was ripping the strips off Charlie.

“YOU COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED! YOU COULD HAVE GOTTEN BELLE KILLED! YOU COULD HAVE BEEN ARRESTED!” Thomas roared. The twins grinned approvingly up at their older brother.

“You rock Charlie!” Izzy clapped her hands.

“You're a hero Charlie!” Lizzy hugged him.

“YOU TWO GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!” Thomas thundered.

“Geez, temper much?” Lizzy gave her father a filthy look.

“Sorry for looking on the positive side!” Izzy followed her sister out of the room. Woof, who had been asleep on the floor, followed the two sisters out, also giving his master a reproachful look.

Both Belle and Charlie were grounded for the rest of their lives, and the next. It was late when they finally got to bed, both exhausted from the days events.

“Hey Charlie!” Belle called softly out of the window. Charlie was about to lie down when he heard her call.

“Belle, how much trouble did you get into?” Charlie called back.

“My life is over, how about you?” Belle replied. Charlie groaned.

“Me too.” He sighed.

“GET TO BED YOU TWO!” They heard Peter yell from downstairs.

“Do you MIND Masters?!” Mr. Jones replied loudly from his bedroom.

“SHUT UP JONES!” Was the cry from both the Beglys and the Masters.

Charlie grinned at Belle, who grinned back.

“Good night Chuckles.”

“Good night Giggles.”

Chapter 6

With the leaders of the Death Valley Gang and the Mobsters of Misneach out of commission (at least until bail was posted), the crime rate in Pleasantville dropped significantly. However, there was still enough action to keep Chuckles and Giggles busy.

"I don't like it." Thomas said to Peter as the two youngsters made their way inside their respective homes after one such escapade a few weeks later.

"I don't either. But it keeps them amused." Peter replied, sipping his beer.

Joe had taken to training Belle in strategy on her spare afternoons, plus Charlie had constant phone calls from his grandfather talking about sword fighting, so the pair were never bored. Life was becoming full for the pair of them, especially with the school camp coming up.

"What a month." Belle lay on a mess of branches in the tree. Charlie hung off a lower branch, watching the creek that ran behind the houses.

"It's nice to finally have a day off." He said.

"Did you hear about Marion?" Belle asked.

"What about her?" Charlie sighed, not really interested.

"One year total, six months suspended sentence. She'll be out in five months." She replied. "Daddy tried, but she's too well-connected."

"You're kidding me!" Charlie groaned.

"Nope." Belle sighed. Belle was of the opinion that her father was the best prosecutor in the world, but even he couldn't compete with the corruption of the Pleasantville council.

"And it's only a matter of time before Master Revolver escapes...again." Charlie rolled his eyes. "First night Dingbat is on duty at the gaol and there'll be a breakout."

The pair sighed. Suddenly there was a small but audible "Bang!" coming from the tip.

"Again?" Belle perked up.

"Police haven't found anything suspicious Belle, so don't worry about it." Charlie yawned. Belle glared at him. He blinked.

"Oh...right..." He mumbled sheepishly. "Does this mean no more day off?"

—

It did.

"There's no one HERE Giggles, can we please go home and go play some Lethal Fight now?" Chuckles groaned as the pair searched the area where the noise had come from.

"Footprints, Chuckles. Lots and lots of footprints." Giggles snapped the visor of her helmet back down. "In a tip that is apparently deserted most of the time."

“And we're going to follow said footprints?” Chuckles followed Giggles as she headed towards some old cars.

She held up one finger to silence him, and walked towards the cars slowly. She pulled out the Lucky Seven Gun, and suddenly banged it on the bonnet of one of the cars.

“OW!!!” Cried a voice inside the car.

“Sir Hyper?” Giggles asked. Within seconds, Chuckles and Giggles were surrounded by the Knights of the Last Order!

Chuckles drew out the Lions Claw Blade and stood with his back to Giggles.

“So. You're the ones who have been making that noise.” Giggles said.

“And what if we are?” Sir Lionheart stepped forward. “You have no business here.”

“Please don't fight, we're on the same side here.” Lady Luck pleaded.

“Or are we?” Sir Dark glowered beneath his hockey mask. The Knights were all covered in various bits of metal and padding, probably trying to simulate armour. Sir Lionheart had an orange Lion on his chest, Sir Dark had a white unlit candle on his, Lady Luck had a green four-leaf clover and Sir Hyper and Lady Silent had yellow lightening bolts.

“Stand down Sir Dark!” Sir Lionheart warned.

“We've helped each other out before.” Sir Hyper piped up. “And you guys are good.”

“Thanks.” Giggles couldn't help but grin.

“How about we trust each other. On the count of three, we all take off our masks.” Lady Luck suggested.

“What do you say Giggles?” Chuckles asked.

“I don't see that there's anything to lose by working with these guys.” Giggles agreed.

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

“HAVEN'T WE SEEN YOU GUYS AT SCHOOL?!” Everyone cried.

“You're Belle and Charlie, right?” Daniel asked.

“Yeah, and you're Daniel and TJ.” Belle replied.

“And you're Petunia, Tammy and Sammy.” Charlie added.

“Wait, aren't you the guys who saved us a few years ago when the DVG attacked the old private

school?" Asked Belle.

"We sure helped!" Sammy grinned.

"Thanks for that." Belle smiled back.

"And you two are the ones who Daryl Jones really has it in for." Daniel said.

"Yeah." Charlie sighed. "Although I don't know what I ever did to him."

"You could hang out with us, his group don't have the strength to deal with us as well as you." Petunia pointed out.

"Tunia!" TJ groaned.

"Well why shouldn't they hang out with us? The only reason Daryl targets them is because he has his posse. If these two started hanging out with us, he wouldn't be able to hurt any of us. You DO remember what he did to Sammy in school yesterday right?" Petunia frowned at her friend.

"I guess so." TJ sighed.

"We don't want to cause any trouble." Belle offered.

"It's no trouble, TJ is just stubborn." Sammy giggled. "I like you guys!"

Belle and Charlie grinned sheepishly.

"Although if you're going to hang out with us, you should probably have watches." Daniel pointed out.

"Watches?" Charlie asked..

Tammy produced two snap wristbands, one blue and one red. Both were rather thick and bulky, with a black face on both of them.

"Tammy made them, she's great with electronics." Daniel smiled. "She's managed to hack into just about every security system in the city – it's how we keep track of everything."

"Those watches we use to communicate. If someone is in trouble, they just push the face in-," Petunia demonstrated. Suddenly, every ones watches started vibrating and a green arrow showed on the screens, pointing at Petunia.

"Awesome." Belle grinned. Her father would certainly appreciate something like this!

"We each have a different colour – Dan is orange, TJ is white, Tunia is green, and I'm yellow. If all the colours show up at once, it means Tammy and home base are in trouble." Sammy explained. Tammy smiled and led the group into a large pipe that had long since been buried in earth and rubbish. Inside was a desk with several keyboards attached to what looked like old computers, and the back wall and the sides were littered with old monitors, each showing what was going on in Pleasantville.

Tammy pushed a red button, and all of the watches lit up with the colours orange, white, green,

yellow, red, blue, purple and grey.

“Who are the purple and grey colours for?” Charlie asked.

“No one yet, Tammy just thought it'd be a good idea to have extras in case we have new people come in.” Sammy beamed at his twin sister, who grinned back.

“Amazing!” Belle looked at the set up.

“By the way, what on earth have you guys been doing to cause all the banging that's been happening?” Charlie asked.

“Sparring. Sometimes things get too rough and things get knocked around. Today we managed to knock a gutted car off it's pile into another pile...which knocked the whole lot down.” Daniel rubbed his neck sheepishly.

“How...?” Belle looked dumbfounded.

“We were pretending the piles of cars were buildings and jumping all over them. Luckily no one was hurt.” Petunia frowned at the boys.

“Buildings are no problem for me – I can fly!” Belle laughed

“I have to ask though – how on earth CAN you fly?!” TJ asked Belle, getting over his stubbornness.

“My Dad made this for me. It took him years.” Belle showed them the Backpack. She then jumped up and suspended herself about a foot off the ground. “It's fun.” She couldn't help but brag.

And then the Backpack malfunctioned slightly and she landed on her backside.

“That happens sometimes.” She had to admit. Everyone laughed.

–

After that, the seven heroes became good friends. They were always seen together at school, they often hung out at the tip having mock battles and lots of laughs and their parents soon became friends too. Best of all was the School Camp, because finally Belle and Charlie could go without fearing what would happen to them.

Well, almost.

Chapter

7

“Sammy, get in the canoe.”

“No.”

“C'mon Sammy, it'll be fun!:"

“No.”

“Sammy please, you got to at least try.”

“No.”

“Sammy-,”

“NO.”

Sammy stood well away from the lake where Daniel and TJ were trying to coax him into the water and into the canoe. Ever since the car accident that had taken Tammys voice, Sammy had been terrified of water, especially big bodies of water such as pools, lakes and the ocean. The car (driven by their erratic uncle) had gone speeding into Lake Pleasantville. Thankfully, the car had landed in shallow water, but it was still enough to cover the car. Tammy had slept through the whole thing, but Sammy remembered everything, from the water flooding into the car to the people who had rescued them.

“Sam, come on, you have to face your fear sometime.” Daniel tried.

“No.” Sammy sat down firmly on the dry grass. “You can't make me!”

“Come on, we'll get a canoe with Petunia.” TJ sighed.

Tammy grabbed Belles hand.

“Of course you can come with Charlie and I!” Belle grinned at her.

They picked out a pair of canoes and headed down to the lake. It was a beautiful day at Camp Tall Parakeet on the Silver Coast, great for some fun out on the water. The school had arrived at the camp the day before, and the scholars were looking forward to a week of fun and sun!

“It's ON!” Daniel cried, splashing water at Tammy, Belle and Charlie. Tammy steadied her paddle, then swept it through the water, sending a considerable amount over Daniel, Petunia and TJ.

“Who knew the littlest of us was the strongest!” Belle laughed.

“You gotta watch that one, she's a fierce little tiger!” Petunia splashed at her.

The friends were having a good time, even Sammy cheered from the safety of the shore. Of course, it wasn't to last.

Sunny and Daryl had also come to camp. Since the day at the tip, the Jones siblings had found it harder to pick on Belle and Charlie, owing to the fact that they now had the numbers behind them to defend themselves. However, the Jones siblings still took advantage of every chance they could get to make the lives of the seven friends miserable.

The two Jones siblings had a canoe to themselves, and were watching the frivolity from afar. They saw Belle and Charlie's canoe swing away from the other canoe, trying to put some distance between them so they could launch another attack.

"Start paddling." Daryl grinned at Sunny. Sunny simply grimaced, nodded, and began to paddle. She had grown into a tall, determined, beautiful teenager, although she still had a tiny scar under her eye.

The pair made a beeline towards Tammy, Belle and Charlie. The two canoes crashed and the three friends were sent flying into the water.

"TAMMY!" Petunia cried, reaching over to grab her best friend. Tammy held on to the side of the canoe and glared at the Jones siblings, who were laughing hysterically. Suddenly, the pair were launched into the water – Belle and Charlie had swum underneath the siblings' canoe and overturned it!

The friends all roared with laughter. Belle swam over to their overturned canoe, planning to right it and get back in, when she felt something grab her foot. Without warning she was back under the water, struggling to get back to the surface and fill her lungs with air. Whatever had her was dragging her down as far as it could. She saw a shadow move up past her, pushing her back down into the depths of the water before surfacing.

She struggled as fast as she could to get back to the surface, her lungs burning. The light of day seemed so far away!

Something grabbed her hand, and pulled her up into the air. She spluttered and gasped for air, holding on to Charlie who had pulled her out. Daryl was wearing a smirk, and Sunny was trying to get back into her canoe.

She looked up at Daniel, TJ and Petunia. Together, the seven friends headed back to the shore. Sammy hugged his sister the moment they were on dry ground, then suddenly he hugged Belle too.

"That was mean what they did." He said. "I saw Daryl duck you."

"I know. It wasn't very nice." Belle hugged him back. They all made their way back to the camp to dry off and lick their wounds.

Soon, they were hard at the table tennis. Belle and Charlie lost every game they played, including the one they played against each other.

"That...that..." Daniel looked stunned.

"That is REALLY bad." Sammy filled in.

"At least we're trying, right?" Charlie asked. Everyone groaned.

They heard some noise outside. Belle poked her head out of the door. "Everyone's heading back now, we'll have to go to assembly soon."

"Ah well." TJ yawned.

The group headed out and followed the crowd back to the cabins. Along the way, they saw something that would change things forever.

“Daryl, cut it out!” Sunny cried as Daryl flicked her with a towel behind some bushes. His moronic friends laughed.

“Don't be mean Daryl, stop picking on me Daryl.” Daryl mimed his sister cruelly. “You wouldn't even duck that unwanted bastard!”

“We'd already gotten her and her stupid boyfriend, why make things worse?” Sunny argued.

“I'm not your boyfriend.” Charlie looked at Belle indignantly. Belle looked back, just as peeved.

“You've always been soft. I remember that stupid kitten you got upset at me about.” Daryl sneered.

“Meow...” Belle whispered, turning back to the argument.

“Anyway at least I'm not like you. YOU actually hate her!” Daryl laughed.

Sunny growled. Belle looked at her from behind the bushes in horror. Sunny looked towards her feet. It wasn't hate. It was a million times worse.

“You can't even deny it.” Daryl shoved her to the ground. “You're just as unwanted as her – you weren't even meant to be born. Mum and Dad wanted another boy too.”

“Daryl is REALLY mean!” Petunia whispered.

Belle wanted to be happy. She wanted to revel in Sunnys pain. She wanted to walk away and leave the scene. But something stopped her.

A Masters never holds back.

It was wrong what Daryl was doing to his sister. Belle couldn't stand back and watch it happen.

She bolted out of the bushes and slapped Daryl hard.

“Your sister may be a cow, but she didn't do anything to you!” Belle roared.

“BELLE!” Charlie ran out beside her. Petunia and Tammy ran to help up Sunny (who shook them off) and Daniel, TJ and Sammy stood with Charlie.

“How pathetic.” Daryl sneered. “Two unwanted children.”

“Belle IS wanted thank you!” TJ fumed.

“You should see how much her father loves her!” Daniel added.

“And she's our friend!” Charlie finished.

“Whatever.” Daryl walked off, his friends in tow.

“Are you okay?” Belle asked, turning to Sunny.

Sunny was blind with rage. This girl, this stupid little girl who had been dumped on her fathers doorstep as a baby with pneumonia and on the brink of death, this stupid little girl whose father would do ANYTHING for her, this stupid little girl who had best friends and an uncle and a grandfather and now she'd really ticked off her older brother and she had no right to do that and she had no right to care and...

“DON'T you DARE speak to me!” Sunny thundered. She knew she was crying, but she was beyond caring. “You don't know ANYTHING!”

She shoved Tammy and Petunia to the ground in anger.

“Sunny, what's going on?” Petunia asked.

“Just...Just shut up!” Sunny roared. She glared at Belle.

“You have everything. A father who loves you, an uncle and a grandfather who would die for you, a friend who you've had for life, MORE friends who think the world of you! Why did YOU get that?! You weren't meant to be born either! I bet you never have to be silent around the house because you're a disturbance, or have to do all the chores because you're one mouth too many!” Sunny was beyond anything at that point. She ran off, crying.

“I HATE ALL OF YOU!”

The friends stood there in shock, all of them troubled by what had just happened.

“What on earth does she mean, 'not meant to be born'?” Belle looked confused.

“Beats me.” Daniel said. “But I think we've figured out why she's so mean to you.”

“Explains Daryl too.” Charlie said bitterly. Belle thought of something.

“Have you ever noticed that Sunny always has a cut or a bruise somewhere on her?” She asked.

The others looked at each other.

“You know, I think you're right.” Petunia said slowly.

“I really wonder what goes on in that Jones household.” Charlie said.

The old bell on top of the camp hall rang out, and the seven friends made their way over for the assembly.

Chapter

8

The rest of the camp flew by in a blur of fun. Although enjoying themselves as much as possible, the seven friends made sure to keep an eye out for Sunny, who seemed to be in a constant state of fury. Even Daryl was wary of his sister!

Soon, it was time to go home, much to the sadness of everyone. The seven friends were lucky enough to snaffle the back of one of the buses, where they could talk easily.

“My last time at school camp.” Daniel sighed.

“And we only have one more left.” Belle turned to Charlie, who sighed too.

“We have loads more left!” Sammy grinned cheekily.

“Yeah, but you have more years left of being bossed around.” TJ poked the younger boys forehead.

“Oww!” Sammy rubbed his head.

“So, have you two decided what you're going to do about Marion and Revolver? Dingbat is on warden duty in a month.” TJ mentioned, turning to Belle and Charlie.

“Put him back in gaol?” Charlie grinned.

“Easier said than done. We're just going to end up having to put him back every single time he escapes.” Belle groaned.

“It'll be fun!”

“It'll be dangerous.”

“Shush you lot! I'm TRYING to catch a nap here!” Petunia frowned at them. Tammy shot them all a dirty look. She had been about to doze off too.

Belle looked out of the window. Her thoughts turned to Sunny. After everything that had happened between them, why did she suddenly feel the urge to protect her long-time nemesis?

—

That night the friends had dinner at Belles place. Everyone loved Bills cooking, and Joes stories made the night all the more interesting.

“Big game on tonight too between the Leos and the Mynahs.” Daniel grinned at Charlie as they cleaned up their steaks. The Collymoddle Mynahs were one of the most despised teams in the competition, and unfortunately also one of the best.

“It'll be fine. With Jackson Blue, Louis Tiger and Joe Patrick in red-hot form, we'll whomp them.” Peter piped up.

“Don't forget Tony Rockcrusher.” Sammy added.

Belle was excited. It was the first time she had ever had so many friends over. The house was filled with laughter and fun, and she was so happy that she finally had so many people she could hang out with.

Finishing up her dinner, Belle took her plate to the sink to rinse it off for her uncle. She looked out the window.

In the opposite window, Sunny was busy scrubbing dishes. She looked lonely and sad, and Belle almost felt bad for her. She WAS lucky compared to Sunny – while she had to do chores as well, her father, uncle and grandfather helped her and each other where ever they could.

Sunny looked up and scowled, drawing the curtain across the window. Belle frowned and shook off whatever pity she had for the bully before heading back to hang out with the rest of the crew. They had gotten out the board games, and were having a blast.

Charlie was about to roll the dice for his next turn, when a bump and some laughter was heard from next door. It was pretty much ignored, they were used to it, but Belle couldn't let it go. What was happening in that household? Was Sunny okay?

“You're distressed Beauty. Are you holding something back?” Peter asked as he took his turn.

“No...yes...kinda.” Belle looked towards the kitchen.

“Are you worried about Sunny?” Sammy asked.

“She was mean to us Belle, don't worry about her.” TJ said bluntly, annoyed that Peter had just taken the lead off him.

Charlie looked at Belle. “It's against the Code for a Masters to just let things go. They don't ever hold back.”

“What about Sunny?” Joe asked. The children told him about what had happened at camp between them. Joe sat back and looked thoughtful.

“You're right to be concerned little one.” He finally said to Belle. “No one should have to live like that. It probably explains why she was so mean to you.”

“Because she hates me.” Belle sighed.

“She probably likes you very much.” Joe corrected kindly. “But she's jealous – very, very jealous. You have everything that she's craved all her life.”

“That's no excuse for being mean to us!” Charlie yelled.

“No, but it's part of the reason. It's very complicated.” Joe leaned forward. “It explains a lot of why the pair of them are the way they are. Daryl has always been spoiled, and Sunny has always been second fiddle to him. I'd love to throttle Jones if I wasn't a civilised man.”

“So what can we do?” Belle asked.

“You can't. No one can do anything. He's not exactly abusing her is he?” Petunia said slowly.

Tammy looked deep in thought. Then she jumped up and tapped her watch.

“The Knights of the Last Order? What could they do?” Daniel asked.

“Count me out.” TJ said.

“Me too.” Sammy agreed. “She was too mean to us.”

“Chuckles and Giggles will go.” Charlie stood up.

“Are you sure the situation even calls for that sort of force?” Belle rolled her eyes.

Sure enough, a cry of pain came from next door. Sunny's voice.

“Seriously?!” Belle got up and followed Charlie upstairs, where they got into their Chuckles and Giggles attire. The pair then snuck next door and peered in a window.

“Daryl!” Sunny cried, trying to get her doll back.

“Go and clean the toilet first!” Daryl laughed, holding up the doll above her head. It was a beautiful male doll, wearing a neat tuxedo and with a porcelain face.

“I DID clean it!” Sunny tried. To Giggles, Sunny looked sad and tired, nothing like the fiery bully she knew.

“Not good enough! Do it again!” Daryl commanded.

Sunny spared a glance through an archway to her parents, who were in the other room watching television. “Daryl please, don't hurt Ramjet.” She begged.

“Wonder what would happen if I smashed its face on the tiles.” Daryl mocked.

He threw the doll to the ground. Just before it hit the hard tiles, it was caught by a speeding Giggles!

“What the hell?!” Daryl cried. He moved to attack Giggles, but was stopped by the appearance of the Lions Claw Blade in his path.

“DAD!” He yelled, terrified of the combined might of Chuckles and Giggles.

Mr. Jones ran in. He prided himself on being a law-abiding, straight-edge Christian man of the highest standard, and to see that two of the town's vigilantes were in his house greatly disturbed him.

“What is going on here?” He growled.

“Why is Daryl picking on Sunny?” Giggles asked.

“And why aren't you doing anything about it?” Chuckles added.

“I don't see how it's any business of yours how I raise my children. I request that you leave my house at once. You are trespassing on private property.” Mr. Jones glared at the pair of them.

Giggles handed Sunny her doll back. “You deserve better than this. Everyone does.”

She turned to Mr. Jones and Daryl. “You two should be ashamed of yourselves. Sunny's a human being too, no matter the circumstances of her birth.”

“You have no right sticking your noses into business that doesn't concern you.” Mr. Jones warned. “I'm surprised you two haven't been arrested yet.” He stepped towards them.

“Get out and stay out. And learn to mind your own business, no one asked you to come in and martyr yourselves.”

The pair left, both shaken by what had happened.

They got back home and changed back to their civilian clothes, then headed downstairs as the football game was starting.

“How did it go?” Bill asked as the pair sat down.

“We didn't change a thing.” Belle hugged her knees. “We couldn't save Sunny.”

“Don't be so sure. These things take time little one.” Joe put a reassuring hand on her head.

For interests sake, the Leos won 25.2 (152) to 1.19 (25) that night.

—

The next day, the friends headed to the tip to hang out and train a little bit.

“Hi-YAH!” Sir Hyper swung his nun chucks haphazardly at Sir Dark, who rolled out of the way and counterattacked. Both were laughing.

“This is training?” Giggles asked Sir Lionheart.

“Yup! So what if it isn't the super-training you and Chuckles have had, at least we're having fun.” Sir Lionheart said defensively.

“You really need to be more careful.” Lady Luck was bandaging up Chuckles, who had fallen from a pile of old TV sets laughing at the “training”.

“My bad.” Chuckles was still chortling.

Lady Silent had one eye on the monitors and another on her brother being silly with his best friends. She looked towards the monitors again, not expecting to see much (crime in Pleasantville usually took Saturdays off). She gasped.

Sunny Jones was headed right towards them!

Lady Silent bolted out of the den and raced towards Sir Lionheart. She grabbed his arm, jumping up and down like mad.

“What is it Tammy?” He asked.

“So, this is where you lot hide out. I'd heard rumours.”

It was too late. Sunny Jones had made it to the den where the heroes were hiding out!

“Sunny.” Giggles said.

“Cut the rubbish.” Sunny snapped. “I know it's you Masters.”

Everyone froze.

“And I know your little friends are the Knights of the Last Order too.” Sunny continued. “So take off the masks and let me fight you face-to-face!”

“Why do you want to fight us for when all we did was try to help you?!” Lady Luck roared furiously.

“Do you know how much trouble I'm in!? My parents aren't talking to me at the moment because YOU couldn't keep your stupid nose of it!” Sunny fired back. “Your disgusting holier-than-thou attitude is beyond a joke!”

“Hold your tongue!” Sir Lionheart stepped forward. “We have been trying to do the right thing!”

“And that gives you the right to interfere in things that never concerned you?” Sunny fumed.

“You're being abused you stupid brat, can't you see that?!” Sir Dark yelled.

“Everything was fine before you stepped in!” Sunny was furious. Inside her felt like molten lava, she was hurt, jealous, angry, upset and alone.

“Get out and leave us alone.” Chuckles stepped forward. Sunny scoffed.

“I know all of your identities. If I went to the police right now, you'd all be screwed.” She smirked.

She flinched as the Lions Claw Blade was pointed at her, inches from her chin.

Giggles stepped forward, putting an arm across Chuckles chest.

“No Chuckles. Let me handle this.” She said calmly. She thought of what her grandfather said about things taking time. The wounds Sunny had endured wouldn't heal instantly. Until they did, she needed help. Fighting with her wasn't going to help anything.

“Sunny, we're sorry we caused you so much trouble.” She said.

Sunny stepped back. An apology?!

“We never intended to make things worse for you, we just wanted to help.”

“You condescending bitch!” Sunny screamed in fury. She flew at Giggles, who shot up into the sky and over Sunny, landing behind her.

Sunny spun around quickly and grabbed Giggles, trying to hit her. Giggles grabbed Sunny back and flew them both into the air. She let Sunny go and kicked her into a nearby pile of mouldy old mattresses.

Sunny finally landed on the ground with a soft “thud” and lay on the ground crying. Lady Luck bolted to her side to try and fix her up. Sunny submitted weakly, too tired to carry on.

“You'll be okay Sunny.” Giggles landed in front of them. She took off her helmet. “We'll be your friends and look out for you.”

Sunny looked up at Belle, before nodding weakly.

She had nothing else left.

Chapter 9

Bill was rapt. His restaurant was FINALLY open! The beach-themed burger restaurant was situated right where the creek fed into the lake, lending itself to some fine views.

“This is the best Uncle Bill.” Belle said one day as she tore into her steak burger. The restaurant was empty except for the seven friends and Bill.

“I’m surprised it’s not more expensive.” Daniel added.

“I like to keep things affordable, that way more people can enjoy my work.” Bill replied, wiping a glass. “So what do you youngins have planned for today?”

“Study.” Charlie groaned.

“More study.” Belle added.

“So much studying.” Daniel sighed.

“Even more studying.” TJ piped up.

“Studying too.” Petunia caught on.

“No studying for me, we had our exams yesterday.” Sammy grinned, earning him a few dirty looks. Tammy simply smirked.

The bell on the door rang, and in walked Sunny. She smiled shyly at the group of friends.

“Hi Sunny! How are things?” Belle pulled up a chair next to her.

“Getting there I guess.” Sunny shrugged. She sat down, looking uncomfortable. Petunia cleared her throat.

“We were just talking about the exams we have next week.” She told Sunny. “Apparently the twins have already had theirs.”

“Seriously? I’m not looking forward to the maths one. That’s going to get ugly.” Sunny said.

“I’m not looking forward to the biology exam. That one is going to be painful.” TJ groaned.

The sound of sirens in the distance made them all stop.

“That’s odd. Marion and Revolver are still in prison, and most of the DVG and the Mob have gone underground.” Daniel looked out the window.

“Do you think we ought to check it out?” Charlie asked.

“I think so. Sorry Bill, can you keep this warm for us until we get back?” Daniel started to grab his things and head out of the door.

“I suppose.” Bill sighed as the group minus Sunny stormed out, nearly knocking over poor Joe as he walked in.

“Young hooligans.” He chuckled fondly. He saw Sunny sitting by herself at the now abandoned

table.

“How have you been recently Sunny?” Joe sat down next to her where his grand-daughter had been sitting.

“In some ways it's been easier. Daryl doesn't give me nearly as much grief as he used to.” Sunny replied. She sighed.

“But in other ways...my parents still don't talk to me as much as they used to, especially my Dad. He's gotten a fair bit angrier nowadays.”

“I understand.” Joe said, putting a hand on her shoulder. “You love them and you want them to love you.”

“You make it sound so simple.” Sunny replied.

“It probably is.” Joe smiled kindly.

Sunny looked out of the window.

“I want to get back at them too.” She said suddenly. “I want to prove to them that I'm just as good, if not better than Daryl.”

“Also understandable.” Joe nodded.

“I wish I could go and help the others. I could repay them and get back at my parents at the same time.” Sunny got up. Joe got up too.

“No. It's too dangerous.” He said sternly.

“You let Belle out.” Sunny pointed out.

“That's not my decision.” Joe replied. “Her father thinks she can handle it.”

“Then why not me?!” Sunny protested. Joe looked at her.

“Come with me. There's some old gas masks out the back that the contractors left behind, good strong ones.” He said.

—

For the first time in a long time Giggles was scared. The man in front of her in the weird dragon mask had rigged the tall Council building near the middle of the city to explode, which would take out many of the buildings around it.

Lady Silent was quickly trying to diffuse the explosives with the help of a bomb expert, while the rest of the Knights of the Last Order and Chuckles were fighting off the dragon-mans minions.

“Who ARE you?” Giggles asked. They were both on top of the building, the sun still high in the sky above them.

“I am Demon.” The man said. His dragon mask was black with gold trim, and only covered the top

half of his face. His mouth was painted red and his face painted white. He was dressed in a white karate uniform with a black belt, and black combat boots. He held a large boomerang, wooden with beautiful native decoration.

“Demon, huh?” Giggles drew out the Lucky Seven Gun.

“That doesn't belong to you.” Demon pointed out.

“So? Would you prefer it in the hands of Master Revolver?” Giggles shot back.

Demon didn't reply. Instead, he aimed the boomerang straight at Giggles and threw it. Giggles shot up into the air.

“HA, you miss-OW!” She cried as the boomerang came back, slicing into her leg and returning to Demon. Blood poured from the wound.

Giggles knew she was in trouble if she had to get to ground. She had about nine minutes of air-time left.

Demon threw the boomerang again, this time Giggles was able to shoot it out of the air. It went flying back towards Demon who caught it easily.

“Damn him!” Giggles thought. Just then, the Backpack cut out.

“Of all the times for it to malfunction...” She growled, landing on her bad leg.

“This city, it's Council, it's cops, everything in this city is corrupt. The system has failed when children think they have the right to stamp their authority on the city. Pleasantville needs to start again.” Demon stood over her.

“You're kidding. You're having a go at US for being vigilantes? What about you?!” Giggles pointed out the hypocrisy.

Demon laughed.

“YOU serve the corrupt system. I wish to destroy it and start again.” He told her.

“With a name like Demon?”

“You're exceedingly nit-picky you know that?”

Giggles groaned and tried to stand up again. Demon kicked her over.

“Now. It's time for me to take the first – OW! WHAT IS IT WITH PEOPLE GETTING SMACKED OVER THE HEAD IN THIS CITY?!” Demon screamed in pain as he was hit over the head with a metal baseball bat.

Giggles almost laughed. The person who had hit Demon was wearing a gas mask, a pair of blue swimming goggles, a bicycle helmet and various pieces of cricket padding.

“Leave Giggles alone.” The figure said.

Demon growled.

“Who are you?”

“None of your beeswax. Leave Giggles alone.” The figure repeated.

“Very well, I seem to have miscalculated. Never matter. My men and I shall return.” Demon said. Two smoke bombs went off.

“Damn!” Giggles cried. The smoke cleared and Demon was gone.

“Are you okay?” The figure asked, helping Giggles up.

“Yeah. Nah.” Giggles tried to put some weight on her injured leg. Thankfully it was only a cut, but it was still a deep one that would need stitches.

“We'd better get back to the tip. Your grand-father will meet us there.” The figure said. Giggles gasped

“Sunny?” She asked.

The figure nodded. Giggles smiled underneath her helmet.

“Good on you Sunny!” She laughed.

She quickly fiddled with the Backpack (which had simply had a momentary glitch, how's that for timing?) before flying herself and Sunny back to the tip, where Chuckles and the Knights of the Last Order were slowly making their way in.

“They all escaped. Smoke bombs.” Chuckles flung himself down on one of the old mattresses.

“What happened to your leg?!” Lady Luck cried, throwing herself at Giggles wounded leg and starting to clean it.

So Giggles told them about Demon, and how he wanted to rule over Pleasantville.

“Is he insane? The Ostrayan Government would send in the Army and squash him flat.” Sir Lionheart scoffed. “But you haven't gotten to who this is, or why they're here!” He pointed to Sunny.

“It's me!” Sunny pulled off her mask. The others gasped.

“You saved Belle?!” Chuckles asked incredulously.

“Well, yeah.” Sunny shrugged.

“You're really brave!” Sir Hyper looked up at her.

“A little bit.” Sunny blushed. Sir Lionheart walked over to her, suddenly having an idea.

“Put your mask back on.” He said solemnly. Sunny did so, and Sir Lionheart led her into the middle of the group. Silence fell.

“You have shown great courage, not only to save Giggles, but to see your old ways of bullying us were wrong, and that you can have friends.” Sir Lionheart said. “Please kneel.”

Sunny got down on one knee, shaking.

“Lady Silent, go and get one of the other watches.” Sir Lionheart commanded. Lady Silent quickly retrieved the purple watch and handed it to him. He faced the kneeling Sunny.

“You have shown yourself worthy of being our friend, and you have shown yourself worthy of being a Knight. I dub thee Lady Courage!” Sir Lionheart touched her shoulders with his slingshot.

Lady Courage! Sunny felt tears welling up behind her eyes. Someone valued her. Someone cared about her.

She finally had friends who wanted her.

“Arise Lady Knight!” Sir Lionheart helped up the newly coronated Lady Courage.

“I hate to break up the impromptu party, but Belle needs medical assistance yesterday!” Lady Luck piped up.

Within the hour Belle was stitched up and heading back home with her grand-father and uncle. Looking out of the window, she smiled.

“You were right Pa. All Sunny needed was time and friendship. Now she's come good.” She said.

“Aren't I always right?” Joe replied gruffly as Bill turned into their street.

“Your tipping would suggest otherwise.” Bill shot back.

“Was I talking to you?”

“Chill out you old git.”

“Watch your mouth you little-,”

“I love this family.” Belle hugged herself.

—

“And how was your day Daryl?” Mrs. Jones sat at the dinner table eating roast beef and mashed potatoes and roast pumpkin.

“Pretty busy, I had to do my speech about the School Camp today. Being the School Captain is hard sometimes.” Daryl grinned, shovelling his dinner into his greedy mouth. “Plus we had revision for our Maths exams.”

“And your day?” Mrs. Jones looked down at Sunny, who was eating slowly.

“Fine.” Sunny replied, pushing her beef around the plate.

“So do you think you're going to pass the Maths exam?” Mr. Jones quizzed his son. Sunny tried to pay attention to the conversation, but soon it just became a drone in the background.

It wasn't her fault that her mother had gotten pregnant again after they'd had Daryl. It wasn't her fault she was a girl. As much as she was happy with her new friends, the pain of rejection from her parents hurt.

She did the dishes, cleaned up the kitchen and the lounge room, put a load of washing through the drier and then headed upstairs to her bedroom. Her homework was already done and she was tired.

She looked out of her window towards the creek. Her parents small boat was sitting tied to the back fence. They were rich, but money would never help Sunny.

She was about to cry herself to sleep again like she had so many nights before, when she noticed the gas mask out of the corner of her eye.

“No. I won't cry anymore.” Sunny thought to herself. “I'm Lady Courage, and I am important.”

Chapter

10

Charlie was tired, and glad to be heading home after a long day at school. The biology exam had been nothing short of the purest torture. He felt like he could never fully enjoy anything ever again, the exam had been so painful, so dull, so unfair, so-

“GRANDPA CHARLES IS COMING! GRANDPA CHARLES IS COMING!” Lizzy and Izzy grabbed his hands and spun him around the lounge room almost the second he walked in the door.

“Grandpa?” Charlie looked at the pair, dumbfounded.

“YUP!” The pair grinned back.

“OH MY GOD! GRANDPA CHARLES IS COMING! GRANDPA CHARLES IS COMING!” The three danced around the room. Charles Howzat had been working in Central Ostraya as a teacher. He had been pretty close to retirement the last time Charlie had spoken to him, and was looking forward to coming back home to Pleasantville.

“Will you lot can it!” Thomas walked in.

“Why is Grandpa coming home? Is he retiring?” Charlie asked.

“Yup. He's been told that he's too old to continue working. So he's off to the Happy Old Farts home.” Thomas sat down on the couch.

“Joe will be pretty thrilled too – he, Grandpa Charles and Grandpa Timmy were best friends.” Izzy said, unable to contain her excitement.

“Those two will be able to chat about the old times. I bet they have a lot of stories from the war they can share!” Lizzy added, bouncing around the room.

“He can show me his old sword fighting moves.” Charlie grinned. Thomas and Betty were a match made in heaven, as the Beglys by trade were blacksmiths and metalworkers, while the Howzats had a history of sword fighting.

“He can babysit you three while your mother and I get some quality time together.” Thomas thought out loud.

“No. No more siblings!” The three children cried out.

–

It was late Saturday morning when Charles arrived at the Begly house. Betty had gone to pick her father up from the airport in Brisvegas, while Thomas and the children got his new accommodation sorted.

They were just putting the television in position when the car pulled up at the apartment.

“GRANDPA CHARLES! GRANDPA CHARLES!” The three Begly siblings ran out of the apartment towards their grand-father.

“Hey kiddos. Look at how big you all are!” Charles climbed gingerly out of the car. He hadn't aged well, and his joints were stiff and sore.

“Grandpa! Let me take your bag!” Charlie grabbed the old mans luggage.

“Come on Grandpa, we cleaned everything up for you!” Izzy grabbed his hand while Lizzy got the door.

Charles smiled at the three, and sighed as he walked in the door. “It's true then. I am old and retired.” He looked around the room.

“Did we set everything up right Grandpa?” Lizzy looked up anxiously.

“You guys did amazing, thank you.” Charlies sighed.

“You're coming to our place for dinner tonight, aren't you Dad?” Betty asked, looking at some of the art on the mantelpiece.

“Of course dearie. Just let me get freshened up.” Charles smiled at his oldest daughter.

—

It was early evening when they finished dinner, the Beglys and Masters sitting in the shared backyard eating barbecued ribs.

“This is GORGEOUS!” Belle grinned, stretching out her arms, belly full of pork.

“Isn't it just?” Joe agreed with her. “And my best mate is back too.”

Charles laughed.

“Everyone knows you and Tim Begly were the best of friends Joey, I just tagged along.” He took another mouthful of beer. “Those were the days.

“Yeah, you and Timmy going at each other hammer and tongs, and I always had to break you two up.” Joe smiled at the memory.

“He was such an arrogant tosser though.” Charles smiled fondly. “Don't know why, he was such an ugly mug.”

“Still managed to woo Denise!” Joe laughed. Charles scowled. “Oh don't look like that Charlie, you didn't say anything!” Joe patted his old friend on the back.

“What happened?” Izzy asked innocently.

“Your Grandma Denise Fairweather was the most beautiful woman you ever saw. I was madly in love with her until your Grandpa Tim got a hold of her.” Charles sighed melodramatically. Inside, the wound still burnt hot.

“Tim had a way with women. Thomas seems to have gotten his mojo from him.” Peter laughed.

“I call incorrect use of the Improbability Clause!” Bill chortled, making the table erupt in hysterics.

“Do you lot STILL believe in that stupid dumb luck?” Charles asked. “I suppose you still follow that Code religiously too!”

“The Masters Code and the Improbability Clause are over 500 years old.” Joe pointed out.

“And besides, without the Code and the Clause, we wouldn't be able to be Chuckles and Giggles.” Belle piped up.

“Ah, yes, I've been wanting to talk to you two about that.” Charles straightened up. “I want to join you on your crusade.”

The table went dead silent.

“Um, aren't you a bit old to be running around Pleasantville in a dodgy costume?” Charlie asked.

“Nonense. A bit of experience would help you.” Charles brushed him off. “I don't understand why Joey hasn't put his hand up to help you.”

“Because I know I'm too old and I'd be a liability.” Joe said quietly. “I coach from the sidelines if I have to be involved.”

“Ah, I see. Being the “strategist” as it were.” Charles frowned.

“It was my job.” Joe narrowed his eyes at Charles.

“Was hiding behind the Code your job too?” Charles shot.

“You know I'd never willingly take the life of another, no one should ever be expected to!” Joe snapped.

“We had no choice, it was WAR!” Charles fired angrily. “You're still a coward I see.”

“YOU TAKE THAT BACK!” Peter and Bill roared furiously. NO ONE called their father a coward!

“You and Tim, always hiding behind those old family traditions which should have died out a long time ago!” Charles muttered bitterly. “At least one of us has gumption.”

“Charles, listen to me, you know you can't go out and fight anymore. Even these two shouldn't be out there.” Joe tried to reason with his old friend, but Charles was having none of it.

“At least your daughter seems to have her priorities straight.” He looked at Belle, who recoiled and hid behind her father.

“I still follow the Code. So does Charlie.” She said quietly. Charles narrowed his eyes at his grandson.

“No. You two need to listen to me and stop relying on these outdated methods that this old man preaches. He nearly got us all killed 40 years ago with his stupid moralising.” Charles frowned. “If you're going to do a job, do it right. If you're too scared to get blood on your hands then leave it to those who will.”

“It's not about being scared Charles, it's about doing the right thing and following the rules!” Joe began to seethe. Peter and Bill stood behind him.

“What are rules if they allow people to get hurt?!” Charles fought back.

“It's not the rules that are getting people hurt, it's the people who can't be bothered following the rules that are doing the damage! Listen to yourself!” Joe stood up, an imposing figure in front of his two sons.

“Boys, sit down. Why ruin a lovely dinner-,” Betty tried, but was cut off by her father.

“YOU listen to yourself! You're a coward, you always have been, and you're now trying to stop the one member of your family who actually has any guts from fulfilling a very noble destiny!” Charles stood up too, just as furious.

“Grandpa, please sit down. We're just trying to do the best we can, and Joe is right, you'd only get in the way and cause issues.” Charlie tried.

“You still don't need to follow that stupid Code! If you had disposed of Revolver and Marion properly, then you wouldn't be here sitting on pins and needles waiting for them to get back out and cause harm again!” Charles bellowed.

“Yes, but that would make the children as bad as the ones they're fighting!” Joe tried to reason with the now irate man.

“At least the city would be safe.” Charles growled.

“At the expense of the childrens innocence?” Joe glared.

“How can any child be innocent in this day and age?” Charles sat back down. “You're a fool Joey. An old fool.”

“We'll just see about that won't we?” Joe continued to glare. “I can't believe you'd sacrifice your own flesh and blood-,”

“Some sacrifices need to be made Joe, don't you DARE judge me for mine!” Charles was back up again, knocking over his chair.

“Maybe we'd better get out of here...” Belle whispered to Charlie.

“Don't you DARE leave this table!” Charles rounded on her.

That did it. Peter stood between the two and glared threateningly at Charles.

“Beauty. Please leave the table.” He said coolly. Belle skipped away as quickly as she could, this was one fight she didn't want a part of!

“Don't you move young man.” Charles stopped Charlie from walking away. “You're not a coward like her.”

Peter growled. Charles eyeballed him.

“Go on. Hit me. Or are you just as cowardly as your father?” He taunted the oldest Masters son.

“I don't hit unless I'm struck first.” Peter replied. He felt his fathers hand on his shoulder.

“You're a good boy Peter. You and Bill head inside with Belle.” He said. Peter nodded and headed back inside, his brother putting his arm over his shoulders.

Joe looked at Charles, and shook his head sadly.

“I'm sorry about dinner Betty, I know you went to a lot of trouble to put this together. I thank you for inviting us, and hopefully we can get together sometime without the arguments.” He walked back inside where Peter and Bill were comforting a shaken Belle.

“Well. That was a bit of a downer.” Thomas sighed as the Beglys cleared the table.

“I have half a mind to never invite those Masters over again!” Betty seethed. Thomas was taken aback.

“What do you mean?! Both of them were equally to blame dearest, besides you can't just cut off our closest friends over a stupid little incident like that!” He tried to comfort her. She rounded on him.

“I knew you'd take their side, you always do! My father happens to be your FAMILY Thomas, or have you forgotten that?!” Betty snapped angrily, slamming down the cutlery on the bench.

“The Masters are as good as family, and the Improbability Clause-,”

“IT'S STUPID, that's what it is! Nothing more than make-believe rubbish!” Betty stormed on.

Listening in were the three siblings. Charlie was indignant.

“The Improbability Clause isn't rubbish, I've used it plenty of times!” He said.

“It's dumb luck Charlie. You need to grow up.” Izzy pointed out.

“What the-? You're Beglys just as I am!” Charlie was shocked. How could his sisters deny their own birthright like that?!

“We're also Howzats Charlie, and unlike Beglys, we stick to our familys side and defend each other.” Lizzy narrowed her eyes at her brother.

Charlie couldn't believe his ears. His own sisters, who had looked up to him for years, were defying him.

“I love Grandpa Charles as much as you do, but even I know he's wrong on this one. Just because you love someone doesn't mean you have to agree with everything they say.” Charlie tried to reason with them, but the girls were just as stubborn as their grand-father.

“He's not wrong Charlie, I can't believe that you'd say that!” Lizzy cried in anguish.

“You're pretty much asking me to choose Grandpa Charles over Grandpa Tim!” Charlie tried to defend himself.

“No we're not!” Izzy looked insulted. “Grandpa Tim died a long time ago!”

“Come on Iz, let's go to our room.” Lizzy pulled her sister away, leaving Charlie feeling lost and

alone.

—

Back at the retirement home, Charles lifted an old wooden box out from underneath the bed. He opened it carefully and laid the contents out on the bed.

Two long blades. Both had a solid leather strap near the end so they could be worn along the users arms.

Charles strapped them on, and started shadow-boxing. The Arm Scythes had served him well over the years, and they would serve him well again.

Chapter

11

“YIKES!”

Giggles ducked out of the way as the car behind her exploded. “Demon this is enough! You're going to get innocent people killed!”

Demon stood atop a large truck, his ten foot-men throwing petrol-bombs at the seven heroes.

“Innocent people are being killed every day due to the negligence of our governments and law enforcement. Any victims today are a small sacrifice to pay for the greater good.” Demon said, watching as the carnage unfolded.

“EEK!” Sir Hyper cried as he grabbed an elderly senator out of the way of a petrol-bomb. “Watch out sir!”

Sir Lionheart looked at his watch. A text message from Lady Silent had appeared.

“Police are still twenty minutes away.”

“TWENTY MINUTES?!” Sir Lionheart cried. “How are we supposed to even SURVIVE twenty minutes, let alone keep the damage to a YIKES!” He rolled out of the way of another explosion.

The news didn't help Sir Dark either, who was trying to keep Lady Luck safe while she bandaged up another female senator who'd been injured.

“Lady Luck, we don't have time for this, we have to move!” Sir Dark growled at her, trying to keep one of the henchmen at bay. The man laughed at him.

“Just a little boy trying to do a mans work!” He taunted. Irate, Sir Dark smacked him across the cheekbone with his metal pole.

“Okay, I'm done. She can't walk though!” Lady Luck told Sir Dark as one of the other henchmen came to the aid of his comrade.

“I can't keep fighting them off!” Sir Dark protested.

Meanwhile, Lady Courage was in a bit of hurt herself. Now sporting a pair of purple daggers painted onto her armour, she had just sustained a nasty burn to her hand.

“We have to go to her!” Sir Dark pointed out.

“But if we leave Senator Lucy out here on her own, she's done for!” Lady Luck protested. Lady Courage was still holding her own against the henchman who had gotten her, but her hand was making it hard.

“There's too many of them!” Groaned Chuckles, swinging wildly with the Lions Claw Blade.

“And I'm running out of ammo too!” Giggles shot another petrol-bomb in the sky, exploding it harmlessly.

“We need to get to Demon. We get him, this ends. I'm going to try and get him.” Chuckles said as Giggles landed behind him.

“Like hell you are. You even look like you're thinking of taking him down and suddenly you've got henchmen to deal with.” Giggles pointed out.

“SOMEONE has to take him out.” Chuckles protested.

“Who?”

Demon chuckled at this little exchange between the heroes. They were stuffed.

Suddenly there was a loud clattering behind him. He spun around just in time to dodge a blue ninja wearing a blade along each arm.

“Oh no...Grandpa!” Chuckles groaned while Giggles proceeded to chuck a temper tantrum. “Stupid, stupid, STUPID!”

“Who are you? You're not a Knight.” Demon glared at the blue ninja.

“My name is Sapphire.” The ninja lifted his arm, pointing one of the blades at Demons throat. “And now you die.”

Demon gulped as Sapphire struck. Fortunately for him a Giggles bullet landed at the feet of the ninja, sending him jumping back.

“What is your problem Giggles?!” Sapphire roared furiously.

“WE. DO. NOT. KILL.” Giggles growled. Three of the henchmen had come to Demons aid, allowing Chuckles and the Knights to get the upper hand against those who were left.

Sapphire knocked two of the henchmen away, going for Demon. Giggles took on the last one, finally subduing him with some rope.

Demon, who had composed himself, fought against Sapphire. He was barely holding his own.

“Chuckles, who is that?!” Sir Hyper asked quietly after the rest of the henchmen had been taken care of.

“My grand-father. Those are his Arm Scythes.” Chuckles sighed in frustration. He ran over and climbed up the side of the truck to help Sapphire.

“This is too easy, you're pathetic Demon.” Sapphire gloated. “The only reason you're still alive is because the others are too weak to end your pathetic life.”

He stood over Demon, who had fallen and was now at the mercy of Sapphire again. Sapphire again aimed one of the Scythes at Demon. Suddenly pain ripped through his hips and lower back.

“Argh! Not now!” Sapphire groaned as his legs locked up. Damn his hip complaints!

Demon saw his chance. He grabbed his boomerang and was about to attack, when the Lions Claw Blade appeared in front of him. One look at Chuckles and Demon slipped off the roof of the truck, knowing he stood no chance against the combined might of Chuckles and Giggles.

His henchmen had slowly made their way back to the truck, and now the group made their escape.

Chuckles quickly leapt off the moving truck, while Giggles saved Sapphire from a certain fall.

“See you guys back at HQ!” Giggles placed Sapphire down on the ground, before heading off.

“Ugh.” Sir Dark groaned, pulling his sore body off the ground where he'd been resting.

The group scattered and made their way back to the tip.

Just then, the police arrived. Timing.

—

Sapphire groaned. His hips were still sore, but at least he could move. He'd finally gotten to the tip, now it was just a matter of finding the headquarters of the Knights of the Last Order.

Meanwhile, the others had hurried back and heard the story of what had happened at the barbecue earlier that week.

“So your grand-father thinks he can help us?” Sunny asked.

“Yeah, but as you saw, he doesn't really conform to our ethos.” Belle pointed out.

“Plus his age. If you hadn't stepped in when you did Charlie, Demon would have killed him.” Daniel pointed out.

“The whole situation stinks.” TJ folded his arms. “I don't envy you one bit Charlie.”

“I don't envy me either.” Charlie sighed. Tammy put an arm around his shoulders.

“I wish there was some way we could convince him to stand down, but I doubt he'd listen to us.” Petunia finished tending to Sammys burnt cheek.

Charlie perked up.

“Hey, maybe we could-,”

“ONE use of the Improbability Clause per day is enough for me thanks.” Belle said dryly. Charlie laughed.

“So, what are we going to do?” Sammy piped up.

“What are we going to do about what?” Another voice popped up.

“ARGH!” The eight friends squealed in fright.

“Oh, Grandpa, it's just you.” Charlie was the first to recover. Sapphire removed his headgear to reveal Charles Howzat.

“What on earth were you thinking?!” Belle fumed.

“I was just going to finish what YOU started.” Charles scowled at the young lady. “And I suggest you be more respectful towards your elders.”

“Grandpa...” Charlie trailed off. “You could have been killed.”

“Not the first time.” Charles grinned at his grand-son. Daniel frowned.

“If you're going to work with us, then you need to subscribe to our ethics. You were going to murder Demon.” He said.

“Yes. I was going to end his little reign of terror and make sure no one else got hurt.” Charles eyed off the younger man.

“We can't have that.” Daniel replied.

“You're the leader of the Knights aren't you? Sir Lionheart?” Charles asked.

“Yes.” Daniel looked warily at the old man.

“And you call yourself a leader?” Charles frowned. “I have half a mind to take the leadership of the Knights myself.”

“We'd never follow you!” Sunny leapt to Daniels defence.

“Not ever! Dan is our hero!” Sammy jumped up angrily.

“Dan is the best leader we've got. He's always looked out for us!” TJ was angry too.

“You'd throw your weight behind an inexperienced leader instead of being smart and following me?” Charles looked disappointed. “I was hoping you guys were intelligent.”

“You are SERIOUSLY deluded!” Belle yelped. “We've been doing fine without you! You're old, slow, and breaking down, you're ideas are so out of touch it's not funny!”

“How DARE you!” Charles rounded on Belle, who was fuming. “Insolent little brat! I'll teach you to speak to your elders that way!”

Charles lunged at Belle, who easily side-stepped. He attacked again, and Belle side-stepped again. This happened four or five times until Belle finally took to the sky.

“You pathetic little coward.” Charles shook his head. “You children have no idea. You're letting these people get away with horrendous crimes, and they'll keep getting away with it.”

“Last time I checked, both Marion and Revolver were arrested. Both are currently in gaol. If they break the law again, they'll get arrested again. They'll learn.” Belle said, arms folded.

Charlie sat silently.

“Grandpa, you nearly got yourself killed. If I hadn't stepped in when I did, Demon would have killed you.” He said quietly.

“Only because your 'best friend' stopped me from killing him in the first place!” Charles rounded on his grand-son.

“There is a process for punishing wrongdoers, and that process needs to be followed! We're simply here to stop them from hurting others!” Belle yelled furiously.

“THE PROCESS IS FLAWED!” Charles yelled back.

“THEN THERE IS A PROCESS TO HAVE THAT FIXED!” Belle retorted.

Tammy looked at the pair, before noticing two men walking towards them. She waved.

“Oh dear.” Thomas looked at the scene he'd just walked into.

“Charles, Belle, what's going on?” Joe asked.

“None of your business Joey.” Charles scowled.

“I'll tell you on the way home.” Belle landed beside her grand-father.

“Okay then little one.” Joe put a hand on her head. “Get changed then let's get home, it's going to rain soon.”

“Yes Pa.” Belle skipped off to the hideout to get into her civilian attire. Charles glared after her.

“Back off Charles.” Joe warned. “Leave my grand-daughter alone.”

“If she gets in my way, she'll get what's coming to her.” Charles replied, before walking off angrily.

“Grandpa!” Charlie tried to run after him, but was stopped by his fathers hand on his shoulder.

“Leave him be son.” Thomas said softly. “You can't help him now.”

Chapter

12

It had been a few weeks since Sapphire had joined the fight against crime. Unfortunately due to his obstinacy and old age, his involvement in any battle usually ended up with one or more of our heroes getting hurt.

“This is insane. Surely he can see that he's just getting us in trouble.” Belle grumbled one day as she sat with Charlie in the tree.

“He says it wouldn't be an issue if we'd just him sort out the criminals his way.” Charlie sighed. “I can't let him become a criminal himself.”

Belle reached out and grabbed her best friends hand. “I'm sorry you're caught in the middle of this. It's not fair on you. You shouldn't have to choose between your family.”

“Grandpa is the one who's making me choose though.” Charlie looked away. “He's never been like this before. He's always been so encouraging and supportive of the Code and the Clause.”

“Maybe it's because he feels now that he's retired that he's not useful any more.” Belle had a sudden thought. “Maybe if you involve him more in your non-crime-fighting life, he might feel more valued and useful and lay off trying to get himself killed.”

Charlie perked up. “Did you REALLY just have a good idea before I had it?!” He looked stunned.

“What's that screaming noise?” Thomas asked Peter, who was helping him paint the front fence.

“I think that's my daughter killing your son.” Peter replied.

“Ah.”

—

“Hey Grandpa.” Charlie walked into the retirement home later that day.

“Hey Charlie. You're walking a bit gingerly aren't you?” Charles noticed Charlie wincing slightly as he walked.

“Fell out of the tree.” Charlie brushed him off. “I was wondering if you could help me.”

“Of course! Nothing's too good for my grand-son!” Charles closed the door behind them and went to get some tea while Charlie sat down.

“Now, what can I do for you?” Charles asked after they'd settled down and were enjoying the tea and shortbread.

“I was wondering...I really like the Arm Scythes. It's just...I wanted to know if you'd train me in how to use them?” Charlie asked. Both he and Belle agreed that it was important for Charles to feel like he was still involved with protecting the city, even if it was via proxy.

“Well, I...sure!” Charles agreed, pleased that his grand-son was taking an interest. “Want to start now?”

“Of course!” Charlie couldn't believe it had worked! The pair went out into the secluded back yard, where due to the over abundance of shrubbery, it was impossible for anyone to see in. Outside was a

small outdoor gym which Charles used every day.

Charlie groaned inwardly. This was going to be PAINFUL.

–

And it only got worse.

“Move it!” Master Revolver ushered his men through the big bank doors and into the large black van that served as a getaway.

The first night of Dingbat's shift as Warden of the prison, Master Revolver had walked out of the door. Literally. Dingbat had foolishly walked past his cell with the keys hanging out of his back pocket and Master Revolver had simply walked out of there and straight back to the Death Valley Gang.

“Hmph. Too easy.” Master Revolver got into the back of the van as it drove away. He was relishing his freedom, and the robbery was merely in celebration of his escape.

Suddenly, the van lurched, throwing everyone in the back of the van into the wall.

“Let me guess. Giggles has shot out the tyres with MY gun.” Master Revolver groaned, pulling himself off the wall.

“YUP! Only it's MY gun.” Giggles poked her head in one of the broken back windows. “Hi hi! You've not finished your gaol term!”

“No. I haven't.” Master Revolver grimaced. “Where's the truck?!”

“Truck?” Giggles asked.

“BEHIND YOU!” Sir Hyper screamed. Giggles flew up just in time to avoid getting crushed as a large truck rear-ended the crashed van. Master Revolver and his crew quickly exited the side doors of the van and rushed towards the truck. The Knights and Giggles soon surrounded them, but they were outnumbered by the Death Valley Gang members. Most of them made it easily to the truck.

“GO!” Master Revolver commanded. “Leave the others!”

Giggles groaned. The tyres on the truck had huge metal plates covering them – no way could she shoot the tyres out.

She instead landed on top of the truck and held on for dear life as it sped through the streets of Pleasantville.

“Where's Chuckles when you need him?!” Giggles tried to keep grip, but it was hard, and the Backpack could only help so much. She'd pressed the button on her watch, hoping someone would be able to follow, but the Knights were too busy taking care of the remaining DVG goons to be of any help.

“She'll fall off eventually. DAMN them! At least that Chuckles kid isn't around as...” Master Revolver exhaled sharply. Chuckles was standing on the pavement, the truck speeding towards him. But this Chuckles was different.

The truck was almost on top of him – suddenly he ran towards it, the Lions Claw Blade aimed below the tyre shields. The truck skidded and smashed into Lake Pleasant, leaving Master Revolver fuming.

Giggles landed beside her best friend. “Took your time.” She grumbled.

“Training with Grandpa again. Like my new decorations?” Chuckles grinned, showing off the Arm Scythes.

“You...filthy...little...BEAST!” Master Revolver rushed at Chuckles with a metal pipe. Instinct lead Chuckles to put up his arm to defend himself, where the pipe met its match in one of the Scythes.

“Seriously?” Master Revolver looked at the metal pipe, disappointed.

Chuckles grinned. Giggles laughed. Master Revolver fumed, until he saw a helicopter in the distance.

A helicopter belonging to the Mobsters of Misneach.

Chuckles and Giggles tensed up. What were the Mobsters up to now? A chain ladder was dropped behind Master Revolver.

“HURRY UP!” One of the Mobsters yelled at him.

Master Revolver glanced back at the two heroes before grabbing the ladder, which took off.

“Come back here!” Giggles yelled. She tried to take off, but the Backpack was out of charge. “Botheration.”

“I wonder why the Mob is suddenly helping Revolver?” Chuckles mused.

“Can't be anything good.” Giggles replied. “Still, it looks like Sapphire is out of the way now.”

“Yeah, this past few weeks he's been really good. He's been more than happy to train me up.” Chuckles said as the pair headed back to the tip. “It helps too that most of the crime has been petty stuff. Demon must have gone underground.”

“I hope he never comes back.” Giggles commented. “He scared me.”

—

Sitting in his lounge room, Charles was furious. He was watching the report which clearly showed Chuckles and Giggles letting Master Revolver AND the Mobsters of Misneach get away AGAIN.

Ooooh, wasn't he going to have a word with his grand-son when he next came over! Using the little “training” excuse to keep his grand-father out of the action!

“I bet that little Masters weasel had something to do with it too, the interfering little beast! Why can't they do these things properly?!” He stormed into the kitchen, grabbing the counter while catching his breath. He went to the fridge and grabbed a drink of water.

He sat down, his chest feeling tight. Why was he feeling so light-headed for?

He jumped as the glass fell from his hand to the floor, clattering loudly and spilling water everywhere. He went to reach for it, but his shoulders were burning and his neck felt tight too. The urge to vomit gripped him as breathing became harder.

He slumped to the floor. Not now. Not now.

Not a heart attack.

—

“You're very lucky to be alive Mr. Howzat.” The nurse said, taking the old mans pulse.

“Tell me about it. Why didn't you call for help straight away?!” Betty was beside herself. She'd already lost her mother, she wasn't ready to lose her father yet too.

Charles wasn't listening. He was too busy glaring at Charlie.

“How could you?” He growled at the young man.

“I did what I had to. To keep YOU safe, and to keep the Knights safe.” Charlie said.

“What happened?!” Betty asked.

“Your son lied to me.” Charles answered.

“I did not! I asked you to train me and I attended training faithfully.” Charlie felt insulted.

“You used your “training” excuse to keep me busy while YOU let the DVG and the Mob escape!” Charles yelled.

“Mr. Howzat calm down right now!” The nurse barked angrily.

“You and your little friend conspired against me.” Charles ignored her. “Your own grand-father.”

“It was for your own good. Look where you are now!” Charlie replied.

“Charlie, let's go.” Thomas reached out to take his son home.

“And YOU are going to sleep!” The nurse jabbed Charles with a needle.

The last thing Charles remembered before drifting off to sleep was being angry.

“I'm sorry Mum, Dad.” Charlie apologised as the family headed out to the car.

“It's okay son.” Thomas sighed. Betty glared at him.

“OKAY? He manipulated his grand-father and you think it's OKAY?!” She yelped as they got into the car.

“Dearest, please. He had good intentions.” Thomas started the car and they drove off.

“Yeah, look where the good intentions got him.” Izzy snapped.

“Didn't stop Grandpa from getting sick.” Lizzy added.

“Would you prefer to have him murdered?” Thomas snapped at his two daughters, who silenced. They knew not to mess with their father when he was REALLY angry. “At least if he has a heart attack at home he has a chance of being saved. If he's killed in the streets, he has no hope.”

“He's too old to be fighting. You guys should realise that.” Charlie added.

“You shouldn't be fighting either young man.” Betty scowled.

“Someone has to.” Charlie replied.

“Don't get smart with me young man. You're a hypocrite, just like your father and your little friends the Masters.” Betty folded her arms. “This discussion is over.”

“Mum-,”

“ENOUGH.” Thomas warned.

The car trip home was deathly silent.

Chapter

13

Charles lay in his bed, looking at the ceiling. He'd been allowed to return to his apartment, provided he stayed in bed and alerted the caretakers immediately if something went wrong.

He felt lonely and angry. Charlie hadn't needed training, it was only a ruse to keep his grand-father out of the way. The insult stung.

Charles could have turned on the TV. He could have read the twenty or so books that the twins had brought him. But he couldn't bring himself to even lift his head.

He WAS getting old. He'd just had a heart-attack, for pete's sake. His hips were constantly locking up and his reaction time was much slower than he had once been.

His thoughts turned to the past. Joe, Tim and him. They were unstoppable in their day.

—

“You're certain this is going to work?” Joe looked doubtfully at the go-cart, which Tim was 100% certain was going to work.

“Yup.” Tim grinned back.

“And you're going to beat those punks on the other side of town?”

“Yup.”

“With no injuries?”

“Yup.”

“And the cart left in one piece?”

“Yup.”

“Even though Pleasant Gorge is full of dangerous turns and covered with rocks?”

“Yup.”

“How?”

“The Improbability-,”

“Finish that sentence and I'll deck you.”

Charles laughed. “You're just jealous Joey.”

“No, I'm not. I just disapprove of using the Improbability Clause for every little thing that comes up out of the woodwork!” Joe fired back.

“Yup, jealous.” Charles continued to laugh.

The three boys had been challenged by another group of boys on the other side of the city to a go-cart race. It was the school holidays and the perfect time for young boys just in their teens to start

causing mischief.

“This beauty will have no trouble getting down that hill.” Tim bragged. “And she'll have no problem beating Davis, Bull and Pitt.”

“This beauty” was made of old plywood and tape, with some old baby carriage wheels to finish it off.

“We're doomed.” Joe buried his face in his hands, his long hair falling around his face. As the oldest, Joe was usually the most level-headed and often kept the other two out of trouble. Tim was next, and was always IN trouble. Charlie was the littlest, and tagged along with whatever Tim wanted to do.

“You're such a spoilsport Joey.” Tim poked his best friend in the ribs. “We'll be fine!”

“Besides, the girls will be there watching!” Charles piped up, earning him laughs from the older two.

“Charles got a girlfriend has he?” Joe ruffled his friends hair.

“No!” Charles shoved him back.

“Well, I will by the end of the week. I reckon Denise likes me.” Tim smirked, proud of himself.

“Denise Fairweather? No way.” Charles frowned. “You're too fat!”

“Yeah, Tubby!” Joe gave Tim a good push. “You need to stop eating for a month, then you might have a chance!”

“Yeah, and you need to eat for a month and you might have a chance with Delilah.” Tim said slyly.

“You know that's an arranged marriage! I have no choice!” Joe groaned.

“You like her.”

“Do not!”

“The only thing stronger than your love for Delilah is your jealousy of the Improbability Clause.”

“GET BACK HERE YOU LITTLE RUNT!”

Charles roared with laughter as Joe tore after Tim, who ran off laughing.

—

The kids from the other side of the city had a beautiful new store-bought cart that looked stunning. It's metal exterior gleamed and the paintwork was exquisite.

Joe looked doubtfully at Tims cart. The thing looked perilously close to breaking apart, the tape looked ready to rip at a moments notice.

“Look at THAT! No way is that even going to make it to the finish line!” Bull laughed.

“She will too!” Tim fought back.

“Oh please, it's barely holding together as it is!” Pitt jeered.

“One weeks pocket money says otherwise!”

“You're on!”

“Hang on-,” Joe tried to intervene. He really didn't want to give up a weeks pocket money, especially when he was so close to finishing his model plane collection!

“Too late! Unless you're a wussy.” Bull teased. The others started chanting “Wussy!” until Joe gave up.

Four of the boys piled into the two carts, with Joe and Davis ready to push the carts down the steep slope that had been the bank of Lake Pleasant until it had been drained.

“On your mark...get set...” The weaselly, pimply Mitch from their class got ready to start the race. No one particularly liked him, but he was good for little things like this. “GO!”

Both boys pushed as hard as they could before jumping into the back of the carts. The two small vehicles tore down the slope.

“WATCH OUT!” Yelled Joe as the poorly-constructed cart rattled over a large rock. The other cart had dodged it, costing the driver a bit of time.

“Faster Bull!” Davis protested.

“I'm trying!” Bull roared back, dodging another bush that the other three boys had simply gone through.

Joe had never been so terrified in his life. The sides of the cart were starting to fall off, and he grabbed them tightly to keep them from flying away. Charles was whooping with joy and Tim was fully focused on steering the contraption...or at least pretending to, he hadn't thought about the actual steering side of things.

The end was in sight, and the newer, shinier cart was barely in front.

“LOOK OUT FOR THOSE LOGS!” Screamed Joe. Precision steering was needed to get between those two logs...and there was none.

“LEAN RIGHT!” Tim yelled back. The three boys leaned right. It was too late, Joe only just being able to grab Charles and pull him back before the cart smacked into the side of one of the logs and went spinning towards the finish line, the other cart barely avoiding getting hit.

Joe grimaced. Charles had nearly had his face scraped off by the sharp sticks that pointed out of the logs. The cart finally landed at the finish line, to the cheers of the other children who had come to watch.

“YOU DID IT TIM!” Denise yelled with joy. “YOU WON!”

“How in the-?!” Bull, Pitt and Davis pulled up behind the three winners as the cart completely fell apart.

“You were too scared to get your cart damaged.” Tim pointed out.

“I CALL IMPROPER USE OF THE IMPROBABILITY CLAUSE!” Joe roared furiously. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in face. He grabbed his eye, and was rewarded with the sight of his own blood.

A nice big cut had opened up over his eye. Thankfully the eye itself hadn't been damaged, but stitches were going to be needed.

“Are you okay Joey?!” Delilah ran over to help her friend. “Come on, we need to get you home!”

“Cripes, sorry Joey. Didn't mean for you to get hurt.” Tim looked at Joe, scared. “You haven't lost your eye have you?”

“NO. My dignity yes, but the rest of me is fine thank you!” Joe walked off with Delilah. Tim and Charles followed, feeling a bit sheepish.

“Maybe helmets next time?” Charles suggested.

“NO NEXT TIME!” Joe yelled.

—

Two tears fell from the eyes of the old man lying helpless in his bed. No longer racing go-carts down Pleasant Gorge, no longer fighting wars.

He felt useless. Impotent. Alone.

Bored.

Charles reached over and grabbed the remote. He flicked aimlessly through the channels.

There was a knock at the door.

“Come in!” He croaked. In walked Joe Masters, the old scar from the cart-race joined by two others. It made Joe look far older than he really was.

“Hard to believe you're older than me.” Charles smiled wryly.

“What does that matter?” Joe asked.

“One of those scars should be mine.” Charles said.

“Again, that doesn't matter. You have nothing to prove Charles.” Joe said sternly. “You're my friend.”

“If it wasn't you protecting me, it was Timmy.” Charles coughed.

“You did your fair share too. How many times did you stop Tim and I from killing each other?” Joe helped the other man sit up so he could have some water.

“When did we get old Joey? When did we stop mattering?” Charles sipped his water slowly.

“We still matter mate. We're still relevant. We're still loved.” Joe took the cup as Charles lay back down. “You shouldn't have been so upset with Charlie. He got a great deal out of your training.”

“It was a ruse.” Charles said.

“Because he loves you. He wants to protect you. He also wants to learn from you. He can't do that if you get yourself killed.” Joe tried to reason with his old friend.

Charles lay back. “I can't stop Joey. I need to be out there. I need to be doing SOMETHING!”

Joe sighed. Charles was never going to stop, that was true. He had always been ready to sign up to whatever stupid plan Tim had going. He was always the first to volunteer for a dangerous mission when they'd been at war. He'd scoffed at anyone who hung back. He was prepared to do anything. Any dare, any favour, anything to make himself noticed.

“You were always the oldest. You were the one who always protected us. Tim always had the ideas. And I was the lackey who followed along, because you two were the most awe-inspiring kids in the neighbourhood. Everyone wanted to be you guys. And you didn't mind that I tagged along. You made me your friend.” Charles coughed loudly again, prompting Joe to refill the water glass.

Joe watched helplessly as the younger man's coughing fit got worse. He reached up to push the red button that would call for help, but Charles stopped him.

“No, it's alright, I'm fine.” Charles coughed out, clearly NOT fine. Joe continued to pushing the button. “NO! Don't push that! I'm fine! I'm fine!” Charles coughing fit soon stopped him from talking. Joe pushed the button, and within five minutes a nurse had arrived to take care of the situation.

The glare that followed Joe out of the room would haunt him for the rest of his days.

Chapter

14

Charlie sat in the tree, looking out over Pleasant Creek.

“It's not your fault Charlie.” Belle tried to reason with him. “You tried to do the right thing, it's not your fault that he got sick.”

“How do you know?” Charlie replied, still staring at the creek.

“Because he was under stress despite you, not because of you. Even if he was out fighting, the stress of the battle would have triggered that heart attack. You heard him wheezing the last time he fought Demon. The next battle would have been his last.” Belle pointed out.

Charlie sighed. “Yeah, I guess you're right. You always seem to be able to think things through.”

“Family gift.” Belle chuckled. She hugged Charlie tightly.

“Thanks.” He murmured.

“You're welcome.” Belle replied.

“OI! ODD-COUPLE! DOWN HERE!” They heard TJ yelling down below.

“WHAT?” Belle shouted down.

“WE'RE GOING FISHING! WANNA COME?!” Sammy yelled.

“SURE!” Charlie replied.

The pair quickly got their fishing gear and headed out with TJ and Sammy to the fishing hole near Pleasant Dam. The others were already there waiting for them.

Daniel, being the tactful leader that he is, had made sure that Sapphire nor Charles were going to be mentioned that afternoon.

“Guys, before you two go and get Belle and Charlie, I'd like to talk to you guys about Charles.” He'd said.

“About?” Sammy enquired.

“Try and keep the talk of Charles and Sapphire to a minimum. Charlie already feels guilty about what happened, this fishing trip is so we can all relax and recover from our various injuries and injustices.” Daniel started moralising.

Sammy raised his hand.

“Very funny Sam.” Daniel glared at him.

“If Charlie brings it up-,”

“GO.” Daniel fumed while everyone else laughed.

“I do feel for poor Charlie though, it must be really tough.” Petunia sighed after the two boys had left.

“Tell me about it. Part of me is glad none of my grand-parents give a damn about me.” Sunny cast her line and settled down, having absolutely no intention of catching any fish, and every intention of spending the day relaxing.

Tammy looked sadly at Sunny. The bruises were becoming less frequent, but from the looks of things the connections that Sunny had with her family weren't improving.

“You have Joe. He looks out for you.” Petunia tried to lighten the mood.

“And you have us.” Daniel put a hand on her shoulder.

“Thanks guys.” Sunny smiled at her friends.

“My grand-parents are very much the doting type. If they knew I was out crime-fighting, they'd report my parents to child services.” Petunia told them.

“My grand-parents keep giving me history books about all the old wars. They think I might find something useful in them.” Daniel chuckled. “I guess they're right.”

“HEY! Caught anything yet?!” They heard TJ yelling.

“That was quick!” Daniel marvelled.

“Uncle Bill gave us a ride. He's off to the restaurant at the moment.” Belle told them as she settled down on the picnic rug. “He just lost an argument with Dad.”

“I wonder about your family sometimes.” Sunny shook her head.

“So do a lot of people.” Charlie laughed. “Dad was telling me back when HE was a kid that he used to hear them fighting all the time.”

“It works for us.” Belle shrugged. “They all love each other.”

“And that's what counts.” Petunia smiled.

“This is getting too sappy, can we move on to the fish now?” TJ complained.

“Awww, doesn't TJ wanna admit he wuvs his Mummy and Daddy?” Sunny teased.

“Oh rack off.” TJ snapped.

“Touchy.” Daniel laughed.

The two boys started wrestling, soon joined by Charlie and Sammy while the girls laughed. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, the fish were biting, and soon the friends were starting to pull in a good haul.

“Uncle Bill WILL be pleased!” Belle grinned as the ice box steadily filled up.

“Is he going to be able to use it all?” Sammy asked, throwing back a small fish that would have been illegal to eat.

“Yup, business is booming at the moment, especially now with the crime rate dropping. People are more likely to leave their homes to go out to dinner nowadays.” Belle replied.

“It's great to know we've helped make this city better.” Daniel stretched himself out.

“You're not going to get all sappy again are you?” TJ groaned, lifting a rather large fish into the ice box. “I don't think we're going to fit much more in guys.”

“I'll call Uncle Bill and we'll get the load to the restaurant. Nothing like fresh fish to go with your chips!” Belle's stomach began rumbling.

“You think Bill will let us have some?” Sammy looked hopefully at the catch.

“He'll have to, won't he?” Petunia was also starting to water at the mouth.

Soon Bill arrived to pick up the load, and not long after that the friends were digging in to freshly cooked fish.

“This is delicious.” Sunny wolfed down another mouthful of her fish stir-fry.

“Unbelievable.” Petunia helped herself to another fish ball.

Sammy and Tammy were content with their fish and chips (battered and crumbed respectively) while Daniel, Charlie and TJ enjoyed their fish in a spaghetti marinara. Belle was making her way through a fish salad.

“It wouldn't be right to sell all these fish and not let you guys have some.” Bill looked out of the kitchen and smiled at the feasting heroes. Already people were starting to forward in, tempted by the delicious smells and the sight of the food. The sun was setting over Lake Pleasant, and the whole atmosphere was brilliant.

Charlie looked around the table. He wished his grand-father was there with them. Every time he'd been to visit the old man in the past week, the conversation had been frosty at best.

Charles Howzat didn't have much time left.

The children had just finished their meal and were about to start thinking about dessert when the sirens started.

“On a Saturday?!” Sunny groaned. She'd been looking forward to some cheesecake to wash down the fish with.

“Let's go – discreetly!” Daniel advised. They all thanked Bill for the meal, and shot out of the back door to get changed into their gear.

—

Like Master Revolver, Mobster Marion thought it was a good idea to have a celebration when she got released from gaol.

Her celebration however had been a bit more lawful. A nice party in her gated mansion hurt no one.

Until the Death Valley Gang arrived and all-out war had started, endangering the nearby populace.

“Just concentrate on getting people out of here!” Giggles said to Chuckles.

“Right!” Chuckles nodded. He ducked underneath a barrage of bullets, heading into a nearby home while Giggles helped a family out of the top-storey window of their home. They took them to the end of a nearby cul-de-sac where they would be safe, and where Lady Luck could look them over for any injuries.

The heroes were going okay until Mobster Marion sent out her bayonet squadron. It was a lot more difficult for the heroes to go unnoticed, especially when both Mobster Marion and Master Revolver declared them targets too.

“WHY did we get involved in this?!” Sir Dark yelled as he dodged another bullet.

“Because innocent lives and nobility and because we're freaking insane!” Sir Lionheart replied, nearly getting skewered with a bayonet.

“How many people left?”

“Too many!”

Sir Hyper ran screaming from one of the bayonets, while Lady Courage tried fighting fire with fire and was taking on two of the Gangsters.

“This is insane! I've seen skirmishes between the DVG and Mob before, but this is beyond that!” Giggles hid with Chuckles behind a house.

“Do you think this has anything to do with that Mobster helicopter saving Revolver last week?” Chuckles asked.

“It could very well do. Maybe Revolver took it as an insult.” Giggles replied, sticking her head out to check what was going on. She fired the Lucky Seven Gun at the feet of a few goons, trying to get them away from Lady Courage and Sir Hyper.

“This is way out of our league!” Sir Hyper yelled as he hid with the others.

“Where are Sir Lionheart and Sir Dark?” Lady Courage asked frantically.

“They're stuck over there with those people. They can't get them out of to the cul-de-sac without getting them killed!” Giggles groaned.

“We could provide a distraction.” Chuckles piped up.

“NO.” Giggles flattened his suggestion. “We'd get killed instantly, and then those poor innocents would get polished off. There simply wouldn't be enough time.”

“If they get distracted, then we've got to try.” Chuckles pointed out.

“Well isn't this a mess?” Said a booming voice that caused a temporary lull in the battle.

“Come on!” Chuckles grabbed Giggles, who was furious. Damn the Improbability Clause!

“So, you're Demon.” Master Revolver stepped forward from the group of Death Valley Gangsters, approaching the newcomer who had walked calmly into the fray. “You're the one who's been keeping the pests busy for us.”

“I don't approve of their meddling in things that children should stay out of.” Demon replied. “You'll understand I'm sure.”

“What do you want?!” Yelled Mobster Marion from one of the mansion windows.

“I want back up. I want to know I can count on the two most powerful fighting forces in Pleasantville to back me when I take on the Pleasantville Council.” Demon stated.

“Whatever.” Master Revolver rolled his eyes. “Get lost freak.”

“Do NOT mess with me Revolver. I will kill you if I must.” Demon warned.

“I'd like to see you try.” Master Revolver smirked, snapping his fingers. Four of the Death Valley Gangsters surrounded him, protecting their master.

“Hmm.” Demon smiled his sick smile.

Meanwhile, the heroes had almost gotten the last of the unintended hostages out of the danger area and back to Lady Luck.

“Almost there! Keep moving!” Sir Lionheart hissed, trying to keep the small crowd inconspicuous.

“Don't you “hmm” me. Show some respect for the most feared criminal in the city!” Master Revolver growled.

Loud laughter was heard from the mansion. Mobster Marion couldn't help herself after hearing that last declaration!

“Shut up Marion!” Master Revolver barked.

Meanwhile, the plan had worked. The hostages were free and the heroes were safe.

“I am NEVER doing anything like that again!” Sir Dark flopped onto the ground, head pounding.

“That was far too close for comfort.” Sir Lionheart agreed. “If it wasn't for the Improbability Clause we'd be in huge trouble.”

Giggles pouted.

“Yeah.” Chuckles wiped his brow. He looked back towards where the battle had been. “Oh NO!”

Sapphire had arrived and was standing close to where the battle had been.

“Grandpa no, you've just recovered from your heart attack!” Chuckles groaned.

He ran towards the old man, who was heading towards the battle armed with two knives.

Giggles ran after them, trying to get the Backpack to work. She pulled out the Lucky Seven Gun, hoping she wouldn't have to use it.

“Well look who else has arrived. Hello Sapphire.” Demon sneered as the old hero walked slowly towards them.

“GRANDPA NO! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!” Chuckles screamed.

“So that's why the rat has your arm thingies.” Demon looked down his nose at Chuckles.

Master Revolver backed off. He didn't want any part of this battle. He'd done what he wanted to do, and that was to put the Mobsters of Misneach on notice.

“I'll settle with you later Marion!” He roared.

“Up yours too sunshine!” Was the polite reply.

“Have fun with the old man.” Master Revolver sneered at Demon, before taking his small army and leaving.

Sapphire attacked first, but the heart attack plus his bad hips had slowed him down significantly. Demon dodged far too easily, and shoved Sapphire to the ground.

“GRANDPA!” Screamed Chuckles, but it was far too late. Demon stomped on one of Sapphires frail wrists, breaking it easily. With the knife that had come loose from the old mans hand, he stabbed his prey squarely in the chest.

Finally the Backpack was going to behave! Giggles flew furiously towards Demon, ready to belt the living daylights out of the man. Demon ducked her first swoop, before throwing his boomerang after her. It clipped her arm, but she couldn't feel the pain over her fury. One boot to the chest had him sprawled on the ground

Realising that fighting Chuckles and Giggles alone was a bad idea, Demon quickly set off one of his smoke bombs and escaped.

“GRANDPA!” Chuckles was still screaming. He fell to his knees next to his beloved grand-father. “WHAT WAS THE POINT?! WHAT WAS THE FREAKING POINT?!”

Sapphire looked up at his grand-son. “At least...we were willing to try.”

The howls of pain from his devastated grand-son echoed hauntingly through the night.

Chapter 15

Charlie sat by the gravestone, hugging his knees. Woof sat sadly beside his master, head bowed low.

He was devastated. If only he hadn't had the idea to go running around fighting crime in the first place, none of this would have happened. Of course, it didn't help that one of Grandpa Tims last suggestions had been to go out and save the day. Why did he listen to his Grandpa Tim? Why did he listen to the Begly blood in his veins, telling him that he was invincible and that nothing could stop him?

But you couldn't blame Grandpa Tim for this. Grandpa Charles had always followed Grandpa Tim, had always wanted to be like Grandpa Tim. Always wanted to be BETTER than Grandpa Tim. It had gotten him killed. A senseless, pointless death that proved nothing.

Grandpa Charles had been at war. He had so badly wanted the Howzat blood in Charles to win out against the Begly blood. To rebel against the Code and the Clause. As much as Grandpa Charles loved Grandpa Tim, he envied and hated him.

Charlie heard a noise and looked up. Joe Masters stood next to him, looking old and sad.

"I couldn't save him. Not this time." He sighed sadly, tears falling from his eyes. "They were my brothers, and I was supposed to look out for them."

Charlie could see even clearer now. It wasn't Tims approval that Charles was after – it was Joes. The big brother. The other vital ingredient in the Improbability Clause. The smart, strong one who always kept them out of trouble.

Charles had been jealous of the centuries old friendship between the two families.

"It wasn't your fault." Charlie whispered.

"I know. But it will live with me forever." Joe looked up to the cloudy sky above. The sudden crack of thunder barely registered in his psyche, but he knew it meant it was time to go home.

"Come on Charlie. We need to go." He held out his hand to help the boy up.

"Oh Charles." The old man thought as he looked back on his best friends grave one last time. "You meant just as much to me as Tim did."

"You were my brother too."

—

That night, while the Masters and Begly families, along with their friends, celebrated the life of Charles Howzat, Master Revolver was stalking the streets of Pleasantville.

The empty alleyway was dark and foreboding. Master Revolver smirked as he walked down it. Pulling his pistol from his belt, he fired into a dark corner. A loud "TINK" reverberated throughout the air, and the gunman grinned.

"So you ARE here. Glad you could make it." He sneered.

"Of course I'm here, I've been on pins and needles just salivating for your arrival." A sarcastic female voice replied.

“Oh I bet you have.” Master Revolver leered. Mobster Marion might have been the leader of his most hated rivals, but she certainly was attractive!

Within a split second he found a sword at his throat. It was no where near as long nor as intimidating as the Lions Claw Blade, but it was at least sharp enough to tear out his throat.

“Don't you dare mock me gunslinger.” Mobster Marion warned. “Or I will kill you.”

“What, after you sent one of your helicopters to rescue me? I was very touched by the way.” Master Revolver shrugged the blade off. “Not as fine as what you're used to wielding is it?”

“Neither is that little pistol you're waving around.” Mobster Marion glared at the pathetic little gun in the Gangsters hand. “However, it will make cutting you down all the easier.”

“Heh heh heh...you're on.” Master Revolver fired his gun, barely missing the Mobster who dodged quickly. She retaliated with a quick jab of the sword, nicking Master Revolvers coat but leaving him relatively unscathed.

Master Revolver fired again, twice. The first bullet missed, but the second one nicked Mobster Marions hand. Enraged, Mobster Marion slashed upwards, leaving a nasty cut on Master Revolvers chest.

Both of them glared at each other. It was on.

Mobster Marion retreated again to the shadows. Master Revolver fumed. Even if he DID retreat to the shadows as well, the gun going off would alert her to his presence. Instead, he dropped to one knee.

“Giving up already? I'll make this quick then.” Mobster Marion thought. She jumped down from the dumpster she'd been standing on, and landed right on Master Revolvers fist!

The wind flew out of her as his fist sunk deeper into her stomach. He pointed the gun at her head, and was about to pull the trigger when the butt of her sword smacked him hard in the side of the head. They separated, both regaining their composure.

“Not bad gunslinger.” Mobster Marion spat, trying to catch her breath.

“You're pretty sharp yourself swords woman.” Master Revolver replied, clutching his sore head. Mobster Marion traced his hulking frame with her eyes, watching his powerful muscles tense and relax.

Both of them look up a fighting stance again. Their eyes locked, the tension rising.

Master Revolver started firing again, each bullet being dodged with ease. Mobster Marion easy got up close and swung her sword, narrowly missing Master Revolver.

Their faces were close. They could taste each others breath. Master Revolver caught her lips with his as she pushed up against him.

“So.” Mobster Marion traced the hairs on Master Revolvers chest two hours later in her bedroom.

“I think we have a deal.” Master Revolver cupped his hand around her face. “Together we'll fix those Knights.”

“And we'll get back the Lucky Seven Gun and the Lions Claw Blade.”

“No wonder I've always liked you.”

“Everyone likes me.”

“So arrogant.”

“I have a right to be.”

Another kiss sealed the deal. The Death Valley Gang and the Mobsters of Misneach were no more. A far worse threat had been born of the union of the two most despised groups in the city.

Pleasantville now had to deal with the Death Valley Mobsters.

Chapter

16

Mobster Marion and Master Revolver walked into the Misneach compound, towards the large group of about 100 men and women, all loyal to the Death Valley Mobsters.

“Hello our loyal followers.” Master Revolver spoke, silencing the crowd.

“You've probably noticed, but there seems to be a disease rampant in Pleasantville. That sickness is the Noble Knights of the Last Order and their little pals Chuckles and Giggles!” Mobster Marion began.

“It's time we fixed what has been wronged. Ever since the birth of Pleasantville the Death Valley Gang and the Mobsters of Misneach have ruled this city with an iron fist. The order MUST be restored.” Master Revolver punched his palm, inciting excitement amongst the group.

“That is why the Death Valley Mobsters have been born – because our word is law in this city, and they'd best not forget it!” Mobster Marion roared.

A great cheer went up.

“Tonight.” Master Revolver grinned. “Tonight, at midnight, we march on Pleasantville. Tonight, at midnight, we take back our city!”

The roar went up, and the two leaders grinned.

Those brats would pay.

—

Daniel grimaced. Sunny glared back. She quickly looked back over Daniels shoulder to Petunia, who nodded.

CRACK!

“MY LEG!” Daniel cried, limping away from the crease almost the moment the cricket ball hit his shin.

Meanwhile, Belle lifted one finger into the air. TJ and Sammy were furious.

“SHE DELIBERATELY AIMED FOR HIS LEG!”

“HOW CAN YOU GIVE THAT OUT?!”

Charlie watched the cricket game from the big tree, not particularly interested. He was filled with a mix of sadness and fury, both at his grand-father and himself. If he'd only been faster. If only his grand-father had just stayed home. If only he'd never donned the Chuckles costume. If only...if only...

It was no good thinking about what could have been, you couldn't change what had happened. You could only go forwards, and try not to make the same mistakes again.

Would he end up being as stubborn as his grand-father had been? Was he going to suffer a similar fate? Could Belle stop him, or would she end up failing like Joe had?

Or was he too much of a Begly? Would he end up like Grandpa Tim, who died peacefully in his sleep after saying good-bye to everyone?

It was doing his head in.

“Are you okay?” Belle was suddenly next to him. How long had he been thinking?

“No.” Charlie didn't see the point in lying to Belle. She'd know. She always knew.

She bent down and kissed his cheek. “It would have been the way he wanted to go, you know that.” She looked towards the creek. “Maybe I was wrong to try and stop him from joining us.”

“He still would have died.” Charlie pointed out. “And he wouldn't have changed anything. You saw that when Revolver and Marion were in gaol – Demon came to take their place.”

“I guess so. All we can do is try to keep them under control.” Belle sighed. “You're still going to try, right?”

Charlie looked up at the sky through the leaves of the tree. A tree that was over one hundred years old. A friendship that was over 500 years old. In all those centuries, not once had anyone given up.

Grandpa Charles hadn't given up.

“Of course.” Charlie looked up at his best friend fondly. “I won't let this stop me.”

“You won't try to get revenge on Demon will you?” Belle asked. “I will stop you if you try to kill him.”

“I won't. I might be his grand-son, but I'm not him.” Charlie reassured her.

She smiled at him. He smiled back.

“So who won the cricket game?” Charlie asked.

“No one. It turned into a brawl and Dad sent everyone home to cool off. They'll be back for dinner.” Belle giggled.

“You really shouldn't have paid that LBW.”

“Technically it WAS there.”

“You just like stirring.”

“I do.”

“Are you two going to come in for lunch?” Bill called from Belle's room.

“Just a minute Uncle Bill!” Belle called back. She turned to Charlie.

“You're gonna be okay. I'll make sure of it.” She said.

“I know.” Charlie replied. It hurt, it would always hurt, but there was a light at the end of the tunnel

now, the wound was going to heal.

The pair made their way inside where Bill had made a big pot of stew for lunch. Thomas, Betty, Izzy and Lizzy were there, and Woof was sitting with Meow.

Charlie looked at his mother, who looked away. He guessed that she'd never be able to fully forgive what had happened. He also guessed his sisters felt the same way.

A shame.

The meal was still pleasant enough, Bill and Peter soon got into a fight about the price of oil in Chyna, Betty rolled her eyes, Thomas laughed, the twins ate in silence and Belle, Charlie and Joe had an in-depth discussion about cricket.

It was a fun afternoon, especially when the rest of the Knights came back over and the group headed out to Lake Pleasant for a swim. Charlie could almost ignore the lingering pain in his heart.

—

It was late that night, and Belle was deep in sleep. She always slept well, even as a baby (pneumonia withstanding, then again I wouldn't expect anyone to sleep well with pneumonia). The three walls that bordered her bed always made her feel secure, and crawling in the end of her bed never bothered her.

She was snuggled into one of the corners, snoring peacefully, Meow purring away against her back, when suddenly she was woken up to Charlie shaking her.

“Get up! Something's not right!” He hissed.

“Go back to bed Charlie, it's 11.30 and I'm tired.” Belle rolled over. Meow glared at her before retreating to another corner at the foot of the bed.

“But Belle-,”

“Go. To. Sleep.” Belle mumbled. “You can even stay with me if you absolutely must.”

“BELLE!” Charlie whispered loudly in Belle's ear.

“For the love of...WHAT?!” Belle snapped in hushed tones.

“Something's wrong. Will you do a patrol with me?” Charlie asked.

“NO.”

“C'mon Belle, I have a hunch.”

“A HUNCH?! You woke me up for a HUNCH?!” Belle was furious. Meow wasn't all too impressed either, and jumped off the end of the bed and headed out of the bedroom to go and sleep somewhere quieter!

“Belle, please, just come with me.” Charlie begged.

“Why haven't you hit your watch? If there's a problem, we're going to need everyone to help us.” Belle replied, irked that her sleep was interrupted.

“I don't want to wake up everyone just for a hunch.” Charlie replied.

“But you have no problem waking ME up?!”

“You're my best friend.”

“You're DEAD if we don't find anything.”

—

Chuckles felt nervous. Giggles was jabbing him in the back, and it was only a matter of time before the Lucky Seven Gun came out and he had no kneecaps left.

“We have been around the city TWICE. We have seen NOTHING.” Giggles growled. “You have thirty seconds to explain why I shouldn't eat you alive.”

“Because then you wouldn't have anyone to activate the Improbability Clause for you?” Chuckles tried. He knew the moment that he mentioned the Clause that he'd just signed his own death warrant.

It was only the sound of marching feet that saved him. Giggles grabbed him and flew him up to the top of a building.

“Is that...the DVG?” Giggles asked.

“There are WAY too many of them to be the DVG. And it's not the Mob either, they're all carrying handguns.” Chuckles looked down.

“Then WHO are they? Not Demons lot are they?” Giggles groaned. She hit the face of her watch, praying that at least one of the Knights was still awake enough to see it.

She looked down again and was horrified. Mobster Marion was walking hand-in-hand with Master Revolver!

“We are SO screwed!” Chuckles groaned. “If they're on the same page, Pleasantville is done for!”

Giggles stared at the pair, feeling helpless. Her hand dropped, hitting the Lucky Seven Gun on the way down.

She had a thought. She could take out the pair from where she was sitting. The Lucky Seven Gun could handle a bit of sniper action.

“Don't even think about disobeying the Code.” Chuckles warned in her ear. Giggles slapped herself mentally. How could she have even considered it?!

“We have to get them arrested again.” She whispered.

“Yeah.” Chuckles looked down. The Death Valley Mobsters were all standing in a formation, almost like an army. Master Revolver and Mobster Marion stood in front of them.

Suddenly Chuckles had an idea.

“We need to take out Master Revolver and Mobster Marion. If we can just hold them off until help arrives, we'll be fine!” He said.

“Not going to happen doofus. If we get into a fight with them, it's easily fifty to one. We'll be killed.” Giggles replied. Chuckles ignored her. “CHUCKLES!”

Chuckles leapt from the top of the building to a balcony below, and made his way down the building. Giggles groaned angrily and followed him down.

“Now, our loyal Mobsters, we are going to make this city pay for daring to try and defy – I'M TRYING TO GIVE A SPEECH HERE!” Master Revolver fumed as Chuckles landed in front of him.

“Let me handle this runt.” Mobster Marion glared at the newcomer to their little party. She charged at Chuckles and slashed downwards, but her sword was blocked by one of the Arm Scythes. Chuckles then swung back with the Lions Claw Blade, narrowly missing Mobster Marion but cutting off a fair chunk of Master Revolver's hair.

“What the-? DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT TOOK TO GROW THIS HAIR?!” Master Revolver was livid. Chuckles was still fighting Mobster Marion, and his back was turned to her boyfriend. Master Revolver grinned. He pulled out his gun

He would have fired had it not been for a bullet landing at his feet. Giggles was in the air, and was pointing the Lucky Seven Gun at him.

“You two are trying my patience!” Mobster Marion kicked Chuckles in the guts, sending him sprawling back. Giggles quickly landed next to her best friend, and pointed the Lucky Seven Gun at their foes.

“What on earth are you trying to do here?!” Giggles asked.

“We're seeking vengeance. Don't you see that?” Master Revolver grinned. “We've amassed our forces, and we're now going to remind Pleasantville of our might.”

“Will you just KILL them already?!” Mobster Marion groaned.

“Your might?!” Giggles asked incredulously.

“For two hundred years our families have had Pleasantville under our thumbs. Two little brats can't stop centuries of hard work. That is why we've decided to work together.” Master Revolver explained.

“So, you've laid aside a centuries-old rivalry just to deal with us. I'm flattered.” Giggles snapped.

“Yes, well, you two ARE a fair bit of a nuisance. You and your little Knights of the Last Order. I have to give you credit, you've certainly managed to scare us. But that's more due to our own complacency than any real talent you have. It's only an accident that you two ended up stealing our sacred weapons, that were forged for our forefathers so long ago. But now it's time for the balance to be corrected.” Master Revolver continued on.

“You're rambling.” Mobster Marion rolled her eyes. “Hurry up!”

“You're very impatient Marion.” Giggles pointed out. Chuckles looked up at her. What was Giggles doing?!

“Yes. Impatience has probably worked in your favour, but not tonight. Tonight, we're going to savour every last bit of your defeat. Our colossal triumph begins by making an example of you. To make sure that no one gets the foolish idea to try and take us on again. THAT is what tonight is about. Squashing any hope of resistance that these foolish peasants might have.” Master Revolver straightened himself up. “And furthermore-,”

What he would have said no one knew, because at that moment Sir Hyper bolted past, nearly knocking Master Revolver off his feet.

“What the-?” Mobster Marion looked around. The night then exploded in the colours of red and blue – the police had arrived.

“Chuckles, Giggles! Over here!” Called Sir Dark from a nearby street. Giggles lifted Chuckles up and flew the pair over to where the Knights were.

“What was THAT about?” Giggles asked Sir Hyper.

“When our watches started going off, we realised we'd probably need the police to back us up. Of course, I never realised we'd be THIS right.” Sir Lionheart looked at the many police officers who had now surrounded the small Death Valley Mobsters army. Many of the Mobsters had fled at the sight of the police lights, but a good many of them still got arrested.

Chuckles couldn't help but laugh.

“See? I told you we just had to hold them up!” He thumped Giggles on the back. “The Improbability Clause strikes again!”

Giggles was about to disagree, when she realised he was right.

“The power of exposition!” Chuckles continued to laugh. Meanwhile, Giggles had developed an eye twitch and was fuming.

She turned around and smacked Chuckles upside the head with the butt of the Lucky Seven Gun.

“We're going home. Good NIGHT you guys.” Giggles grabbed Chuckles, whose eyes were watering.

“G'night Giggles! G'night Chuckles!” The Knights waved as the heroes flew off into the night. Once Giggles was out of earshot, they too started laughing.

Poor Belle Masters!

Chapter

17

Once again we find our heroes at Pleasantville Dam, happily fishing.

“This dam has stood the test of time for two hundred years. My fore-father built it with his best friend, Louis.” Joe looked proudly at the feature. “However I don't think it will last too much longer.”

“Do they have a plan to fix it?” Sunny asked, rubbing some more sunscreen onto her arms.

Joe scoffed. Peter shook his head.

“Of course not. I've only been petitioning for it for the past three years.” He scowled as Belle hauled in another large fish.

“You know that they're corrupt in the Council Daddy, why don't you just take the money from the coffers and do it yourself?” She asked innocently.

“What, and be as bad as those I'm trying to prosecute? No thank you!” Peter admonished her.

“It was just a suggestion. Considering how much damage would be done if the dam DID burst, I think it's a good one.” Belle replied haughtily.

“You're having another good idea before me?!” Charlie yelped. “What on earth is going on?!”

It took Thomas, Daniel, TJ, Peter, Joe and Sunny to stop Belle from strangling her best friend with the fishing line.

—

Belle was still stewing later that afternoon. Charlie didn't help the situation any and insisted on needling her when he could. The others had gone home for the evening, and the pair were in their tree waiting for Bill and Betty to finish making dinner.

“Next you'll be able to use the-,” Charlie taunted, but silenced when he saw the look on Belle's face. “You're hilarious when you're mad, you know that right?”

“You're a pain Charlie. Why do I hang out with you again?” Belle frowned at him.

“Because I know too much.” Charlie teased, pinching her cheek affectionately.

“Like Mr. Wuzzy-Fuzzles?” Belle smirked.

Charlie shut up after that.

Belle enjoyed her little victory. She looked out towards the road, noticing a beat-up old Crummydore mounting the curb.

“Visitors?” She said quizzically.

Inside, Peter had also noticed the Crummydore. He'd just finished giving Bill a piece of his mind when he noticed who was driving it.

“Get Beauty inside. NOW.” He commanded his brother.

“You do it yourself!” Bill snapped.

“Bill, NOW.” Peter gave him a Look. Bill stepped back.

“Okay, whatever. BELLE! GET INSIDE NOW!” Bill yelled as he headed up the stairs.

“What's up?” Joe asked.

“Jessie and Johannas.” Peter replied.

Joe froze.

“BELLE! NOW! NO ARGUMENTS!” Bill roared as he entered her room.

“But-,”

“NOW!” Bill reached through the window and grabbed her. Charlie followed her inside.

“Close the windows and stay put!” Bill warned. He'd just noticed the car too – and he knew what it meant.

“Uncle Bill-,”

“Belle, trust me on this. Do as you're told.” Bill growled. That instantly silenced Belle, who was now a little scared.

Unlike her older brothers, Jessie looked like her mother, only with her father's dark hair instead of the blond hair the boys shared with their mother. She was tall and thin with dark circles under her blue eyes.

Her boyfriend Johannas was just as thin, with a shaved head, numerous tattoos, brown eyes and a leering smile. He stank of alcohol and he hid his red eyes behind a pair of oversized sunglasses.

Jessie had left the Masters family before Belle was born. She couldn't stand the Masters Code nor the Improbability Clause, and thought both were old and antiquated (and in the case of the Improbability Clause, completely fictional). The fight that she'd had with Joe the night before she left was much, much worse than the petty squabbles between Joe and his sons, and it had left Joe in tears. That night Peter and Bill turned on their sister and refused to acknowledge her as their relation. It had killed Peter inside to do it, as he had been raised to believe his number one priority was to protect his siblings at all costs.

Seeing her now, he realised that she had never changed. Even as children, she'd been the odd one out. She'd never fully embraced the family Code, or the friendship with the Beglys for that matter. There was nothing anyone could have done.

“What does she want?” Bill growled after he got back downstairs.

“I don't know, but she better not think that Johannas is coming inside.” Peter said firmly. Last time Jessie had come back with Johannas, he'd tried to molest Belle in her sleep. Peter had caught him before he even got close though, and had earned himself his second scar in the process. Belle thankfully had no idea what the ensuing fight had been about, assuming that the argument had just

been the stock standard one that was always going on.

The three went outside to meet the unwelcome pair. Belle peeked underneath her curtain, then quickly closed it again. Johannas scared her.

“Are you okay?” Charlie asked.

“Jessie and Johannas.” Belle replied. Charlie hugged her. He had a quick look outside too, and saw the three Masters men standing outside. Thomas was outside too, pretending to weed his petunias.

Jessie got out of the car, and walked towards her family. Johannas leaned back against the car, smirking. Two of his friends were sitting in the car, big, hulking men who oozed trouble.

“Jessie.” Peter frowned.

“Peter. Bill. Dad.” Jessie glared back.

“What are you after?” Peter asked unkindly.

“What, I'm not allowed to come and see my family after so long?” Jessie bit back.

“Considering what happened last time, I think I have the right to be wary.” Peter said, glaring at Johannas, who chuckled.

“Get out of it Peter, he didn't hurt her.” Jessie snapped.

“Only because I stopped him.” Was the cold reply.

The two siblings glared at each other.

“Aren't you going to say anything Dad?” Jessie turned to her father.

“I've said all I ever have to say to you Jess.” Joe said sadly. “You won't listen to me.”

“All you ever talk about is that stupid Code.” Jessie fired.

“It's our family Code! YOUR code!” Bill protested. “You're one of us!”

“Apparently not any more.” Jessie glared at him. “You're right Jo, I don't know why I came back.”

“I told you they wouldn't have a bar of it.” Johannas sneered. “They don't care about you.”

“Unfortunately that happens when you get your heart broken.” Peter snarled.

“You can't even let it go for the sake of your own niece or nephew? Pathetic.” Johannas got up off the car and walked towards Peter. Bill and Joe flinched as he stood right in front of the oldest Masters son.

“You're pregnant Jessie?” Peter asked, looking down his nose at Johannas.

“Yes. I am. I came to you for help and instead I'm being thrown out.” Jessie rounded on him.

“We'll help. Just keep Johannas away from us.” Peter said.

“Johannas is the father. If you help me, you help him.” Jessie bit back.

“Then we have nothing to discuss.” Peter finished the conversation.

“I'm your sister.” Jessie began to tear up.

“And you hurt my brother and my father. Your little boyfriend tried to hurt my daughter. I think I know whose side I'm on.” Peter looked at his baby sister. Pregnant with the fools child. He pitied her a little.

Two tears leaked from Jessies eyes. Johannas fumed.

“You made her cry you bastard!” He roared at Peter.

“She made us cry.” Peter replied.

Johannas swung violently at Peter, who dodged. With one hand to the chest, he sent Johannas flying to the ground.

Thomas roared with laughter. Johannas had landed in a muddy puddle, and his pants were now stained brown. Peters expression hadn't changed.

His two friends suddenly leaped out of the car and headed towards the three Masters. That's when Thomas got up and came over.

“I'll handle these two.” He smirked. Peter groaned.

“They're younger, stronger and faster than you.” He said. “You're going to get thumped.”

“Heh. Improbability time.” Thomas replied.

The two thugs rushed at him. One went to punch Thomas, and ended up getting his fist caught. Thomas threw him aside easily. The other tried to grab him around the throat from behind. Thomas merely leaned back, causing the thug to slip on the wet grass. He went down, Thomas landing heavily on top of him.

“And done.” Thomas got up, proud of himself.

“Come on Jo, let's go.” Jessie pulled Johannas up as his friends rushed back to the car. He swatted her away angrily.

“Get your hands off me bitch!” He shoved her aside and stalked back to the car.

Jessie took one last look at her brothers and father. Peter, the way she'd always remembered him, with his neat short hair and short build. Bill and Joe, both tall and solid with long hair, the only difference between them being the number of scars and Bills blond hair against Joes dark hair. With one last glare, she jumped in the car and the group drove off.

Thomas grinned and got up.

“Did you see that? How good was I Ow!” Thomas bragged as Peter smacked him upside the head.

“My ONE moment of badassery. ONE moment, and you RUINED it!” Peter fumed.

Sometimes it's hard to be a Masters.

Chapter

18

Several weeks passed, bringing summer and the end of the year upon Pleasantville. Belle had easily passed all of her subjects, and was ready for her final year of high school.

“I do love summer. If it's not hot days off to the beach or at the creek, it's the rainy days watching the lightening and listening to the thunder.” She sat in the tree one day watching the rain hit the creek.

“Budge over, I'm getting wet.” Charlie shoved her gently, trying to get under the thick cover of the leaves and the tarp that had been erected many years ago. “So, any idea what you're going to do after school?”

“I want to get a start at the new University that opened up last year and study law. They're going to let me in next year even though I'll only be in year twelve.” Belle replied smugly.

“You're kidding me!” Charlie grinned. “Good for you Belle!”

Belle grinned back. Charlie couldn't help but be proud of his best friend, even though she was blessed with genius she was still hard-working. She had earned this opportunity, and he knew she'd make the most of it.

“What about you Charlie?” Belle asked.

“I'm finishing year twelve and then heading into the family business. Dad wants me to do an apprenticeship as a metal worker.” Charlie replied. “I can't wait to learn all of the little family secrets and expand the family empire.”

“Expand?” Belle asked.

“Dad's been mainly concerned with building supplies and the like. I want to start servicing the rural towns around the area, I know a lot of farmers head this way to stock up on things and I'd like to be leading the way in this particular market.” Charlie began talking very seriously, which made Belle giggle a little.

“You're certainly starting to sound grown-up Charlie! Maybe you should do some marketing at the university with me?” She suddenly had an idea.

“Yeah! We can go to uni together!” Charlie jumped up, knocking down the tarp and drenching the pair of them.

“You complete and utter idiot.” Belle deadpanned.

—

Demons latest trick had been trying to poison the city water supply (and on a Saturday too!). That particular plan had ended when he and four of his goons had nearly drowned in Lake Pleasant, requiring Giggles to rescue them.

“That was pretty stupid don't you think?” Giggles asked as she flew Demon back to dry land.

“Shut up. My dignity is already in tatters, there's no need to rub it in.” Demon glowered.

“Given you're a murdering narcissist, maybe you need taking down a few pegs.” Giggles tossed him

unkindly onto the bank.

“You're very blunt. But I'm afraid my plan hasn't been entirely unsuccessful.” Demon picked himself up out of the mud. “The glass jar in which the poison resides is still out there somewhere on the banks of Pleasant Creek.”

“You WHAT?!” Giggles was furious.

“Happy searching cherub!” Demon bowed before letting off another one of his smoke bombs.

“DARN you Demon!” Giggles flew above the big smoke cloud, hoping to see where Demon had escaped to. Unfortunately, she couldn't find him.

She flew back to where Sir Hyper, Lady Courage and Chuckles were watching the action.

“The vial of poison is still out there near the creek. All it takes is some wild animal to get a hold of it and there could be serious trouble.” Giggles told them.

“I'll get Lady Silent on to it. She can find anything in Pleasantville!” Sir Hyper grabbed out his phone.

“You start looking by air, Lady Courage and I will check out the ground level.” Chuckles told Giggles.

“Right.” Giggles nodded. “Someone better get the others too.”

“I'll take care of it.” Lady Courage pushed the face of her watch in.

“First one to find it gets a chocolate bar off the others!” Chuckles ran off.

“No way!” Giggles flew after him.

The group of heroes combed the banks for a few hours, trying to find the poison. As much as Sir Hyper begged, the local police force were no help (usually the case on a Saturday).

“Where could it be?!” Sir Lionheart surfaced after swimming around trying to find the vial.

“It could be anywhere. Hopefully still sealed.” Lady Luck was wading on the other bank. “Of course, the current is so fast.”

“That's how Demon got swept away.” Sir Lionheart prepared to dive in again.

“Get in the water Sammy.” Sir Dark frowned at Sir Hyper, who was refusing to get into the water.

“No.”

“Mate-,”

“NO.”

“We need your help!”

“NO!”

“Sam-,”

“NO NO NO!”

Giggles meanwhile was continuing her flight up the creek, stopping every so often for a brief recharge so she didn't go flying into the creek a la Demon. She wondered to herself what on earth possessed him to try and poison the city water supply – surely he couldn't be that embittered by whatever had happened between him and the Pleasantville City Council that the deaths of many of its citizens was worth it?

The rain that had let off for most of the day suddenly came back with a vengeance. Giggles cursed under her breath – their task had just gotten harder.

Her watch beeped. She took a quick look at it.

“Meeting up at the dam.” Was the message from Sir Dark.

Shrugging, Giggles gave up and soared towards the dam. She managed to get there just as the others arrived.

The dam was in a dire state. It wouldn't take much longer for it to fall apart. Then Giggles saw it.

“Oh NO! The vial of poison! It's been stuck into one of the cracks in the dam!” Giggles dived down to where the blue bottle was sticking out.

“Drat! There's no way we can get that out without bringing the dam down!” Chuckles groaned.

“There has to be SOME way of doing it!” Sir Hyper looked at the bottle, which was just above his head.

Lady Silent shoved past him holding a toolbox. She tugged at Lady Luck and Lady Courage, motioning them to help. She set down the toolbox and pulled out a pair of pliers. She motioned for Lady Luck to stand on one side and Lady Courage on the other, both of them holding the fragile rocks either side of the vial.

Carefully as the rain beat down on them, Lady Silent worked on getting that vial loose. It took about ten minutes, but finally she managed to pry it free.

“Well done Lady Silent!” Sir Dark cheered as the others celebrated. Giggles turned cartwheels in the air while Chuckles punched the air.

Lady Silent smiled proudly as she put the vial away into her bag.

“I bet that was Demons plan, to try and make us trigger a flood!” Sir Hyper growled.

“But we won and he lost!” Lady Courage thumped his back, making him cough.

“We'd better get away from here before something goes wrong.” Giggles said. She swooped down and landed next to Chuckles.

“I think we earned a hot chocolate.” Chuckles said, wiping the rain out of his eyes.

“And a hot shower.” Sir Dark shivered.

“I reckon we should have a movie night. It's the weather for it!” Sir Lionheart proposed.

This suggestion was met with cheers, and the group headed off.

Then they heard the creaking.

“What was that?” Sir Dark asked.

One of the rocks near where the vial had sat had popped out, spewing water out.

“Oh no...RUN FOR IT!” Sir Lionheart cried as more rocks began to pop out.

The group bolted back towards the city, hoping that they would make it in time.

Pleasant Creek and Lake Pleasant were about to return to their former glory.

Chapter

19

“DAD! DAD! THE DAM IS BREAKING!” Belle cried, running into the house.

“What?!” Peter poked his head out of the bathroom.

“Demon tried to poison the water but instead he's triggered a flood! Get everything together and we need to get out of here! THOMAS! BETTY! FLOOD!” Belle ran over next door.

“Oh no! Quick, get the essentials and let's get to the hotel. The guys there will let me in and we can stay there until the dam gets fixed.” Bill grabbed a bag and started emptying all the cupboards.

“I'll get our stuff organised.” Joe grabbed the bag. “Bill, get to the hotel and let them know what's going on. They're going to be full!”

“Beauty!” Peter called. Belle appeared. “Get your Giggles get up back on and start telling people what's going on.”

“Yes Dad!” Belle put her helmet back on and flew off. Peter meanwhile shot upstairs to grab anything they could use as Joe fought to get Meow into her cat carrier (not even the threat of an imminent drenching would convince her to get into that detested thing!).

Meanwhile, the Knights were having no luck convincing people to leave their homes and head for higher ground. Most of the people in the outer east suburbs would be okay, but anyone living on the west side would be in huge trouble.

“Why doesn't anyone want to listen to us?!” Sir Dark groaned as he got another filthy look from a passerby he was trying to warn.

“I've had a little bit of luck, but not much. Everyone seems content to just bury their heads in the sand!” Lady Luck replied as the rain continued to fall.

“Explains a lot about this city.” Sir Dark looked to the sky.

“We have to keep trying.” Lady Luck pulled him along.

“Sir, please, you have to get out of here, the dam is about to burst!” Sir Lionheart was trying to talk an old man into leaving his home.

“But this has been my home for sixty years son! I can't just abandon it!” The old man cried.

“You'll die if you don't!” Sir Lionheart groaned.

“Says you!”

Giggles flew overhead, shouting as loud as she could.

“THE DAM IS ABOUT TO BURST! PLEASE LEAVE YOUR HOMES AND FIND HIGHER GROUND! THE DAM IS ABOUT TO BURST!”

Sir Hyper and Lady Silent had tried to talk the police into helping, but had nearly gotten arrested for their trouble. They looked up at the sky and saw Giggles trying to raise the alarm.

“Don't bother Giggles. The police are against us. They think we're trying to cause trouble.” Sir

Hyper said dejectedly.

“How stupid are these people?!” Giggles facepalmed.

Chuckles ran over with Sir Dark and Lady Luck.

“I've gotten a few people to move, but I doubt many will go until the water starts flowing.” He said. “Your Dad is having a lot more luck though Giggles.”

“Well, he IS a public figure.” Giggles pointed out. “People will listen to him.”

“We're public figures too!” Sir Hyper pouted.

“Yeah, but we're vigilantes. Technically what we're doing is illegal.” Sir Dark patted his back.

Giggles flew up to the top of one of the tallest buildings in the city. She could see everything, including the hotel room where Bill and Joe arguing while Betty was trying to keep Izzy and Lizzy calm and Meow was grooming Woof.

She could also see the dam in the distance...or what was left of it.

“RUN FOR YOUR LIVES! THE DAM HAS BURST!” Someone ran screaming through the city.

Cue mass panic.

“Well, that's just a blow to my ego.” Sir Lionheart deadpanned.

“Come on, we need to find the others!” Lady Courage grabbed his arm and they ran towards the city.

Thousands of people were running into the four tall buildings of Pleasantvilles CBD. The Knights of the Last Order were rushing around like mad to try and catch the stragglers and anyone else who was having trouble.

—

“We gotta get outta here Jo!” Jessie jumped out of the Crummydore, which was refusing to start. Water was starting to rise around them.

“I've got stuff in the back, we can't leave without it!” Johannas roared back angrily.

“Mate, we gotta go before we all drown!” One of his friends begged him.

“WE'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE WITHOUT THE CAR!” Johannas fumed. “C'mon you useless hunk of junk MOVE!”

“Jo please!” Jessie begged.

Overhead, Giggles was flying around looking for any other stragglers. Sure enough, she noticed her aunt and her friends who were in big trouble.

“Here! Grab on to me before the water gets too high!” Giggles commanded.

“The Backpack?” Jessie looked at Giggles quizzically, but wisely said no more. Struggling, Giggles managed to get Jessie and her two friends out of harms way.

Johannas on the other hand...

“I'm not leaving my stuff here!” He swatted Giggles away.

“You'll drown if you don't!” Giggles tried to pull him out of the car. He swung wildly at her.

“GET THE HELL AWAY FROM ME!” He roared.

“Oh for the love of...” Giggles groaned as he stumbled back into the car. Pulling out the Lucky Seven Gun, she shot at his foot, barely grazing him.

“You shot me! YOU SHOT ME AND NOW I'M GOING TO DIE!” Johannas screamed, frozen with terror as Giggles lifted him up and flew away, just as a large wave came and pushed the car away.

“You complete and utter pansy.” Giggles shook her head.

—

A small group of people had gotten trapped on the roof of a small building near the hotel, and the water was still rising. Sir Lionheart and Sir Dark were trying to think of a plan to save them.

“Someone could swim out with a ladder or something for them to climb on.” Sir Lionheart suggested.

Sir Hyper was hiding back towards the wall where the water couldn't get him. He squeaked at Sir Lionheart's suggestion.

“Are you insane?! You'll drown!” He cried.

“I'll tie a rope on whomever goes.” Sir Dark assured him.

Lady Silent gave her brother a hug, and went to fetch a ladder. Sir Dark tied a rope firmly around Sir Lionheart's waist, and then tied the other end to himself. Lady Silent then handed one end of the ladder to Sir Lionheart, who eased himself into the uneasy waters.

Sir Hyper couldn't watch. He covered his eyes as Sir Lionheart swam out, holding on to the ladder for dear life.

“It's Sir Lionheart! We're saved!” Someone cried as the Knight made his way with the ladder, which barely made the distance between the two buildings. Lady Silent had her arms stretched out.

“Okay guys, you need to climb the ladder to where Sir Dark and Lady Silent are. They'll get you upstairs where you can have something to eat and dry off.” Sir Lionheart explained, thankful that at least the Beglys and Masters had been sensible enough to bring plenty of food.

“Are you sure it's safe?” Someone else asked.

“It's your only chance, the water is rising too high and this building will be underwater soon!” Sir

Lionheart replied.

Slowly, the small crowd of about twenty started to make their way up the ladder. The water was starting to lap at Sir Lionheart's feet.

"Come on, it's okay, we've got you." Sir Dark tried to be reassuring as he helped the poor people off the ladder.

Finally, the last person was safe, just as the water was up to Sir Lionheart's waist.

Quickly Sir Dark began to pull him back in, with Lady Silent helping with the ladder. Without warning, the ladder lurched in the water, sending both Sir Dark and Lady Silent into the murky depths!

"NO!" Sir Hyper cried as he watched his twin sister disappear before his eyes.

Blind adrenaline took over. He ran after her and dived into the water. Grabbing blindly, he took firm hold of his sister and struggled to the edge of the window.

Lady Silent still had a hold of the ladder, which Sir Dark also gripped tightly. Rain pounded down on the four Knights, who were pretty much doomed.

"Hey you guys are there any more...OH SNAP!" Lady Courage walked into the room, seeing Sir Hyper holding onto the ledge for dear life. She quickly hauled the twins in, followed by Sir Dark. Then the four pulled in Sir Lionheart, who was blue in the face and barely conscious.

"Well done Sir Hyper!" Sir Dark thumped the young boy on the back. "I knew you could conquer your fear if you tried!"

"What an act! Maybe you should hold the Courage mantle!" Lady Courage hugged the boy.

Sir Hyper, for probably the first and only time in his life, was speechless. Then he started crying loudly.

"Poor kid." Sir Dark ruffled his hair as Lady Silent hugged him tightly.

—

"Stop...STRUGGLING!" Giggles tried to keep Johannas under control. Her uncle was seriously trying her patience!

"You brat! Let me go!" Johannas tried to get away.

"Why did I save you again?" Giggles wondered out aloud. The hotel was in sight, and there was no way she was going back out after this.

The rain had stopped, and the sun was finally peeking out from behind the clouds. The water had stopped rushing thankfully, and most of the citizens of Pleasantville had survived. The whole city was underwater, and it would take weeks to clean it up.

"Look, we're almost there, will you please cooperate?!" Giggles was losing her patience.

Johannas growled and swore quite loudly and obscenely at her. She looked down and saw a small speedboat weaving between the few exposed rooftops.

“GIGGLES! DROP HIM DOWN HERE!” Called a familiar voice. Giggles grinned beneath her helmet. Trust her Dad to go out looking for her!

“No problems!” Giggles swooped down and dropped Johannas next to his two brothers-in-law. She wasn't staying around for the fireworks though!

She soared through the air, enjoying the peace and the thrill of flying. She could feel the weight of her body being held up by the Backpack, defying gravity, as if two strong hands were lifting her up and flying her around.

It felt great. She made her way back to the hotel, when the Backpack gave out again.

“Oh no, hold on! I'm almost there!” She cried as gravity took its toll. She was certain she was going to meet a watery doom, when she felt someone grab her wrist.

“Showing off really isn't getting you anywhere is it?” She heard a familiar smug voice above her.

“Thanks Chuckles.” Giggles looked up at her best friend. He hoisted her up and took off his mask while she took off her helmet.

“Dad really should have embezzled that money when he had the chance. Look at this mess.” Belle sighed, looking out over the ruined city.

“Maybe it's better this way. The Council might actually learn something.” Charlie pointed out.

“I hope so.” Belle said. “I don't see how this can get any worse.”

Famous last words Belle. Famous last words.

Chapter

20

It took about a week for the Council to start work on cleaning up the city. The dam was quickly rebuilt, and the water took another week to drain off. Before then people had started to move out to the eastern suburbs which had escaped virtually unscathed.

However, things were happening in the hotel.

Daniel was quiet. Too quiet. He had barely spoken after getting fished out of the water by Sir Hyper, and usually only offered shrugs or grunts in answer to any questions from the other Knights.

“Something's wrong with our fearless leader.” Sunny dragged the Knights into a spare room a few days after the water started receding.

“I know. But he won't tell us what's wrong.” Petunia sighed sadly.

“He gets like this sometimes guys, you know he'll snap out of it.” TJ tried to cheer them up.

“Yeah, but it's usually only for a couple of hours. He's been like this for over a week now.” Petunia argued.

“I wonder if he's upset about nearly drowning.” Sammy piped up. Tammy nodded.

“Maybe. But he's had plenty of near-death experiences before.” Sunny pointed out.

The five of them looked at each other. Daniel was their leader, their hero, and if there was something wrong with him then it affected the whole Order.

Speaking of the devil, Daniel walked in soon after that.

“Hey guys. Team meeting without me?” He joked, but the joke was hollow.

“About you, actually.” TJ looked at his best friend.

Sunny closed the door and locked it.

“You're going to have to talk to us Dan, something's up and we want to help you.” Petunia said gently.

“I'm fine.” Daniel shifted uncomfortably. “Unlock the door Sunny.”

“Not until you talk to us Sir Lionheart.” Sunny replied, taking her Lady Courage tone.

“There's nothing to talk about.”

“There IS, that's why Sir Dark called us in.” Petunia took her Lady Luck tone. “You've been quiet and moody since the flood!”

“Everyone's been on edge!” Daniel snapped back.

“We've still been talking to each other and helping each other.” Sammy stood up as Sir Hyper. Tammy took her Lady Silent stance beside him.

“You're committing mutiny?!” Daniel looked around horrified. Sir Dark frowned at him.

“NO mate, we want to help you. We need you to be okay. You're our leader and our friend.” He begged of Daniel. “We need you to be Sir Lionheart, we need to follow you!”

“After I nearly got three of you killed?!” Daniel cried. He immediately went silent.

“We're nearly getting ourselves killed all the time. What happened wasn't your fault.” Sir Dark clapped his shoulder.

“I shouldn't have dragged you guys into it.” Daniel flopped down on a couch, tears beginning to form. “I should never have let you guys become Knights.”

“Oh BUNKUM!” Lady Courage roared angrily. Everyone jumped. “If it wasn't for us you wouldn't even BE Sir Lionheart.”

“You wouldn't be able to be Sir Lionheart if you didn't let us be Knights – no matter what you do we'll follow you anywhere!” Sir Hyper piped up.

“If you're Sir Lionheart, then we're the Knights of the Last Order. We won't let you do it alone!” Lady Courage added.

“You took on the bulk of the danger yourself, like you always do. You didn't do anything wrong, it was just bad luck.” Lady Luck tried.

“You couldn't have saved those people alone. And you couldn't have just left them.” Sir Dark added.

Lady Silent took Daniel's hand and squeezed it tightly. She looked up at him with such devotion and loyalty that he couldn't hold back the tears any longer.

“I'm sorry guys.” Sir Lionheart admitted.

“It's okay mate. We all have our moments.” Sir Dark breathed a sigh of relief.

“YAY! Sir Lionheart is okay again!” Sir Hyper jumped up in his usual hyperactive way. Sir Lionheart grinned.

He hadn't realised how much these kids looked up to him. How much they wanted to be like him and copy him. How much they all needed him to be their leader and hero. It was scary really. But not surprising, given that most of them he'd looked after ever since they were little.

—

Things weren't going as well for Chuckles and Giggles however.

“Why did you save him again?” Betty deadpanned as Johannas screamed down the walls. They had forced him into one of the spare rooms and locked him in so he couldn't hurt anyone. His violent episodes were becoming more and more dangerous.

“Because...job description?” Belle tried. “He's technically my uncle and the father of my cousin-to-be?”

“Well, I hope you're happy.” Betty replied shortly. She stalked off, scowling at Jessie who was

sitting near the door.

“Thanks Belle. I thought we were done for.” Jessie looked up at her niece, who looked sadly at the door Betty had just stormed through.

“It's no problem. The Code demanded it.” Belle shrugged.

“The stupid Code.” Jessie chuckled. She took another mouthful of hot soup. “I never understood why the family had to have a Code to tell them how to behave like human beings.”

“It's more than that.” Belle argued.

“Really?” Jessie looked at her sceptically.

“You'll never get it.” Belle shook her head and walked out. She headed outside, where Charlie was sitting.

“How's your aunt?” He asked sympathetically.

“Eh.” Was the sullen reply.

Charlie smiled sadly, and put an arm around his best friend. They sat there cuddled up with their heads together, watching the water slowly drain away.

“She seems okay. She's very dead-set against the Code though.” Belle said finally.

“Being against the Code doesn't necessarily make you a bad person.” Charlie reminded her. “Think of your great-Aunt Matilda.”

“Yeah, I know. But Johannas is different. He's so...” Belle didn't want to say “evil”, but that's how she felt.

“I know.” Charlie replied softly.

They continued to look out over the drowned city.

“Do you know where Dad is?” Belle asked. “I haven't seen much of him.”

“He's been busy with the Council. They're thinking of making him Mayor after this.” Charlie grinned.

“It won't happen, he's not corrupt enough.” Belle laughed.

A loud bang was heard from inside, along with screaming.

“Wait, that's not just Johannas...JESSIE!” Belle cried. She and Charlie bolted inside, quickly joined by Peter, Bill, Joe and Thomas.

“He locked it!” Peter groaned as they approached the room where Johannas and Jessie were.

“JO PLEASE!” They heard Jessie scream in terror.

“SHUT UP!” They heard the roar back.

“I’ll go and get help.” Thomas said, running down the corridor. Peter and Bill started trying to break the door down, hoping they weren’t too late to save their baby sister.

“What the hell did she let him out for?!” Bill slammed as hard as he could against the door. More bloodcurdling screams were heard from inside, along with a sick gurgling noise.

“JESSIE!” Peter screamed, slamming himself against the door in rhythm with his brother.

Belle had to do something. She ran to where her pack was and grabbed the Desert Eagle her grand-father had once wielded. She ran back to where her father and uncle were still trying to get into the cursed room.

“Stand back!” Belle cried, aiming the gun at the lock. She fired, hitting the lock dead on, and Peter kicked the door in.

A bloodied Johannas flew out at him, grabbing him around the throat. Belle acted blindly, kicking Johannas aside, punching his face and pointing the gun directly into his eyes for a split second before recovering herself.

A Masters never willingly takes the life of another.

Johannas grinned.

“Bless the Code.” He sneered before pushing her away and running.

“JESSIE!” Belle heard her grand-father scream in terror. She ran into the room.

Her aunt lay in her fathers arms. Joe was trying to keep her calm, but she kept reaching up to touch his face. Tears dripped from his cheeks to her bloodied chest as she tried to wipe them away, leaving bloody marks on his face.

“I’m...sorry...Papa...” She gurgled through her slit throat before she died.

Joe lowered his head. He gently reached out to her eyes and closed them.

“I’m sorry Dad.” Peter wept, dropping to his knees beside his father. Joe grabbed him and held him tightly. Bill was frozen in place, shaking his head.

“This is...it can’t...Oh Jess.” Bill too fell to his knees and into the embrace of his father.

Belle was angry. She turned to Charlie, but then found she couldn’t say anything.

“Go to them.” He whispered.

Belle turned and fled, latching on to her father.

Thomas ran in with a small group of medics. He stopped when he saw the scene.

“I’m too late.” His breath caught in his throat. Jessie had been his little sister too. He turned to his son, who held him.

Belle looked up at her best friend. She couldn't cry.

But she was going to make sure that Johannas was brought to justice.

Chapter

21

Once the water was down, the funeral was held. Joe spent most of it shaking. A brother and a daughter. Both gone within a year.

Peter was feeling empty. Impotent. Jessie had always been his responsibility, and now she was dead.

Bill had lost his little sidekick. The pair had been inseparable as children, and he'd never fully forgiven her for abandoning the Code. Now he was prepared to forgive anything.

Belle didn't know how to feel. She knew this was her aunt whom her family had loved, but she had never known her. She knew she had to get Johannas though. She had to stop him from hurting anyone else.

The Code, no, her Code, demanded it.

—

“IT'S THE MOB!”

“RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!”

Oh come on. Like you DIDN'T expect the Death Valley Mob to start looting the moment the water went down.

“You know, I do like floods. Makes it so much easier to escape gaol for one thing.” Master Revolver walked along the street with a sack of stolen goods. Even though most of the city had been completely submerged, there was still a fair bit of stuff that hadn't been hurt.

“And you do get such nice things for a very reasonable price.” Mobster Marion inspected her new diamond ring, courtesy of her boyfriend.

The pair strutted happily along the road, enjoying the screams of terror and the looting being done by their underlings around them.

“I'm SO glad my family built on the east side. My mansion is fine, I get new things, the city is ours for the taking...oh isn't life wonderful?!” Mobster Marion went into a rapture, making Master Revolver laugh.

“As long as my girl is happy, then so am I.” He took her hands and swung her around into his arms.

“You lying hound.” Mobster Marion batted her eye lashes at him. “Only stealing and hurting others makes you happy.”

“Oh you know me too well.”

“You two are disgusting.”

“Oh poo. What do YOU want Demon?” Mobster Marion glared at the villainous swine.

“Me? I just want to be thanked for my efforts. It was my hard work that triggered this flood in the first place.” Demon smirked.

“Yes, we heard about the poison plan.” Master Revolver narrowed his eyes. “What WAS in that

bottle?"

"Blue food colouring." Demon laughed.

"And you MEANT to cause a widespread flood?" Mobster Marion raised an eyebrow. Demon hesitated. "I thought so. You just got lucky." Mobster Marion laughed.

"The fact is that without me, you two wouldn't be enjoying yourselves nearly half as much!" Demon fired.

"Because I've never escaped from gaol without your help before." Master Revolver rolled his eyes.

"Whatever. I see you're not going to show any gratitude." Demon turned away, angry.

"Bye bye Demon!" Mobster Marion waved as Demon stalked off. Both she and Master Revolver roared with laughter at themselves.

Demon headed down a nearby alleyway, furious. How DARE they mock him?! Hadn't he proven a match for Chuckles and Giggles, not to mention the Knights of the Last Order? Hadn't he destroyed Sapphire?

He was stewing furiously until he came across a sad, pathetic individual slouched against the wall, sobbing loudly.

"What's wrong with YOU?" Demon looked down his nose at the man.

"I killed my girlfriend. I killed my baby." The man sobbed.

"Oh. That IS a shame." Demon sat down next the forlorn creature.

"I lost all my dope too." The man sniffled.

Demon smirked inwardly. This guy could be a good lackey if given the drugs he wanted.

"You haven't had the best time have you?" Demon put an arm around the man. "What's your name?"

"Johannas." Was the sullen reply.

"Well Johannas, how would you like to come with me? We can get you something to eat, a nice hot shower, and all the drugs you can ask for." Demon grinned.

"You mean it?" Johanna asked, perking up.

"Of course." Demon helped the man to his feet. "As long as you promise to help me, you can have whatever you like."

"Oh THANK YOU!" Johannas hugged him tightly. Demon patted his back gently.

"Now lets get out of this cold alleyway hey?" Demon helped Johannas to walk.

Meanwhile, the Death Valley Mobsters were having their party crashed.

“Hi hi Marion! Hi hi Revolver! You guys been shopping?” Giggles flew around the heads of the two Mobsters.

“None of your business you runt!” Master Revolver tried to swat her away.

“Be nice to my best friend!”

Master Revolver suddenly found himself on the wrong end of the Lions Claw Blade – and Chuckles!

“Watch where you're pointing that thing amateur!” Mobster Marion growled, pulling out her own blade.

Meanwhile, two of their unfortunate lackeys had come face-to-face with Sir Dark and Lady Courage. Sir Hyper was happily taunting a third who had dropped a rather expensive television set, and the rest were being sorted out by the other Knights.

“Do you ALWAYS have to bring your little posse with you?!” Master Revolver glared at the Knights.

“Only when you do.” Replied Giggles.

Demon quickly poked his head out of the alley way and saw the confrontation. Johannas suddenly yelped.

“It's her! She's the one who made me kill my girlfriend!” Johannas cried. Demon raised an eyebrow. Who was this guy kidding? Giggles seemed like the type who would never condone murder.

“I want to kill her too. I want her to pay for what she did.” Johannas growled. Demon grinned.

“Well then, why don't you go and get her?” Demon suggested casually. “Climb up this stairwell here to get to the roof, and get her from there!”

Johannas grinned and started climbing. He got to the top and leapt at Giggles.

“Oh – NO!” Giggles soared upward trying to shake her attacker off. She threw him back on the roof and landed near him, when she noticed who it was.

Johannas. The man who had murdered her aunt and unborn cousin.

“Get her Johannas!” Demon called from below. Giggles grimaced.

“I thought Demon was all about righting the wrongs of society through force, but now I see he's only after power. Why else would he associate with a murderer?” She glared at Johannas, ready to take him down.

Johannas flew at Giggles in a rage. Giggles went for the Lucky Seven Gun.

A Masters will never willingly take the life of another.

She froze. Johannas began raining down blows on her. She couldn't fight back, her mind had locked

up and her body wouldn't move.

“You're a pathetic piece of rubbish and I'm going to make you pay for everything you've done!” Johannas roared. Giggles felt like she was being ripped apart. He threw her to the ground and sneered at her.

Unfortunately for him, he didn't get the chance to finish her. As he was going to stomp her, he too found himself at the wrong end of the Lions Claw Blade.

“Leave my best friend alone.” Chuckles said evenly, but Giggles could hear him seething. Johannas realised he was no match for the swords man, and quickly made his way back to Demons side.

Giggles got up slowly. She noticed that Mobster Marion and Master Revolver had made a getaway.

“They're long gone. But they'll be back.” Chuckles answered her mute question. “And so will he.”

Giggles folded her arms across her legs and sighed. “I'm sorry.” She whispered.

Chuckles knelt down next to her.

“You have nothing to be sorry for buddy. I probably would be the same way with Demon.” He said, gripping her hand. He thought of his grand-father. “You can't beat yourself up. It's too soon after the trauma for you to be able to face him.”

“I wanted to kill him. But I kept thinking of the Code. What's wrong with me?!” Giggles balled up her hands into fists.

“Wasn't the Masters Code originally created to help curb the violent tendencies of the Masters clan?” Chuckles asked. “You're just feeling the echos of some leftover genetics.”

“Leftover genetics.” Giggles sighed. “Brilliant.”

She couldn't escape the feelings no matter how hard she tried.

“Come on, let's head back. You can fly me some of the way.” Chuckles helped her up. He hugged her tightly.

“I won't let you break the Code. I promise you. Just like you wouldn't let me.”

“I know.”

They held each other for a long time, both thinking of the ones they'd lost.

Life wasn't fair.