


YEAR 9 FIRST LANGUAGE LITERATURE



NOUGHTS & CROSSES
MALORIE BLACKMAN

BYRON COLLEGE - DECEMBER 2020

Fan Fiction Anthology

A Selection



'Stop it! You're all behaving like animals! Worse than animals - like blankers!'

Sephy is a Cross: she lives a life of privilege and power. But she's lonely, and burns with injustice at the world she sees around her.

Callum is a nought: he's considered to be less than nothing - a blanker, there to serve Crosses - but he dreams of a better life.

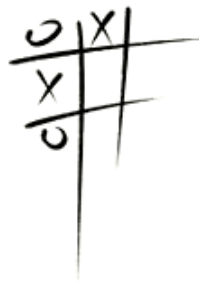
They've been friends since they were children, and they both know that's as far as it can ever go. Noughts and Crosses are fated to be bitter enemies - love is out of the question.

Then - in spite of a world that is fiercely against them - these star-crossed lovers choose each other.

But this is a love story that will lead both of them into terrible danger... and which will have shocking repercussions for generations to come.

2020 was a challenging year for everyone, but in Year 9 First Language Literature you rose to the occasion by producing original, thoughtful, emotive, well thought-out, and often highly action-packed creative writing that did justice to your efforts, resulting in a powerful fan fiction anthology of which you can all be proud.

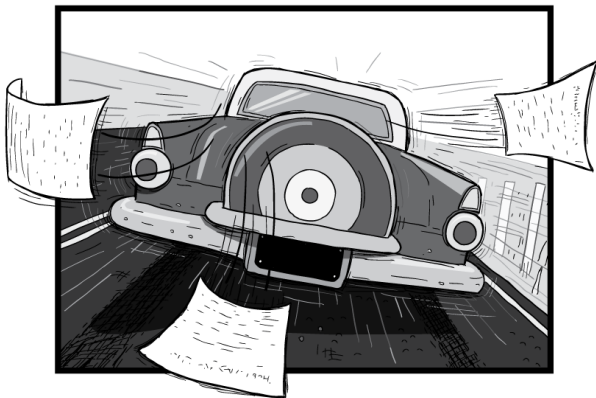
Well done!



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**SEQUELS TO
THE NOVEL**



Maps

by Penny Tritsinis

Prologue

May 14th, 2007

I am lying on the floor; the warmth released by the carpet in blatant parallel to my hypothermic and trembling body. The warmth doesn't seem to travel within me, but just subside against my frame as I analyse every patch of this room. Such riches cannot be simply imagined by the human mind but created by something higher, superior. Curtains made of lush fabrics shaded in hues of red so beautiful they could be framed and sold to the highest bidder as an abstract painting by the gods. Those are the images that come to mind as I take my first of many sleeping pills. I gulp one down and think of what exactly has led me here? What did I do so wrong? Was it drinking alcohol by the bottle every night? Or a five-letter word beginning with "K" and ending with "amal"?

But, in the very back of my mind, where I keep small precious memories, I know that my entire life after the age of seventeen can be summed up by one meeting. One person. One name: Charlie. I still think about him all these years later, when it's late at night – or rather early in the morning. I cry so



softly no one would ever know; re-hatching a wound previously thought by everyone, including me, to have been long healed. In reality, the raw flesh was carelessly stapled together and sealed with shallow words of comfort. As I'm slipping in and out of consciousness, I can feel within me the delicately abrasive hands of time rhythmically ticking backward. I am submerged into a bittersweet liquid of youth; nostalgia is soaking my nightgown and a long-lost feeling of hope and direction softly caressing my hair.

Chapter 1

August 20th, 1982

I had never noticed the way my velvet canopy serendipitously gushed down my bedframe. The velvet material shone against the light of the crystal chandelier, blinding and stinging. Today wasn't my day. No, now that I think about it, it was never my day. My French tutor was humorously unaware of the existence of my social life; humorously for my friends, who got to hear all the insults I have just boiling inside me every afternoon. Not very humorous to me. Here I was, seventeen, almost eighteen, and writing an essay on the importance of honesty, in French, on a Friday night.

I stopped for a second and read over my sentence, correcting a few misplaced nouns, and puzzling together meanings. Was "espérer" a regular verb or was it irregular? I was always forgetting that one. My head ached, and I needed a break from all this. A weekend resort at a luxury spa might do it, but we all knew that would not happen on such brief notice. Yet, I still needed a distraction of some sort. My friends were out and I only had one hobby which was shoe shopping – if you counted that, which my father, unfortunately, didn't. Anyway, I'd already tripled my allowance that month. So, I wasn't getting "one penny out of him", he'd told me, until the first of September, even if I begged, which I so often did. So be it: my luxury vacation or fresh pair of boots could momentarily be substituted by a cool glass of water – or two.

'Kathy, can I get a glass of water, please?' I clapped my hands, the sound echoing against the unpleasantly frigid marble of the walls. They gave the appearance of being at the North Pole, not a particularly welcoming environment. No answer arose.

A beat later, 'Kathy! Kathy?' Again, no answer. Was she off sick today? They would have informed me.

'Kathy, are you th-' My voice froze because dear Kathy wasn't there; someone else was.

A nought man roughly my age – maybe a year or two older – rushed in. His posture aggressively improper, shoulders curved inwards and spine hunched, reminding me of a fishing hook my father had displayed proudly on his office wall. He stopped walking – or maybe jogging a pace or two in front of my vanity, awkwardly balancing an eccentric cup filled to the brim with water.

'Who exactly might you be?' I spoke quietly but with disarming authority – at least that's what I'd been told.

'I'm Mrs Kathy's boy – I just started working as a servant here this morning.' He handed over my glass, the icy water acting as a branding iron against my fingertips.

'And what's your name?' His eyebrows rose for a second, although I couldn't figure out why.

'My name is Charlie, what's yours?' Was he looney? Charlie was working for me: why or how didn't he know my name?

'You don't know my name?' The sentence tickling the back of my throat, a feverish laughter in danger of escaping.

'No – should I?' Our eyes met then; a mischievous glint coating his ever-so-present grey pupils. I finally understood it was a joke. How thick did I have to be not to realise? Then again, it wasn't every day a nought is kidding around

with you, is it? They usually just shake around, like half-dead fish out of water, helplessly gasping for air.

'My name is Jasmine Cohen.' I whispered, my eyes still firmly holding his – Charlie's.

Chapter 2

November 2nd, 1982

My new boots were a deep eggplant shade, the leather supple against my feet and the heel; shiny and crisp. They made a satisfying clicking sound against the black oak floorboards with every step, scented with that brand-new-shoe smell; my favourite. I couldn't wait to show these to Charlie, and luckily for me, I wouldn't be waiting for much longer. We've organised a weeklong schedule for times where he was free from the washing or the cooking to pop in and visit me. If things were business as usual, he'd be here within the next five minutes.

Charlie and I had been together for just about two months. I didn't dare tell any of my friends about him, mostly because he was terrified they'd inform my father about us. Daddy planned for me to marry one of his friend's sons right after university. That would not happen, of course. After my seventeenth birthday, I made a point of letting him know that I would not be the product of another arranged marriage; like him and mother. It only took me a few hours of aimless threats to run away from home until I got him right to his knees. Daddy promised me he would never make me marry anyone and just like that, our battle was finally over; I had come out of it victorious.

The sound of soft treading footsteps outside my door interrupted my train of thought – Charlie. I walked over quietly and opened the door as it made a loud creaking sound, making me jump a little. There he was; a smile plastered onto his face, like always.

‘Alright, come in now,’ I say, trying to sound normal and with fewer nerves. I straightened out my now lopsided dress and hair. Father opened the door and stepped in, leaving a trail of thick cigarette smoke behind him.

‘Good morning, dear, could you sit down a second? I’ve got a few things we need to talk about.’ I sat on my vanity chair, positioning my dress neatly. I’d never get into trouble usually, but this was Dad.

‘You remember that little talk we had a few months ago – about you getting married to one of my friend’s boys after finishing school?’ What was he rambling on about? We agreed that would not happen.

‘Yes, Daddy, I do, but I must correct you on something. You’d insisted that I get married after university – anyway, why are you bringing this up now? We agreed I wouldn’t be marrying anyone I didn’t want to.’ His face darkened and a feeling of panic rushed through me.

‘Did I now? Well, you see... circumstances change. Opinions change. And as for recent events, I’d like for you to meet and eventually marry the Prime Minister’s son. His name is Kamal Hadley. Don’t worry though dear, you’ll meet him first in per-’

I stop listening after that because every organ in my body has plummeted to the floor. Tears are less like raindrops and more like tsunami waves, burying all my dreams of a future with Charlie to the ground. I don’t realise I’m on the floor. I don’t realise my father has long stopped speaking and is now staring at me. I don’t realise that Charlie isn’t in the closet anymore. I don’t realise my father has seen him. I don’t realise that this is the end of us – the end of him.

That night was the first time I drank without company. My usual small, controlled sips were now thick gargles that dripped onto my clothes, face, and hair, but my tears had already done that, so I didn’t much care. I’d already finished my first bottle a minute later. The alcohol burned wildly within my oesophagus as the flames passed through my stomach and finally came to an end at what seemed to be my tailbone. My mouth was left sickeningly sweet

and acidic; the only thoughts that kept swimming into my consciousness were that my head hurts. What had happened to Charlie? And that I need more of whatever alcohol I'd been consuming.

Chapter 3

January 16th, 1983

I never saw or spoke to Charlie again. The week after I found out about the arranged marriage, Charlie was on the news. They had charged him with some sort of burglary. That's a charge that if someone were found guilty wouldn't cost over ten years – but they always maximised all punishments for noughts, to the point where Charlie could end up with capital punishment. I knew my father had framed Charlie; I begged for him to do something but my pleas were left unanswered. Each day passed slower without him. Sometimes they didn't pass at all, just drained along like a car that was perpetually frozen milliseconds before a crash.

My days were filled with few activities. Drinking, eating – occasionally, shopping, crying, begging, and sleeping – occasionally. Rinse and repeat. I'd stopped calling my friends, and soon they did too. The only person I had to keep me company was a maid called Meggie. She wasn't much older than I was and lived close to Charlie, so she told me everything about him and his life now before the trial. She had a quite joyful disposition, probably the result of her soon to be married to the man of her dreams: a nought names Ryan McGregor. I'd hear all about him each afternoon as Meggie carefully dusted my room, about their dates, dreams, hopes, future prospects, everything really. I lived vicariously through them and, for that, I was grateful.

I refused to meet Kamal and soon learned why he needed me to marry him; his girlfriend had got pregnant. If the Prime Minister's son were to have a son out of wedlock, it would send waves of rioting through the country. But more

importantly, it would ruin the 'Hadley' name. Kamal's girlfriend wasn't from any sort of elite family like I was; she was wealthy enough, pretty enough, smart enough, but not someone that a Prime Minister's son should be marrying. Not that I was in a position to judge: I'd fallen in love with a nought. Hadn't I?

One drowsy afternoon, as slow and boring as the rest, I was greeted with a face I'd been well acquainted with the last few months.

'Hello, Miss Cohen, nice to meet you. I'm Kamal Hadley,' Kamal said. He was taller than I expected. Other than that, his hair looked like everyone else's, his nose looked like everyone else's, his mouth looked like everyone else's, he looked just like everyone else. I took a loud sip out of my wine bottle. Kamal looked at me with a disgusted expression which made me smirk with pleasure. I stretched my limbs, my joints making satisfying cracking sounds.

'Are you intoxicated?' Of course I was intoxicated. What did he think I was drinking, apple juice?

'What do you think?' I whispered, sarcasm dripping with my every word.

'I just came here to have a chat with you, set rules and boundaries before our wedding ceremony.' I snickered.

'What rules?' I asked, although I didn't give a penny what they were. I just wanted him to leave already.

'I'll be visiting my girlfriend and son every month and giving them a large percentage of my earnings. I want you to know that the only reason I'm marrying you is because of your money and name. We'll have children that I will care for but... that's just for the press. I want nothing else from you.' Did he hear himself? My family was going to be giving him everything, and he had the audacity to speak to me like that? As drunk as I was, I wanted him to know that I would not be pushed around when we got married.

'Who do you think you are? Your father might be Prime Minister, but you and I both know the people hate his guts. That man might have a big name, but he's been drowning in debt the past twenty years, so don't you come in here all high and mighty and tell me you are doing my family some sort of favour. We're doing you and your spoiled reputation a favour.' I hadn't felt so angry in a long time; I was shaking, and my face was probably so red I could be mistaken for a tomato. Kamal just stared at me; he was shaking too. Without another word, he simply left my room; I couldn't help myself yell at him one more time.

'Don't let the door hit you on your way out.'

Chapter 4

September 5th, 1983

Charlie was all I thought about. Kamal had proposed to me publicly during our third meeting, so I couldn't say no in front of all the press – more of my father's work. Charlie's trial was later that week. I was planning to sneak out and watch it; I'd just tell father I was going to visit a friend. Charlie didn't have enough money for a good lawyer, so the country gave him one for free. Everyone knew that was worse than no lawyer at all. More than anything, I regret not sending him money for a lawyer. Father would have found out, but I could deal with him. I left Charlie with no other option and for that, I will never forgive myself.

The courtroom was quiet. Not even a whisper could be heard as I waited for the verdict on Charlie's charge. My fingers fiddled mindlessly with the seat as I pinched the inside of my arm in the hope it would distract me from bursting into tears; that was going to leave a bruise tomorrow. Finally, the judge walked back into the courtroom; I swear the atmosphere was so thick you could cut it with a knife. I frantically bit the inside of my lip, the pain numbing

and comforting, slightly lulling my nerves. The verdict is announced. A five-hundred-pound piano falls out of the sky and pulps me to the ground. My body paralysed and punctured with a million and one needles. I sit and stare. It's worse than I expected.

Charlie's execution was broadcast live to the entire nation; my father made me watch. He held me down on one of his old velvet armchairs and made me watch Charlie's very life draining out of him; drop by drop like a perpetually still waterfall, water rather floating than falling down the stream. As I watched I began to gag, as the acid burned my throat, tears flowing down my cheeks like the Nile River. The crowd of Crosses frantically cheered and acted like this was a celebration and not the brutal murder of a young man. I didn't eat, drink, sleep, or do much of anything after that. I just mindlessly stared up at the ceiling imagining an existence of 'ifs'. What if Charlie had enough money to buy a good defense attorney? What if he never came out of my closet in the first place? What If I'd acted calm, and he'd never felt the need to come out of my closet? What if Charlie was a Cross? What if I was a nought? What if?

Chapter 5

October 9th, 1983

My wedding day was almost a month after Charlie's trial. It was a subtle warning over my head but acted more like a straitjacket that had me trapped; tied together to the point I couldn't think or do as much as take a breath. I had a designer wedding dress on that was tight in the right places and sparkled like the equator's vertical stars, yet it made me feel the worst. It was like I was a bird trapped inside a golden cage, unable to escape. Everyone cared about what colour the flowers were or who'd designed my veil: not about how I felt, and that was for the better because inside I was like cold, hard plastic.

I'd been given a sheet of wedding vows that some writer had penned so I didn't make a mess of things; because I always made a mess of things. It was hard to read phrases like "I love you" or "I'll always be there" to a man who was still visiting his girlfriend and son every chance he got. A man who wasn't looking at me as I walked down the aisle, but at her. Madeleine had showed up, his girlfriend. I felt like twenty thousand cotton balls were stuck down my windpipe when I was forced to say the most aggravatingly final words of all: "I do." The only thing that kept me from running away was that I imagined that instead of kissing Kamal in his sleek black suit, it was Charlie who was holding me instead.

Epilogue

April 22nd, 2060

My children grew older: they too found love and, some sooner, others later, lost it. Charlie is still in my mind now and again; I see him in everything beautiful. I can hear his laughter every time the sun rises and turns that marvellous orange colour he used to love. I can see him every time someone gives a penny to a beggar. I see him every time my grandchildren smile. I see him in myself; I see him in Sephy and Minerva, I even see him in Kamal. Avoiding grudges is key. Everything that happened was for a reason, a deeper cause that at the moment we don't see, some we still can't, but they are there. That's the beauty of it. You don't know quite how many people you have impacted or the effects of however many years you are on this planet – until you're not.

My and my daughter's love stories don't fit the mould of perfection; they are more painful than others, scarred and bruised, but that's what makes them even more alive – they encapsulate history. They become a map of moments and events, the more complicated the better. Dates are coordinates, valleys are memories, and rivers are losses. Yet, maps are so different from one an-

other, no one dares call one tragic; they all tell a different story, a different path. I am much older now, my hair has turned grey, my cheeks have hollowed out and my eyes have wrinkled, but I am not afraid of death. I know that when I reach the other side, he will be waiting for me like nothing has changed – Charlie.



In Another Life

by Anastasia Stamatelopoulou

Chapter 1

Untroubled. I guess that is what you could call my life right now. With Sephy. With our child.

I've been cherishing every moment I've spent with my new family because truthfully, I have a feeling deep down in the pit of my stomach that these moments won't last forever as I desire. After all, I am a nought and Sephy is a Cross.

Not only that though. Her father's words from that day still linger in my mind.

Five years ago

'You're free to go, Callum,' he stated stoically. I just stood there wide-eyed, trying to process the words that had just come out of his mouth.

Currently I'm packing all of our clothes, including Callum's. As I'm going through his drawers, I find a letter with my name written on it. I immediately recognise that handwriting. Callum's. I open it and start reading.

Dear Sephy,

I'm writing this right after our son's birth. We are lucky that we have been blessed with another child because it was such a pity that you had a miscarriage. It's not your fault though. Please don't blame yourself.

However, this feeling has been bugging me. Something feels wrong, out of place. I feel like our happiness won't last forever but I hope that isn't true. We are living such a peaceful life, away from the daily nightmares of our society.

Sometimes I find myself wondering when is your father going to show up or if he even will bother to.

I've been trying to convince myself that our lives are untroubled and they truly are – but almost, not fully. I still worry about my mother who has been abandoned by my whole family and about my brother who I haven't heard about since your escape from the kidnapping.

All these thoughts and feelings I have are so conflicting. However, you are the reason why I've been so optimistic about everything. Thank you.

Whatever life we are living, our love still is wrong to everyone else but us. No one understands us but I still love you, Persephone Hadley, and I always will, regardless of who or where we are. May we meet again in another life where our love isn't forbidden and concealed.

Callum

I just kept rereading the letter; my tears staining the thin paper more and more, starting to mess up the ink. I regret everything. I regret lying about the miscarriage, I regret lying about your release. *Everything.*

Please God, if you're up there, take good care of Callum.



Rosie's Disappearance

by Vasco Lago da Silva Sourtagias

SEPHY

The doors slid open and shut as nurses scooted around the waiting room. I clutched tight the half-filled cup I had been given, sipping my coffee every now and then. Had the floor not been so filthy, the blood trail couldn't have been missed. Small droplets had tumbled and spread, producing the outline of multiple twisted shapes. My biggest concern, however, wasn't the floor's mucky surface; Jude's threat was like an earworm, his words engraved in my mind. I could only imagine what he...

'Miss Hadley?' A plump male doctor approached me, a friendly yet firm look on his face.

'Yes?' I replied, making my way towards him.

'Your sister is recovering at a quick pace; although she's still unconscious she is expected to be up shortly.' For a moment the doctor's words felt reassuring; however, reality broke the spell.

'Sephy, thank goodness you're all right!' My gaze swivelled over the waiting room; I couldn't believe my eyes.

'Mom?' I was hopping mad. I had been avoiding her like the plague. She knew I despised her presence; our relationship had been collapsing ever since I had set sail to that prosperous life of mine.

'What – what are you doing here?' And then it struck me... Minnie.

MINNIE

'You push, you're a pusher, you push, push, push, just like you pushed me out of the house, you're now trying to push me back in.' Sephy was irate.

'That's–'

'You must recognise however that I've had to put up with too much, starting with my intoxicated mother along with my troublesome sister–'

'Sephy, please–'

'Followed by my narcissistic father.'

'You know that's–'

'No human is capable of coping with such lifestyle, not me, not you, and most certainly not my daughter!'

'Sephy, please, you've gone through a lot, no one can deny that, but if you just let me explain–'

'Make it quick, will you?'

'If you say so. Mother has been in rehab for over three months now and she hasn't touched a glass of wine ever since–'

'How about a bottle?'

'Sephy...'

'Sorry.'

'I, on the other hand... I – I guess I can be a little aggravating from time to time so I suppose you can tell me off if necessary.'

'Your words may tell the truth but how about Father? He sees my girl as an abomination, one of god's multiple mistakes.'

'Regarding what you said about Father, yes, he may be a little 'unstable' about the whole thing but you know how he is, constantly busy, always absent, his presence will be insignificant. Plus, just think about all the issues that could be disentangled if only you would settle down with us: food is more than sufficient, your income will no longer matter, and your daughter would finally get the schooling she deserves...'

Yes, at first things may have gone South but overall I'm pleased with the outcome.

Sephy is moving in with us and has agreed to lower her guard. Sometimes I guess you just need to follow a different, more subtle approach.

A few years later...

ROSIE

My mother has always been fussy about where and with whom I go. No matter if Alice is present or not, she'll always send someone after me. She has this obsession that everyone is chasing me down but can't be bothered to explain the cause of her delusion. These last couple of weeks, however, going out with my friends has been out of the question.

'Mom, please, it's only Alice. I swear we won't leave the house grounds.'

'You see it's not...'

'Safe, yes, I know, but I'm thirteen for Christ's sake, I need a life.'

'I know sweetie but...'

'Why can't you just be more like Father, just let me be!'

Mother is much too preoccupied about what may or may not happen. What actually displeases me however is how protective she is. All I want is to be normal – have a normal life with normal friends and a normal family. But that will never happen, will it? Noughts and half-noughts are not made to blend with pure-blood Crosses. Half-bloods such as me are looked down on and don't deserve their attention. I suppose I'm like the black sheep in the family, aren't I?

SEPHY

I know I can be harsh with Rosie but it's for her own good. After her father's death, life seemed pointless. However, once my little angel came along I started seeing life from another aspect; she was the one who motivated me to keep on going, she was the one who encouraged me to be the best I can. Rosie is all I have, so as a result I can turn out to be slightly over-protective every now and then. I know that at some point my actions will have to be justified, but not yet. Rosie is a clever girl with a bright future ahead of her. With time I know she'll want to know the truth, but only when she is truly ready.

ROSIE

'Hurry up Rosie, you're gonna be late for school!' Monday, what a nasty day. Double maths, imagine. I wish Mr Johnson is absent today, I honestly can't be bothered with him anymore. He loves going around with his menacing look, intimidating anyone who passes his way. Why did Mrs Bailey have to quit? She might've been a nought but was undeniably the sweetest teacher in Heathcroft. Now we get to stay with the one and only Mr Johnson, how shocking is that.

MINNIE

‘I’ll be picking up Rosie from school, is that okay?’ I never do something with Rosie before informing my sister. No matter if it’s to go for a ten-minute walk or a vacation, Sephy must know beforehand. Our last encounter with Jude was haunting; since then, my sister has been obsessed with the wellbeing of her daughter. I don’t blame her however. If Rosie were my daughter, I’d be hysterical.

‘Yes of course, but you better get going, her lessons start in just fifteen minutes.’

‘See you later.’

‘Bye mother.’

ROSIE

‘William Smith?’

‘Present.’

‘Ella Davis?’

‘Present.’

‘Rosie McGregor?’

‘Present.’ The register seemed like it went for ever until Mr Johnson finally reached Harper Jones. Then, out of the blue, he requested my assistance. Stunningly enough, he wanted me to read out the homework that was due for today. Although he knew I wasn’t the brightest student in his class, he just had to go with me. Frankly, that’s what puts me out the most about new teachers: they have favourites. They make up their mind about how well one is going to be treated. Mr Johnson was an evil soul; I have never wanted to see someone out of my life so badly.

SEPHY

'Mom, I'm home!' I'm always glad to hear from Rosie once she gets home.

'How was school, sweetheart?'

'You know, kinda dull. I simply can't stand that Mr Johnson – he picks on me knowing I doubt myself just so he can embarrass me.'

'Maybe he just wants you to try harder, to dedicate more time and effort to your work and he'll put an end to this fuss.'

'Um, I don't know... It's like he enjoys seeing me suffer.'

'Don't you think you're going a little over the top?'

'Mom...!'

I wasn't going to waste time on Rosie's school issues; I knew or at least thought she was capable of handling this problem on her own. As a result, I decided to let go of the subject and focus my attention on dinner.

MINNIE

Today couldn't have gone better. I had the whole day all to myself. Rosie was in school, Mother was home in the company of Sephy, and Father was out. So I figured, why not pass by the mall? I was in need of some new shoes after all, and a couple of new dresses wouldn't harm anyone. Once I was finally done with my shopping, it was past 7. It was only fair to assume that dinner was over; I wasn't too hungry however so I wasn't in a rush. I arrived home promptly, and who do I find staring at me with a gaze of hatred and disgust? Sephy.

'I'm so sorry, I...'

'I frankly don't want to hear it, just remember—'

'I swear next time—'

‘There will be no next time. Rosie was scared to death.’

‘No I wasn’t,’ Rosie piped up.

‘Yes you were, now stay out of this Rosie!’

‘I know I messed up but–’

‘No! There is no excuse for your behaviour. Can you just imagine for a moment or two what could have happened to my daughter? She was alone, all by herself with no one to look out for her.’

‘For God’s sake, give me a break will you? I know what this is all about but believe me when I say you have nothing to worry about – thirteen years have gone by, thirteen!’

‘Perhaps you are right... Thirteen years have gone by and he is nowhere to be found.’

‘Thank you.’ And just when I thought I could finally be left alone...

‘No, this can’t be right. A person like him would never...’

‘Seph, it’s late. Please just let us be.’

‘He is a trained soldier: this is all he knows, this is all he wants.’

Eventually my sister must let go. She holds on to these thoughts for so long, too long.

ROSIE

What just happened? Mother seemed so ruffled, and who is being referred to as ‘he’? Aunt Minerva was in a more tranquil mood but that doesn’t make things better. I’m assuming they could’ve been talking about Grandpa. However, he never belonged to the military and I presume he would never harm any of us.

Besides, there's the fact that there are massive brick walls surrounding our house and guards present; Mother says they protect us from everyone and everything. Though the truth is Mother was alarmed. It's only fair to believe that whoever this man is, he is vicious and dangerous.

SEPHY

Quitting isn't an option for Jude. He won't stop until he gets what he wants. My sister may be right – thirteen years have passed – but so what? That doesn't prevent him from attempting to harm me, or Minnie or even Rosie. Everyone believes I'm going insane – I'm not. I'm being cautious: that's what I am, cautious. All I wish for is the wellbeing of my family, especially my daughter, and if that makes me seem mad, well then so be it.

MINNIE

It's never easy with Sephy and it's even harder with Rosie. She's too young for all this, and with Sephy constantly being on the lookout, sooner or later her daughter will be questioning her. One way or another, Rosie must learn the truth about her father and his family. We can't just leave her in this state, especially after her mother's breakdown.

ROSIE

Today time flew by. Shockingly enough, for the first and only time Mr Johnson appreciated me attending one of his lessons. I was planning on telling Mother though she seemed pretty occupied, so I moved on to Aunt Minerva. She on the other hand was excruciating.

'Aunt Minerva!'

'Oh Rosie, I'm glad you're here.'

'You are?'

'Indeed. I assumed after yesterday's episode...'

'Forget the past – how about we focus on the future? I was meaning to—'

'I apologise for interrupting you. Even so, I was wondering if you have any questions or doubts about yesterday's...'

'No, not really, as I was—'

'Is that so?'

I ended up telling no one after all. Don't get me wrong – it wasn't the end of the world – but I was disappointed since I had been really looking forward to it. It was a kind act coming from a cruel figure – odd, isn't it? How some people change from one day to another.

SEPHY

I must admit, Rosie appeared to be a little down today. I decided to go and talk to her – on second thought, though, she may describe me as nosy and intrusive. However, I am her mother, and what could the worst-case scenario possibly be?

'Rosie?'

'Yes Mother?'

'You've been looking down lately. Care to talk about it?'

'It's nothing really...'

'Rosie.'

'Very well. Mr Johnson, remember him? My Maths teacher, the one that's—'

'Always picking on you. What's he done this time sweetie?'

'It's more about what he didn't do. He didn't pick on me once, and as a matter of fact despite the fact that I failed to answer one of his questions accurately, I got 'rewarded' with a never mind.'

Knowing my daughter can and did open up to me was a huge relief. It'll help me sleep better and, to be honest, it gives me the impression that a stronger bond has formed.

MINNIE

I feel rather guilty about my previous behaviour. Rosie was clearly attempting to discuss with me a certain issue that concerned her, or maybe a more positive matter that had made her feel more joyful than usual – and I just pushed her away. I honestly hope she didn't feel as if I didn't care – I was just wondering if she was okay after what she had witnessed. Sephy does have her moments every now and then; Rosie must get used to these minor faults.

ROSIE

I didn't expect Mr Johnson to be the soft-hearted man he was. A couple of weeks ago I'd describe him as an inhuman and barbaric beast. However, my judgement has altered. The past few lessons, it's like a new teacher has come along. As it happens, it does feel odd. I couldn't stand being around that man, but now – now I may be one of his favourites. It spooks me.

SEPHY

I'm glad Rosie is getting along with her Maths teacher. However, we exchanged viewpoints before taking her to school and agreed that Mr Johnson's behaviour is unusual. As a result, we decided before picking her up that I would have a little chat with him to make things clear. I anticipated traffic on

the way to school; however, there were barely any vehicles going around and even fewer pedestrians. It was quiet. I set foot on the school grounds and before I knew it, she was gone.



Cross Knight

by Frangiskos Lago da Silva Sourtaggias

Chapter 1: THE VISIT

Every step Sephy took on the moist floor, which was now hidden by the rolled-up and parched leaves, disturbed the tranquil and soothing ambience of the graveyard. As she approached a barren and rather dead tree she reached out for a hidden chair that she had shoved in between the tree's naked branches. Under her thick scarf a restful and pleasant expression could be perceived, but below her face and flesh misery and grief bloomed... She unfolded the chair, set it down and sighed.

'I didn't forget you, Minnie,' she said, swiping dead twigs off her sister's white Satuario Italian marble grave. 'Anyway, it's a good day today, had no problems. The only one is having trouble sleeping during the night... In any case, shall we see what's new in the world today?' she spoke softly as she opened a newspaper. But by the time she had even read the first sentence she could hold her heartbeat no longer and she fell to the floor as tears raced down her cold cheek, followed by her fist meeting the damp soil. 'Why?! Why Min-

nie! Why did you have to leave me?’ she cried. Anger spiralled into uncontrollable rage, until she got up, fixed herself and left. ‘The L.M. will pay for what they did. I can’t let them get away with it...’ Sephy told herself in a low and sinister way...

Chapter 2: DECISIONS

Once Sephy had climbed up her entrance staircase with the damaged and, in places, missing handrail she knocked on a mouldy, supposedly red door which was so worn out and exposed to the sun that it no longer had its vivid colour but rather a dull maroon. After a short while, swift but heavy footsteps were suddenly heard from the other side of the wall and the door suddenly opened. A tall slender nought lady suddenly came into sight. Her thick dark brown hair was caught in a grey ribbon contrasting with her blue eyes. She was well dressed and perfectly clean. Like Sephy.

‘Hello Sephy! You came back from your stroll quickly,’ said Maggie, her roommate.

Sephy entered their house and responded, ‘Well, there wasn’t much to say...’

As she entered she slipped out of her clean shoes and placed them under her dark blue jacket which she had already hung up. By the time the red round sun had sunk into the shadows of the towering buildings, dinner had already been made. Inside the old walls of the building the wooden table had already been prepared. Table runners had been set, both salad plate and dinner plate had been placed down (as well as the small bread plate on the side), napkins were rolled in beautiful silver napkin holders and finally all the various cutlery as well. They both sat down on opposite sides and began eating. At first they didn’t even attempt to engage in conversation. Sephy was staring outside at the waxing moon which lay a cold grey light on the street. She was contemplating talking to her roommate about her secret thought.

'Maggie?' she finally asked.

'Yeah. What is it?' Maggie responded, without paying much attention to her question, rather concentrating on her plate.

'I – I have been thinking about something lately... Something involving my sister's... death,' Sephy said with difficulty, 'and the L.M.'

Maggie stopped eating. She placed her knife and fork down, raised her head and swallowed her food.

'What are you up to...' Maggie said suspiciously.

'I've been thinking about it. A lot. So I was thinking if we could infiltrate the Liberation Militia and prevent all the crimes occurring lately,' Sephy explained.

'You are joking right? Do you think we could just simply infiltrate one of the most threatening and extreme organisations in the world and just like that stop it. Plus you're not doing this to prevent all the crimes occurring lately,' Maggie said in a mocking tone. 'I think you are doing this because of your sister's death,' she continued.

'Look. I have thought it out. Thought it all out. You would enter as if it was me and the –'

'No,' Maggie interrupted with an exasperated expression on her face. She grabbed her empty plate with only the leftovers and rushed to the kitchen. Inside the kitchen she leaned next to the oven with her head, rubbing her forehead. After a good while of logical (or not quite) thinking, she sighed and rejoined Sephy at the table, which was now unusually quiet.

'Fine... We can do it,' Maggie said, breaking the awkward silence that filled the room.

Sephy's head suddenly rose and she sprang to her feet in excitement.

‘Actually?!’ Sephy exclaimed. She was so happy that she couldn’t keep herself together or even keep still. But was it quite happiness? Was happiness the correct term for Sephy’s current emotions or was it the feeling of revenge and the thought of satisfaction if she tore down the L.M?

Chapter 3: THE PHONE CALL

The next morning the sun poured through Sephy’s window and golden fingers of sunlight shone softly on the city streets. The moment Sephy woke up she immediately woke up Maggie. They both got dressed and walked into the kitchen for breakfast. The kitchen was compact and small but was well designed. It had dark blue cupboards, nice-looking red fridge, an oven, a sink, a dishwasher and a Bauhaus-looking bin. After they finished, they sat at the table with a classical old phone on it. Stress and tension flowed through Sephy’s veins. She dialled in a combination of numbers, raised the handset with her hand shaking and brought it to her ear.

‘You’ve reached the Atlanta* chapter of the Liberation Militia, please leave a message, and God bless Noughts,’ said a robotic voice through the phone.

Sephy licked both her lips and finally answered. ‘Hello. This is Sephy Ha–’

‘Not your real name!’ Maggie whispered in panic.

‘Sephy Harrison,’ she finally said in relief. ‘And I saw your advertisement in the Atlanta Gazette... and... and I’m interested in reading some material and being in... involved. My phone number is one-oh-three-nine-nine-four. I am very much looking to you returning my call. God bless Noughts.’ And that was it. It seemed as if all Sephy’s thoughts had just drained out of her body.

‘Were you crazy! Giving out your real name! Especially yours!’ Maggie shouted with a grin on her face. Suddenly, as they were just getting up from their chairs, the loud and harsh ring of the phone spread through the room. Both Maggie and Sephy’s expressions faded to a grave expression. *Could it be*

them? they thought. Sephy grabbed the phone swiftly and raised it to her head so fast that it hit her on her forehead.

'Yeah, who's this?' said an unexpectedly ordinary voice.

'Sephy Harrison here,' she said.

'This is Shane returning your call. From the L.M.,' the voice responded.

'The L.M.,' Sephy repeated.

'We appreciate your interest... so what's your story?' Shane asked. A short silence fell upon the table. Sephy panicked. She was quietly signalling Maggie as to what to say but all she got as an answer was a pair of raised shoulders and a whispered 'I don't know!'

'Hello?' Shane asked after a short while.

'Yes! Well... since you asked... since you asked, I hate daggers. I really hate those cross rats... and pretty much anyone who doesn't have pure white blood running through their veins. And my sister was just recently accosted by one of those monsters,' Sephy said in a secure and tough voice.

'Is that so?' Shane asked.

'Yeah... every time I think of that dagger touching, putting his filthy dagger fingers on her body, pure as whitest snow! I mean, pure, Shane! She's a saint – an angel! Makes me wanna puke!' Sephy suddenly said with confidence.

'You are just the kind of person we are looking for. Listen... where can we meet?' Shane questioned.

'I am able to today right after I get off work,' Sephy said.

'Ok then. You've got a deal. See you at the Atlanta Lounge then. Take care now,' and just like that the call ended.

'WOW,' Maggie exclaimed. 'I did not know you could talk like that,' she continued.

'Me too,' Sephy answered with astonishment. 'Now, come on. You need to be ready for your first meeting with the L.M.'

**Atlanta: a city where Noughts and Crosses live*

Chapter 4: ATLANTA LOUNGE

After a long while when the sky was inked orange and purple like a watercolour painting, Maggie left their house and headed for the Atlanta Lounge. By the time she arrived the sun had already disappeared and all she could see were the shining and twinkling LED strip lights highlighting the 'ATLANTA LOUNGE'. She rested her arm on the rough paintwork coating the door and pushed. Red rough wooden splinters crumbled to the floor. Laughter overpowering the jukebox and a swirling dirty cloud of smoke drowned the room. Maggie examined the lounge attentively until she heard a voice.

'Sephy!?' a familiar voice shouted from the bartending table. Maggie didn't pay much attention but once she remembered her undercover name she rapidly turned her head.

'Shane?' Maggie said, making sure he was the right person.

'Glad you could make it, I was impressed by our conversation on the phone,' affirmed Shane. Shane was a tall man with short-cut hair and round pilot-looking glasses. While he was introducing his partners involved in the L.M., Sephy entered through the entrance door and sat at the closest but furthest table from them. And there she sat, fighting to hear their conversation over the blaring crowd.

Shane sucked on his cigarette and continued.

'I have the feeling that you could have a lot of fine ideas that could help the cause and the L.M, and which we need.' he said.

‘So what do you guys do?’ asked Maggie with a slightly confident tone.

‘Well... we do marches, we vandalise properties to teach people not to mess with us and other things,’ said another girl approaching from the darkness.

‘My name’s Leila, by the way, but this year is proving to become a big year for us,’ said the girl.

‘How so?’ asked Maggie.

Leila slowly approached Maggie and suddenly said...

‘BOOM,’ and started laughing. Maggie tried to hide her serious face as well as Sephy on the other side of the room.

‘Alright, alright, shut your dumb mouth now,’ said Shane. ‘She gets a little drunk sometimes. Anyway Sephy... you mind coming with me for a sec,’ Shane continued.

‘Yeah, where to?’ asked Maggie curiously.

‘Are you undercover?’ asked the other man called Felix suspiciously. Tension rose within Maggie. She didn’t know what to say.

‘You ask too many questions,’ Felix continued with a sinister but friendly expression engraved on his face.

‘Alright... be friendly now. She’s family. Right? Let’s go.’ Shane looked at Maggie with a relaxed face. They walked into a corridor with red lighting into a small-scale box-like room with a small light bulb hanging from a thin metal chain.

‘How about we go get that membership process started,’ affirmed Shane.

‘That’s it?’ Maggie asked, since she had been expecting a more complicated process before membership.

‘That’s it, have a seat. You will need to fill these papers out to send them to Headquarters and once they send you your membership card you will be able to participate in all our programmes,’ Shane explained.

'Thank you, brother. This means a lot to me,' Maggie said.

'You take care now. See you at our meeting tomorrow. You will be informed with more detail soon,' Shane said.

'Night,' said Maggie. She walked through the corridor, opened the entrance door, and left. After some seconds, Sephy finally got up from her chair and met Maggie outside.

'So how was it?' asked Sephy with eagerness.

'Well, they definitely bought it... except one though. Felix. He looked quite suspicious and undoubtedly he won't be easy to persuade. We need to be careful,' Maggie explained in a low voice, examining her surrounding for any people.

'One of them. A girl talked about a bomb. Right?' Sephy asked with an agitated expression.

'We need to prevent it somehow,' Maggie said to Sephy.

'You did good today. Tomorrow is another big day,' Sephy said as they walked to their house. Big but dangerous.

Chapter 5: THE GATHERING

Once Sephy and Maggie's curtains added an orange glow to the morning light, they woke up, wore their soft robes and headed for the kitchen.

'Morning,' they said to each other in a slow, tired, and dry way. Sephy rubbed her eyes as she walked through the wooden corridor until she noticed something unexpected. A dark yellow file had been slipped under their old door.

'Maggie?' she called out, bending down for it.

'What is it?' Maggie shouted softly as she poured cereal into a bowl.

Dear Ms Harrison,

On behalf of the Imperial Officer of the Knight of the Liberation Militia I would like to welcome you to the Atlanta L.M.

You have been vouched for as a person who is thoroughly a Nought and a lover of our constitution. As such it is our honour to welcome you into our esteemed organisation.

As a true L.M. knight you are expected to uphold and promote honourable peace among our race and happiness in the homes of our people. You have now become a part of the organisation that strives to protect the Nought race.

Our next meeting will take place tomorrow at 12:00. We are looking very much forward to meeting you.

Long live the Liberation Militia and God bless Noughts.

'You heard the letter. We need to be there at 12:00. And cautious. I have an ill feeling about this Felix,' Sephy suggested, looking concerned.

'We?' Maggie questioned, looking at Sephy dubiously.

'Yes... In fact I shall be there. Outside. Inside our car to observe,' affirmed Sephy.

Later that day, time seemed to crawl by, both for Sephy and Maggie. They were anxious and fearful of what was to come. Would the meeting prove difficult? Or will the meeting turn out effortless and facile?

Chapter 6: NARROW ESCAPE

The next morning wasn't so clement and calm. Sephy woke up several times during the night by the aggressive patter of rain on their roof. When the next day finally arrived Sephy and Maggie both woke to the low, laboured, groaning sound. Thy swung their feet over the side of their bed and walked barefoot towards the window, rubbing the crust from their eyes. The window was

splattered with raindrops, grey clouds swirled and covered the sky. Everything looked so dull.

'Weather can really put your mood down,' thought Maggie to herself. She later got dressed and slowly, slowly dragged her feet outside her room to meet Sephy.

'Good morning!' Sephy said delightfully.

'Morning,' Maggie groaned.

'I bought some new equipment,' she said.

'What equipment?' Maggie asked.

'A body microphone that will enable me to hear everything,' answered Sephy, demonstrating the minuscule mic. 'All I need to do now is stick it under your clothes and we're off.'

* * * * *

Once they reached their destination Maggie opened the door and furtively left.

'Good luck,' Sephy whispered. Maggie nodded and walked towards the house. It was ordinary-looking. It had one square window which revealed a small kitchen and had a wooden blue door as an entrance. Maggie knocked at the door with her fist clenched.

'Hi there, we were waiting for you Sephy!' Shane said in a friendly and welcoming tone. Maggie entered the house which immediately led to the living room. Plenty of people had gathered: Felix, Shane, Leila and other unknown individuals who probably were members of the L.M. Various drinks and sandwiches were placed on the table but Maggie didn't even touch them. She stood there awkwardly, embarrassed to engage in conversation with anyone else. As time passed, Shane lifted a glass of wine and his spoon and struck them carefully, making a soft delicate noise.

'Excuse me ladies and gents, knights of the L.M, we are gathered here not only to feast on these delicious edibles but also to organise our plot... I would like to introduce with great honour our man... Jude McGregor!' announced Shane, clapping at Jude as he entered the room. Sephy froze – that name rendered her catatonic. That name froze her blood and sent shivers down her spine. But it seemed as if a dead or forgotten part of her brain suddenly came to life bursting with emotions.

'Callum...' Sephy murmured. A small tear suddenly came down Sephy's cheek. She quickly wiped it and concentrated on the speech.

'Everybody listen... I would like to thank you all for being here, with us. I am going to be straightforward and tell you what is our plot. We have been thinking of detonating another bomb. In Kamal Hadley's house. The C-4,' he spoke, showing what looked like a brick wrapped in green plastic. 'It's going to be planted inside his mailbox which is going to be done by Felix. When he arrives next to it to upon his return home we are going to be expecting him. I with my partner are going to be waiting for the perfect moment to press the button.' A round of applause was suddenly heard from the house. Jude left first and drove off. Maggie was ready to leave until Felix grabbed her fiercely by her arm.

'Come with me,' he said, staring at her. Felix forced Maggie into a small room underground. He locked the door.

'Sit,' Felix ordered. A large machine covered the small table. 'You are going to take this lie detector test. Sit,' Felix repeated. Maggie finally sat.

'What is this? Is this your little undercover test den?' Maggie said trying to look tough.

'You're going to take the test,' he insisted.

'This is some lame crap,' she said. Felix slipped out a gun out of his jeans and shook it.

'Alright, Felix. Out of respect for the organisation I am going to take this test but I'm no undercover,' Maggie answered in a disrespectful manner. 'You're gonna shoot me? Put that gun away,' she said.

The moment Sephy heard the word gun she quickly removed the equipment and raced to the house. She grabbed a heavy rock and catapulted it at the kitchen window. A yell was heard and they all ran outside to see what had happened. Including Felix.

'A dagger just threw a rock at our window!' Leila screamed. Felix ran like a maniac holding his gun and aimed at the car that Sephy was in, which had already bolted down the street. He shot several times until Maggie grabbed it and continued shooting herself.

'Yeah, keep driving you filthy dagger!' Maggie shouted in an infuriated tone of voice.

'Still want me to take that lie detector test?' she stared at Felix and then left.

Chapter 7: SHOTS

A few minutes later Maggie and Sephy finally met.

'Come, we should get a drink. And talk about annoying Felix,' Maggie suggested.

'Alright,' she responded. They both entered the car and headed for a bar. Once they arrived at the Golden Room bar, they sat on the dark leather seats of the bar stools and gyrated to the bartender.

'Two shots with whiskey please!' Maggie shouted eagerly.

'As you wish, ma'am,' responded the besuited man already preparing the drinks. Once he finished he stretched out his two hands and placed the shots in front of them. Sephy gazed at it, and smiled. As if meeting an old friend. By the time Sephy took the decision to drink it, Maggie had already chugged and

gulped three of them. Once the liquid kissed Sephy's lips, infinite emotions raced through her. And with every drink she took she experienced even more. A feeling of energy, confidence, protectiveness and restlessness danced inside her – until everything stopped. Everything faded, into darkness.

* * * * *

'Ma'am? Ma'am, are you alright?' a voice was suddenly heard, seeming to come from far, far away. However, every second it became clearer and clearer. Maggie suddenly woke. Her head sprang up.

'What t-time is it?' Maggie asked the bar tender, still slurring her words.

'It's... 2:58, ma'am' responded the bartender.

'2:58!? Sephy, Sephy! Wake up!' she shouted, shaking her friend's back. 'We are late!' Maggie panicked. Once Sephy's head gradually came up from the table, Maggie paid, grabbed her by the hand, and bolted outside the Golden Room. Maggie shoved Sephy into the passenger side and raced to Kamal's mansion.

Chapter 8: PLANTING

Felix, with the C-4 on one hand, crept and tiptoed from shrub to shrub. He had his eyes fixed on his target. The mailbox. He made a run for it and quickly tried to thrust the bomb into the mailbox, but to his surprise the C-4 was too thick. An expression of frustration and rage was carved on his face.

'Think, think Felix,' he thought to himself. He ran towards Kamal's parked car and threw it underneath and ran down the street. The moment Kamal appeared, Jude appeared, his car silently peeking behind Kamal's. He held the remote in his hand. He stared wickedly at Kamal as he approached the mailbox. And the bomb detonated.



The Ghost of the Past

by Nick Stamatelopoulos

Chapter 1: JUDE

'The General, Andrew Dorn, was killed by our men after being discovered to have been a traitor. He had been delivering information of our attacks to Kamal Hadley, which led to the arrest of some of our highest-ranking members and their execution. The person responsible for exposing him, Jude Ryan McGregor, will be taking his place.'

I felt petrified, I never imagined of achieving such a thing. I will be the leader of the L.M. at last! Can you believe it, because I certainly can't. This all happened thanks to Callum. Oh little brother, if only you were here to witness this. I will cherish this position, and use my power to avenge you and Dad. If you're up there and listening, I promise that one day, whenever it may be, you will receive justice for what those daggers did to you.

'Oh Morgan, you are such an impatient person. For heaven's sake, the 'big' thing is coming sooner than you expect. I know that this seems so sudden, but today we will start planning it.'

Jude was a good guy, but he has changed a lot over the past eighteen years. He has become lazier and was always finding an excuse as to why he hasn't done anything. It felt like I had to babysit him. Babysitting the General? You're at an all-time low Morgan, you need to man up and do something.

'Sooo... what is the 'big' thing? And why have I not known about this before? I need explaining.' I sounded very demanding and rude, but I was excited after eighteen years of doing nothing.

'You don't have to know everything about it now. We will cross that bridge when we come to it.'

I just had to ask. I have known Jude since we were kids. Same school, same life, same hate for the Crosses. We have known each other for so long, he knows the rules and so do I. Friends don't keep secrets, we are at desperate times, and we are brothers in arms. Thoughts were circling around my head about what it could be, thousands each second. A bombing? A shooting? A hijack? I was thinking very thoroughly, but then it all went blurry. Everything felt so... so... relaxed and colourful. It was too late when I realised what had happened.

'You bastard, you... you... you drugged me!'

'Shhhh, it's OK Morgan, you will understand.'

I had my suspicions when he told me to meet at a bunker in the middle of nowhere, but elected to ignore them, since I trusted my leader. I felt numb, and my bones relaxed. After that, everything went dark.

Chapter 5: Jude

Morgan was one heavy boy. Thank God, I had Leila and Tom to help me as I wouldn't be able to carry him. There were no signs of human life for miles and miles. We got on the 4x4 and drove to a secret outpost located in the suburbs of the city. It took us one hour of driving to get there. Jason was waiting for us just outside the gate, and welcomed us, as well as our visitor.

'You got him?' he asked.

'Yes,' I replied.

Chapter 6: Morgan

I woke up with a terrible headache. To say the least, it hurt like hell. I was in a bed, quite comfortable to be honest, but it didn't make me forget what Jude did to me. I got out of bed and exited the room. I then saw four people, two who seemed like Jude and Leila. Leila's presence shocked me, since last time I saw her, she was rotting in a prison cell.

'What the hell is this? What was that for, moron?'

'We had to get you out of there in a way in which you wouldn't know where we were going. You can't know our location.'

'I can literally run out of that door now.'

'I wouldn't do that if I were you, as you wouldn't have a clue where you are.'

'Alright, I'm convinced, what are we doing here? Is this the 'big' thing?'

'Yes. Morgan, meet your team. Here we have Jason, a half-nought, half-cross teacher turned terrorist. He was belligerently kicked out of his job after the case with Callum at Heathcroft. Then we have Leila, whom you already know. She escaped during the Great Prison Escape of '09.'

'I'm back baby, ready to get my revenge on them daggers,' Leila said. You could hear the sheer determination in her voice, along with some aggression.

'And lastly, Tom. He is Pete's son. He was an unemployed teenage nought who was determined to make a change when his father died. This seems like the ideal job for him. So, how'd you like it?'

'It is, just amazing. I never imagined that we would work together again, especially after what happened with the ransom, and the fact that I've done nothing the past couple of decades.'

'Great, because we have five long months of planning ahead. Let's not waste any time,' Tom replied, feeling determined and proud.

Chapter 7: Jude

The Operation

We were outside the restaurant. It was 12:15pm on a Saturday, the perfect time for anyone to come and enjoy their brunch. The people seemed very happy, enjoying their lives, the Crosses, that is. No nought was nearby, except us, as this was the rich side of town, so that meant we stuck out like a sore thumb. I was leaning over our red Peugeot car. I felt nervous sweat dripping all over my face. My bones felt weak and everything felt cold. I felt dizzy and everything seemed blurry, but I wouldn't let that stop me from doing what I came here for.

'It is now or never, do it,' I whispered, with a slight stutter.

'After this, there is no coming back. See you in the other side guys,' Tom replied.

BOOM! The place turned from paradise to hell in a matter of seconds. People screaming, blood and debris everywhere. I could hear the sirens faintly, as my ears were ringing. The cops were already here, as It probably turned out that

some Cross had already called them minutes before. How original. Shots were being fired everywhere, from both sides. The building had nearly collapsed, so we had to get out of here. We were behind a transport truck, belonging to a company that sells pork. The design was unsurprisingly two happy Crosses enjoying their Crossmas meal. We had to move, and we had to do it quickly. I knew we weren't going to make it. I brought them to their own deaths.

'COVER ME!' Morgan yelled.

I fired my rifle, wasting all the ammo, hearing the bullets drop one by one. The cops kept on collapsing like sacks of potatoes, but more of them came, without knowing what they were walking into. I threw a hand grenade towards them as cover fire. Me, Jason, Morgan and Tom ran for our lives. We used the building and cars as natural cover in order to move closer to the port, where we had a little boat waiting for us. We were sprinting through all the chaos, and my eyes picked up something. Or someone. A familiar face. I stop and see him.

'Ca... Ca... Callum?'

It was a kid that looked like Callum did, days before I last saw him. He screamed, but I just, I just, I just stared. My mind couldn't believe it. A dagger was next to him. She was awfully familiar too.

'Se... Se... Sephy?'

I could tell from the look on her eyes that she knew me, but she chose to ignore it. I wouldn't blame her, after everything we did to her. She was screaming too. *It's not him*, I think to myself. He is dead. Callum is dead. CALLUM IS DEAD. Callum may be dead, but I won't let his kid end up like him.

'Run kiddo. RUN FOR YOUR LIFE. GO HIDE. YOU TOO SEPHY!'

'Jude? WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?' Sephy cried. 'Stop doing this, it won't bring him back.' Her eyes started to tear up and she started crying.

What have I done? How many wives have I left as widows? How many children have I left as orphans?

'GO HIDE,' I yelled at the top of my lungs, something which I regret doing because Sephy was just confused on top of being in the middle of a battlefield.

Chapter 8: Morgan

'Where's Jude?' I yelled.

'I don't know, but there is no time for him, keep on running,' panted Jason. We were all tired from running, but it was the only thing we could do. We were lucky enough that the police hadn't spotted us.

I stopped running and looked around. He was nowhere to be seen. Leila had been killed by the impact with the shockwave. I wasn't going to lose anyone else today. I ran back to the restaurant, hiding behind a car as I was still a wanted man. I see Jude charging at the cops. He didn't care about himself, he wanted us to escape. My instinct told me to go help, but my logic hesitated. Jude was cornered. Surrounded by a bunch of cops holding guns who had bad intentions. I wouldn't blame them, I mean half of the block has turned to a hellhole. The cops approached him slowly, but Jude was continuing to take them out. By killing them, he did nothing but exacerbate the situation. The cops were like a Hydra, every time one fell down, two more were behind him. Eventually, it got to the point where Jude was out of ammo. The cops marched and shot him more than enough times. I pointed my gun, ready to shoot, but I knew that would do nothing. Instead, I turned back and ran. I ran and ran till my legs could no more. I had arrived at the port in a matter of four minutes. Tom and Jason were there, ready to take off. I wasn't focused on who was on the boat. I was focused on who WASN'T.

his coffin, along with Jason and Tom. After all, it was the least I could do. He was slowly buried right next to his brother, father and sister. There was a silence that felt like eternity in which all my regrets returned to haunt my mind for a minute or so.

‘He was a good man, Meggie, a man who acted from his heart and not mind,’ said Jason, trying to hold back the tears.

‘Indeed, he helped me avenge my father. We know what it is like to lose, to feel so happy, and then to fail. Dread it, run from it, destiny still arrives,’ cried Pete, as he understood the feeling of emptiness, just like me.

‘He was my first-born,’ Meggie said. ‘He was my lovely boy. I never showed him that, and that is what’s eating me up from the inside. Love is something you take for granted until you lose it.’

‘Don’t worry Meggie, he knew that you loved him. He is in a better place now, with the rest of his family,’ I pointed out in order to try and calm her down just a little bit.

Over the hours, people started to leave, dozens at once, until it was me, Meggie, Tom and Jason. And a mysterious black man. It was unusual. A Cross at a nought funeral. I slowly approached him, endeavouring to get hold of my knife just in case he was no good.

‘Sir! May I ask what are you doing here?’

He turned around. It was an old man with one eye and loads of scars on his face. He was wearing brown boots covered in mud and a long black coat. The thought of him coming here to mourn didn’t cross my mind, because of the fact that it is rare. I had noticed everything about his outfit and movement, but what I realised way too late was the gun he was holding, with his finger on the trigger, pointed at my chest.



“I knew I loved you. That I always have and that I always will. But I also realized what you’d been trying to tell me all these years. You’re a Nought and I’m a Cross and there’s nowhere for us to be, nowhere for us to go where we’d be left in peace. Even if we had gone away together when I wanted us to, we would’ve been together for a year, maybe two. But sooner or later, other people would’ve found a way to wedge us apart. That’s why I started crying. That’s why I couldn’t stop. For all the things we might’ve had and all the things we’re never going to have.”

Chapter 112

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