

Chapter 1

1672

The docks were at their best at this time of day. With the sun half in the water and the wind blowing away the afternoon's business, it was as if Jason was alone in the world.

The lapping sound of water against the quay had a calming effect on him. A shriek of a lonely seagull was the only thing disturbing the peaceful quietness the colourful sky had created.

A high-pitched scream brought Jason right back to reality. The yell came from a girl a few years older than himself, standing a couple of feet behind him. She was surrounded by a group of boys of the same age. One boy pulled her skirt, and another one grabbed her arms.

The sight of it filled him with rage. Although Jason was alone and -minor detail- eleven years old, he did not hesitate for a second to help. He ran into the group and bashed against the boy who was trying to put his arm around the girl's waist. The boy stumbled back, and Jason turned around, but the girl was nowhere to be found.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and stared right into the face of one of the boys. His heart pounded heavily in his chest as fear grew inside him. Fear was a curious thing. It could make one freeze up in an instant, but it could also boost the adrenaline to save one's life.

Without thinking, Jason turned around and made a run for it. His feet kept moving, but he was not sure where to go. After taking a left, he found himself in one of the shipyards. Sadly enough, there was no other way out than the opening he used to come in. This was no option anymore, with his chasers blocking it. He glanced around, anxiously looking for something to make his situation less helpless.

A lead pipe caught his eye. It was impossible to just run for it, though, since his chasers were closer to the pipe. If they saw it, one of them would definitely grab it, and only the Lord knew where that would put him.

As he observed his surroundings, a plan started to grow

in his head. It would be risky, but it was definitely better than doing nothing and hoping those bullies would keep him in one piece.

He waited until the group was close enough, then put his plan to work. He jumped on one of the storage boxes, took the knife on his belt and cut loose the rope holding together a bunch of barrels. The rolling hulks fell on top of one of the boys.

Jason put on a smirk and climbed further until he was high enough to grab a hook that was hanging just above him. So far, so good, and a spark of hope lit in his chest.

He was about to set himself off when he felt someone grabbing his ankle. He turned around, and his eyes met those of a pink and sweaty boy that reminded him of a pig. Bugger.

The extra weight made it impossible for Jason to keep his grip around the hook tight, and they fell together. The pig guy fell flat on his face and let go of Jason immediately. This allowed Jason to break his fall with a roll and stand on his feet for a moment. He noticed that the pipe was now up for grabs and did not hesitate, just in time.

As soon as he turned around, Jason found himself surrounded. Boldly, he put up the pipe as if it was a club and cried, 'Stand back, or I'll bash in your brains!'

The boys hesitated and glanced at the one Jason bashed earlier. That must be the leader, Jason thought. He noticed that, unlike the other boys, this boy showed absolutely no fear of the idea of being hit in the face with a lead pipe. Actually, he looked rather bored.

It was a tall, slim boy with a dirty white shirt loosely hanging over his torso and brown trousers tucked into knee-high boots. The boy had dirty blond hair, just like Jason. The difference was the face.

Jason's eyes were grey, always examining the world with a soft curiosity. On the other hand, this boy looked at the world with his brown eyes as if he wanted to see everything burn.

After a while, the guy rolled his eyes. 'Oh my... You guys aren't telling me you're scared of that little sparrow? Look how tiny he is. I could break him with only one hand.'

'But Giles,' one of his friends asked, 'how do you think

his old man will react if he knows one of his brats got the shit beaten outta him?’

Giles stared at his friend for a few seconds and then grinned. ‘Don’t worry, that little piece of trash won’t snitch to Beckwith. But, you know, why don’t we make sure he gets that message?’

This seemed to remove the boys’ hesitation. Jason widened his eyes and clenched his teeth. The only way out of this situation now was to fight.

Since the only advantages he had were the element of surprise and the pipe, he used those and swung the weapon with all his power at the boy at his left.

Without checking what he hit, he took the pipe back and caused as much damage as possible to the opponents until someone grabbed the other side of the pipe. Jason looked up, straight into Giles’ devil eyes. They no longer expressed boredom but were full of fire.

‘Come here, you little brat!’ He yelled and pulled the pipe towards him. Jason let go, but too late. Giles grabbed Jason by his shirt with his free hand and threw down the pipe. He pulled the kid closer and lifted him from the ground.

Blood drained from his face, and his heart was racing. Their faces were only a few inches apart, and as Giles began to speak, Jason felt the spatters covering his face. Blood was running from his eyebrow, but Giles did not notice it.

‘You is going to pay for all of this.’

‘It is you ARE going to pay for all of this.’ Before Jason knew it, he had said it.

This made Giles furious. He threw Jason to the ground, and Jason threw his arms over his head to protect it from Giles’ leg. The rest of the boys just stood there, some hurt by the pipe, and others were just hit by a stupid friend who could not see the difference between an eleven-year-old and one of their own friends.

The kicking just did not seem to stop. Jason cringed increasingly with each kick, but he made sure not to make a sound -he did not want to give Giles that satisfaction.

Pretty soon, he could not see much anymore. The pain made everything blurry. At one point, he just prayed it would be