

Chapter 4: The Library

After the shock receded, Silas pulled himself slowly to his feet. The ragged looking man – the one who seemed to be protecting the boy – raised his sword and glared. The boy was still whimpering. The priest who was with him started dragging him towards the door. *God's Grace, no doubt*, Silas thought. Two more figures entered the library before the priest reached the door. One looked hard with a battle-scar across his face; the other looked soft, and had a pronounced limp. And bore the scar of a faithless defrocked priest on his forehead.

"The underway?" he said, lightly, to the ex-priest. "I was planning to choose the sand, myself."

"And here I thought we were going to be friends, cousin," the ex-priest replied, grinning, as he drew a sword.

Cousin still, Silas thought. *Cheeky*. He felt a hand on his arm and saw Sarah standing beside him.

"I am Sarah of God's Will," she said to the strangers. "How can we be of service?"

The ragged man – who seemed to be in charge – looked them over for a while before answering.

"You got any weapons?" he asked firmly.

"Brother Paul has a short sword," Sarah replied, gesturing towards the badly injured priest-warrior, "but he is hardly fit to use it. Aside from that we are unarmed."

"I believe Brother John has a knife tucked away in his robes as well," Silas said to Sarah.

Silas looked back at John and smiled. John glowered at him.

"Shall we turn them over to you?" Sarah asked calmly.

"Just keep them where we can see 'em," the ragged man replied.

He lowered his sword but kept a watchful eye on them.

"Chunk, Scar, make sure the door is secure," he said to his own people. "And check on Pock."

The ex-priest and the hard-looking man with the scar on his face left the room. *Not very creative names*, Silas thought.

“One of them has been vamp-bit!” blurted the priest with the now struggling boy. “And they brought him with them!”

Still here, are you? Silas thought. *The boy doesn't seem to like you any more than me.* The ragged man glared at him and raised his sword again.

“I've led you back to your people,” he said angrily. “I'm done with you, Seth.”

“My people?” the priest – Seth – sputtered.

“Apparently not everyone is up on current religious politics,” Silas chimed in, before pulling out his flask and taking a drink.

“Squirt, take Shadow and see if Rat and Chunk need any help,” the ragged man said.

The dirty child who had first entered the room led the boy – *Shadow, now*, Silas wondered – out of the room. Seth started to protest but the ragged man shoved him backwards.

“Like I told the other one,” he said, “he's with me.”

He then abruptly turned and followed them out of the library.

Sarah's announcement initially produced more confusion than alarm. The silence that had accompanied her deliberations had been replaced by a low murmur. After a few moments the jurist from God's Grace stood up.

“Stop playing games, cousin,” he said derisively to Sarah. “We are restoring proper faith to the community, faith which your libertine bureaucrats allowed to lapse. This is a rescue, not an attack.”

Sarah smiled bemusedly and indicated for the courier to take the note she had received over to the jurist.

“I know what this is, cousin,” Sarah said. “I am referring, however, to the attack the so called Liberation Army has launched on the capital, from above.”

“Impossible!” the jurist from God's Grace said after reading the note.

“Surprising, yes,” Sarah replied, “but apparently quite possible, cousin. And the timing is quite curious.”

“Curious? What’s curious?” the jurist from God’s Grace asked, a note of concern in his voice.

“What’s curious is that the attack was timed to coincide with a leadership crisis,” Sarah replied decisively. “A crisis that has distracted God’s Hammer – that has distracted us – from mounting an adequate defense against our enemies. And a crisis that seems to have been orchestrated by God’s Grace. Cousin.”

“What?” yelled the jurist from God’s Grace. “That’s ridiculous!”

The jurist from God’s Hammer suddenly stood, grabbed the note from the other jurist’s hand, and quickly scanned it.

“Seize him!” he ordered. “Seize them all!”

The troop of God’s Hammer priest-warriors moved forward, weapons raised.

Silas looked down at Seth – who was still on the ground – and then turned to his fellow prisoners. *Or maybe former prisoners*, he thought.

“It’s him. It’s the boy,” he said to no one in particular. “Not that anyone seems to care anymore.”

John, Micah, and Martin were huddled in a corner whispering among themselves. And ignoring him. Sarah and James – the jurist from God’s Will – were also engaged in private – and quiet – conversation.

“Which one, cousin?” croaked Paul.

Still with us, Paul, I see, he thought.

“The one Seth here had hold of, cousin” Silas replied pointing at their new companion. “The one the ragged looking fellow called ‘Shadow.’”

“Who is the boy, cousin?” Paul asked weakly.

“Who’s the ... Why he is what this whole thing is about,” Silas said.

“Hardly, brother,” Martin chimed in. “Your work was just an excuse for a power play by God’s Grace.”

“The boy is the key to salvation, to everything,” Seth blurted out.

“Finally, someone who ...” Silas started.

“Who are you, Seth?” Sarah interrupted. “And what do you know about what’s going on?”

Seth glared at her angrily. But he didn’t say anything more.

A few minutes later the ragged man came back into the room.

“We need some supplies,” he said quietly. “Food, water, bandages. Anything you can spare.”

“Brother Silas, could you show...” Sarah began and then addressed the ragged man, “what should we call you, son?”

“Rat,” he answered.

“Silas, could you show Rat the way to the storeroom?” she continued. “And make sure he gets what he needs.”

Silas headed out of the library with Rat – *Rat*, he chuckled to himself, *how apt* – following closely behind.

The storeroom was on the same side of the hallway as the library, at the end furthest from the doorway. *The main doorway, at least*, Silas thought. He pointed out the mostly dried food, which Rat proceeded to modestly select from.

“Do you have any bandages,” Rat asked, “or medicine?”

“The bandages are over here,” Silas replied, pointing. “And here are some powdered poultices. A new creation of ours: just add water.”

Rat looked them over cautiously.

“You can find water across the hall in the bathing room,” Silas continued. “The pumps are still working. For now.”

“We have an extractor,” Rat replied.

Silas raised an eyebrow.

“An extractor?” he said. “We don’t see many of those in the capital.”

Rat just nodded.

“Where did you find the boy?” Silas asked suddenly.

“What’s it to you?” Rat replied curtly.

Silas paused for a moment before responding. *I better tread carefully with this one,* he thought.

“I run ... ran an orphanage,” he said. “The boy – you call him Shadow? – was a resident there.”

“Why is he scared of you?” Rat asked, a vague hint of violence in his tone.

Silas paused again before answering.

“Life wasn’t easy at the orphanage,” Silas replied. “They had to work for their keep; and discipline was firm.”

“What do you priests all want with Shadow?” Rat asked.

“He’s a ... special boy,” Silas replied, again after taking a moment to consider his answer.

Rat stared at him severely for a moment, and then left the room with his supplies. *He doesn’t trust me,* Silas thought. *And he didn’t answer my question.*

Silas followed Sarah’s lead and surrendered quietly to the priest-warrior who approached him, although not before he discretely tucked his flask back into his robes. Micah tried to protest and got a black eye for her troubles. The jurist from God’s Grace got the worst of it. His counterpart from God’s Hammer struck him in the face with the pommel of a sword – Where did that come from? Silas wondered – and kicked him repeatedly after he fell to the ground. When he was done, the jurist from God’s Hammer ordered that the rest of them be taken downstairs to the holding area. As they left the courtroom they found Martin already in custody and bleeding from the nose. Couldn’t wait to find out how it would end, Silas thought. After a brief discussion, the priest-warrior in charge of them took Martin as well. As they were led down the stairs, they heard the sounds of fighting below. When they entered the corridor, they passed the body of one of the priests who stood guard there. The other guard looked to be on the cusp of the same fate.

“Stop!” Sarah ordered the priest-warrior about to strike the killing blow.

And he stopped. Old habits die hard, Silas thought. He turned to the priest-warrior who was in charge of the prisoners for instructions.

“My brother Paul is of no danger to you, cousin,” Sarah said to the same priest. “I will take charge of him, and guarantee his cooperation.”

He’s unlikely to survive the night, Silas thought, surveying Paul’s many wounds. An easy promise to keep. The priest nodded.

“Cousin Silas,” Sarah began, and after a pause, “and Cousin John, please help carry Brother Paul to ...”

“Where are we going, cousin?” she asked the priest in charge.

The priest looked confused for a moment. He has no idea, Silas thought.

“Perhaps the library, cousin,” Sarah suggested.

The priest nodded.

“Cousin Silas, Cousin John, could you help carry Brother Paul to the library?” Sarah asked.

John and Silas walked over and carefully lifted Paul to his feet.

On his way back to the library Silas slipped back into his old cell. He lay on his back on the floor and pulled himself under his cot. He had just pulled his waterskin out of its hiding place when he heard a familiar voice.

“Well this is a compromising pose,” the ex-priest – Chunk – said. “Find anything interesting?”

Silas squirmed back out from under the bed, waterskin in hand, and began refilling his flask.

“I was almost out,” Silas said.

“Well we can’t have that, cousin” Chunk replied, grinning.

When it was full, Silas passed the flask to Chunk, who took a sip followed by a large mouthful.

“Aahh,” he sighed when he was done. “It’s been so long.”

Chunk passed the flask back to Silas who also took a long drink.

“Where did you come from?” Silas asked, as he passed the flask back to Chunk.

“The sand, ironically, cousin,” Chunk replied, gesturing at the scar on his forehead.

Chunk took one more drink and then passed the flask back to Silas.

“We’ll have to do this again some time, cousin,” he said as he left the room.

Silas refilled his flask and then secured the waterskin back under the cot.

As he left his old cell, Silas saw Rat, Chunk, and the two children – *or are there three?* he wondered – kneeling around a man lying on the floor. *Must be the Vamp-bitten one*, he thought as he wandered over.

“Am I starting to look delicious, Pock,” Chunked quipped.

Rat glared at him until Pock – *that fits*, Silas thought – faintly smiled.

“I’ll always be a Rat-man, Chunk,” Pock replied weakly.

Chunk laughed, and Rat nodded at him slightly. Squirt – the dirty child – had tears in his eyes. Another even dirtier child watched quietly with an unreadable expression on his – *her?* – face.

“How long ago was he bitten?” Silas asked Rat.

“Just before we got here,” Rat replied. “Less than an hour.”

“In twelve to twenty-four hours he is going to start craving blood,” Silas said. “And if he doesn’t get any, he’ll start going mad – and degenerating into a howler.”

Rat and Chunk just listened without replying. The children didn’t seem to be paying any attention to him.

“And be careful about contact,” Silas continued. “You can catch the vamp plague without being bitten.”

“How do you know so much about vamps, cousin?” Chunk asked, after a pause.

“I was part of a team studying them,” Silas replied. “Doing God’s Work.”

“I thought you ran an orphanage,” Rat said.

“That too,” Silas added quickly.

Rat turned away from Silas and looked back at the man on the floor.

“We can’t take you with us, Pock,” Rat said softly.

“I know,” Pock replied, half-sighing, half-crying.

Rat reached into his pack, pulled out a revolver, and handed it to Pock.

"Take it, you decide," he said. And then, "there's only one bullet."

"But don't take too long," Silas added.

He got up and headed back towards the library without waiting to see how they reacted.

Silas awoke to the sound of whispering. It took him a moment to realize where he was – that he had been sleeping on the library floor. I miss my cell, he thought as he gingerly pushed himself into a sitting position. At least there I had a bed. Sarah and Martin were quietly conversing in the far corner, while everyone else seemed to be asleep. But you've got one eye open, he thought as he looked over at John. He pulled himself to his feet and stretched briefly. He walked over to the bookshelf along the wall opposite the door and started browsing through the books. Moving gradually in the direction of Sarah and Martin. When he got close enough to hear, he eased to a stop, pulled a volume from the shelf and started thumbing through it. Ugh, more God's Grace theology, he thought, once he noticed what book he had chosen.

"...hope to achieve by conspiring with that rabble, cousin?" Martin asked.

"That is the question, cousin," Sarah whispered in reply. "God's Hammer does not seem to be in on it. And Cousin Bartholomew appeared to be ignorant as well."

"Bartholomew was a sacrificial lamb, cousin," Martin said quietly. "He's told them everything he knows by now."

Bartholomew? *Silas wondered.* The jurist from God's Grace?

"A lamb? Yes. But who sacrificed him, cousin?" Sarah replied.

Martin was quiet for a few moments. Calculating, Silas thought.

"All speculation aside," Sarah continued, "what are we going to do about God's Grace and the Liberation Army, cousin?"

"Do?" Martin replied, incredulously. "We can't do anything. We can't even get out of this room. And even if we could, we don't know what God's Grace are up to."

Martin paused again.

"Cousin," he added as an afterthought.

"It doesn't matter, brother," Silas chimed in.

He put down his book and tried to take a drink from his flask. Empty, he thought. Damn. Martin looked surprised to see him standing there. Sarah nodded and smiled.

"What doesn't matter, Cousin Silas?" Sarah asked.

"Ignore this drunken libertine, cousin," Martin interjected angrily. "He's caused enough harm already."

"This "drunken libertine" nearly saved God's Work, cousin," Sarah replied calmly. "Why do you think God's Will voted to hold him responsible?"

"We developed an effective defense strategy," Martin said, more calmly this time, "which Brother Micah implemented impeccably. Cousin."

"True enough, cousin," Sarah replied. "But if Cousin Silas had wavered, that whole edifice would have come crumbling down. Silas convinced me he would not waver."

Martin glared at Silas but remained silent. And, after a moment, nodded to him, almost imperceptibly.

"What doesn't matter, Cousin Silas?" Sarah asked again.

Silas pretended to take a slow drink from his flask before answering. Makes for a more dramatic delivery, he thought to himself.

"It doesn't matter that we can't leave the room or that we don't know what God's Grace are up to, cousin," he said. "As long as you can convince God's Hammer to, ah, "intervene" in the way that they do, their plans will be disrupted whatever they are."

Sarah smiled.

"Food for thought, cousin," Sarah replied. "Why don't you get some rest? Cousin Martin and I have a lot to talk about."

Dismissed, Silas wandered back over to where he had been sleeping and lay back down on the floor.

*Silas awoke with a start. He was disoriented and had a pounding headache. After a few moments his eyes adjusted to darkness. *My cell*, thought to himself. *How cozy*. He reached down and picked up the now empty flask that had fallen onto the floor next to his cot. *I'll have to refill it*, he thought as he sat up gingerly.*

"Ohh," he moaned, and fell back on his cot clutching his head.

After a few minutes he sat up again, and carefully swung his legs over the side of his cot. Once his head cleared he grabbed his flask, got up, and headed out into the

hallway. He glanced towards the main doorway. There was someone standing by it who seemed to be on guard but he couldn't make out who. *I don't care*, he thought to himself and headed down the hallway the other direction. He entered the bathing area and began to relieve himself.

"...one of them...can't be trusted..." a voice Silas couldn't make out whispered in the darkness.

Silas tried to quietly finish up urinating but dropped his flask. Which hit the floor with a clearly audible clang. In an instant, Rat emerged from the shadows with a sword in his hand. He was joined shortly by Sarah.

"Cousin Sarah, I would never have guessed," Silas quipped awkwardly.

"What did you hear?" Rat demanded, raising his sword menacingly.

"N-nothing," Silas replied as he raised his arms and backed towards the corner.

"Shh!" Sarah whispered harshly to both of them, and then to Rat, "Cousin Silas is no threat, son."

"I don't trust him," Rat said to Sarah, his eyes fixed on Silas.

"You don't need to trust him, son" Sarah replied. "He doesn't have any friends or allies here. Except maybe me. Isn't that right, cousin?"

Silas nodded. And Rat lowered his sword slightly.

"Maybe you can help us, cousin," Sarah continued. "Our friend Rat needs – we need – a route up to the surface or down to the underway. But all the stairwells seemed to be blocked just above the thoroughfare. And the quarantine barriers are overrun. But God's Work always seem to have secret ways of getting around."

"Why do we need to go anywhere?" Silas asked, genuinely puzzled. "This seems as safe a place as any. At least for now."

"Apparently our continued presence may become, ah, untenable in relatively short order, cousin," Sarah replied, looking over at Rat and then back at Silas.

Silas paused for a moment. *There's no point in keeping it secret anymore, I suppose*, he thought.

"We have our own quarantine barrier," said Silas, "in the orphanage. Cousin."

"Interesting, cousin," Sarah replied with a smile.

“Why would you need get to the underway from an orphanage?” Rat interjected.

“Ah ... just in case ... special projects ...,” Silas stammered, flummoxed by the question.

“Cousin Silas,” Sarah interrupted, “Rat and I have a lot to discuss. Maybe you should go back to bed.”

“Good idea, cousin,” Silas replied and started towards the door.

Thank you, Sarah, he thought, before he stopped and turned.

“How are we going to get out of here, cousin?” he asked.

“God’s Will has their little secrets as well, cousin,” Sarah replied. “Good night.”

This time Silas smiled before continuing out the door and back to his cell.

Silas awoke again to the sound of voices. This time they weren’t whispering. I didn’t think I’d be able to sleep, Silas thought. What’s it this time? He sat up and looked around. Sarah and James were kneeling beside Paul. God’s Will sticking together, Silas thought. How quaint.

“He’s going to die if we can’t get the bleeding stopped, brother,” James said. “And infection will kill him even if we can.”

Sarah nodded sadly and looked around the room.

“Cousin Silas, go down to the storeroom and get some bandages. And fresh salves if there are any,” she said softly. And then, “it’s at the far end of the hallway on the right.”

Silas pulled himself to his feet and walked stiffly over to the door. He knocked gently and waited. After a moment, the door opened sharply and a priest from God’s Hammer stepped in. Sword raised.

“What?” he demanded, before derisively adding, “cousin.”

Silas paused – to check his indignation – before responding.

“It’s Cousin Paul,” Silas began. “He’s getting worse. There are medical supplies in the storeroom.”

The guard looked over at Paul and shook his head derisively.

"It's a waste of time," the guard said. "He'll be dead soon anyhow. Cousin."

"Maybe I can find something you need while I'm at it, cousin," Silas replied.

The priest narrowed his eyes before stepping back outside and closing the door. Silas heard voices on the other side of the door but couldn't make out what they were saying. At least I got his attention, he thought.

After a few minutes the door opened again and the guard gestured for Silas to come out. There was a second guard leaning against the wall beside the door with a disgruntled look on his face.

"This way, cousin," Silas said as he turned and headed down the hallway in the direction Sarah had indicated.

As he neared the end of the hall, he started trying doors until one opened. Turning on the light revealed a room filled with supplies.

"Help yourself, cousin," Silas said, as he started exploring the shelves himself.

The shelves were neatly organized, with different kinds of goods in different sections. He found the bandages easily, as well as a jar of salve that had an expiration date on the label that had not been reached yet. Even bureaucrats sometimes come in handy, Silas thought dismissively. Before collecting the medical supplies, Silas continued searching the room. After a few minutes he spotted a large jug tucked away in a corner. This looks promising, he thought. He found a glass on a shelf nearby and filled it using the tap at the bottom. He took a sip, and then drained the glass. Ah, the good stuff, he thought. Silas looked back at the guard who was filling his satchel and ignoring him. He then refilled and drained the glass again before filling his flask. Finally, he stood up and collected the bandages and salve.

"I've got what I need, cousin," he announced.

After selecting a few last items, his guard led him out of the storeroom and back towards the library. Silas glanced back at the jug as he walked out the door. I'll be back for you, he thought wistfully.

Silas's head was still throbbing when he awoke again. This time it seemed to be pulsating in a rhythm. *Boom-boom, boom, boom, boom. Boom-boom, boom, boom, boom*, Silas counted to himself. It took a moment for him to realize that the sounds weren't just in his head. He got up and went out into the hallway. Rat and Pock were talking quietly to one another, looking at the ceiling. *He's looking better*, Silas thought. *I guess his injuries were superficial. Except for one.* Sarah emerged from the library, followed by James, and joined the others.

“What is it, son?” Sarah asked.

“I don’t know,” Rat said. “Someone’s going to have to go take a look.”

“I’ll go,” Scar volunteered quickly.

Where did he come from? Silas wondered. Rat nodded. Rat and Pock walked over to the main door with Scar and helped moved the furniture out of the way that was blocking it. They opened the door just wide enough for him to squeeze through. He stuck his head in and looked around before leaving.

“I’ll just check what it is and be right back,” he said

“Be careful,” Rat replied.

Rat watched him through the doorway for a few minutes before stepping back inside and closing the door. He exchanged some hand signs with Pock, and then the two of them began quietly moving the heavy furniture back in front of the door. When they were done Rat gave Pock a tight hug.

“Hold the door as long as you can,” Rat said quietly. “And then use the gun.”

Pock nodded as Rat released him, tears in his eyes. *This must be good-bye*, Silas thought. Silas followed Rat as he left Pock and headed back down the hallway. Chunk emerged from one of the cells just as Rat reached Sarah and James.

“It’s time to go,” Rat said to Sarah.

Sarah nodded solemnly, and whispered something in James’ ear. He headed into the library.

“Chunk, grab the kids and follow her,” Rat said, gesturing towards Sarah. “I’ll get the gear.”

Silas waited in the hallway with Sarah. In a few minutes Chunk emerged from one of the cells with Shadow and the two dirty children, each of whom was carrying a pack. Shortly afterwards James led the priests from God’s Work – Martin, Micah, and John – out of the library. Seth, and then Paul, straggled out as well, after a moment. *Standing now Paul*, Silas thought. *This truly is a day of miracles.*

“What is going on, cousin?” Martin asked, addressing Sarah. “Cousin James tells us we’re going somewhere.”

“Brethren, friends,” Sarah said, addressing the group, “it looks as though the Underway Liberation Army will be arriving shortly. We don’t want to be here when they get here.”

“Where are you taking us?” Seth chimed in, angrily.

“Cousin,” Sarah began, “we will be going to Cousin Silas’s orphanage. And then down into the underway.”

Seth seemed mollified by this answer and stopped scowling for a moment. *That’s the happiest I’ve ever seen him*, Silas thought. John, however, glared angrily at Silas.

“More secrets, Brother Silas?” Martin asked.

“Secrets from you maybe, brother. But not secrets from him,” Silas replied, gesturing at John. “And not secrets from God’s Work.”

Martin looked over at John. John met his stare without looking away.

“Brethren, friends, quickly, this way,” Sarah said firmly, gesturing towards the far end of the hallway. “The door to the emergency tunnel is in the bathing room.”

“Where’s Scar?” Chunk asked, as the rest of the group started following Sarah.

“He’s with the army,” Rat said from behind them.

“He’s wi ... oh,” Chunk replied. “Well well, a veritable wolf in wolf’s clothing.”

“Is Scar Hogg?” Squirt – who had lingered behind – asked.

Squirt’s question was met with a puzzled silence. *Hogg? Where have I heard that before?* Silas wondered.

“Well the man has appetites, but I wouldn’t go that far,” Chunk quipped.

Squirt didn’t respond. Rat passed some of the equipment he was carrying to Chunk and they headed down the hall. Silas quickly ducked into his cell to retrieve his waterskin. Just as he re-emerged he heard banging on the main door.

“They’re here!” Pock shouted.

Silas turned and fled towards the bathing room.

Silas was drunk. Very drunk. In addition to the two glasses of liquor he had consumed in the storeroom, he had nearly emptied his flask. He was holding onto the bookshelf to keep from falling down. And even so, he was swaying back and forth. Luckily, no one's paying attention, he thought to himself. Everyone was watching Sarah who was having an animated conversation with the jurist from God's hammer.

"Everyone except Paul," Silas said out loud. "He's watching the ceiling."

"Shh!" said Martin.

Silas lowered himself to the floor as carefully as he could. He knocked a couple of books off the shelves as he adjusted himself to a sitting position. Martin looked down at him and gestured for him to be quiet.

"It's my plan," Silas said. "But do I get any credit? No, not Brother Silas. Let's just send him to die in the sand."

John walked over and crouched down next to him. He doesn't look happy, Silas thought. What's new?

"Brother Martin asked you to be quiet, you disgrace," he whispered angrily, "so shut up!"

"A disgrace?" Silas almost shouted. "I saved the order. I didn't waver. Ask Martin."

Martin looked over when he heard his name called, gestured for silence again, and looked away.

"You didn't save anything," John whispered coldly. "You libertines are a cancer. You destroyed the order here in the capital. At least you destroyed yourselves while you were at it."

"At least I'm not a disposable assassin," Silas retorted.

John glared and started to pull a knife out of his robes. He's going to kill me, Silas thought.

"Brother John!" Martin hissed. "He had the sanction of the council. He played his part. He was willing to face the sand."

"He'll face the sand yet, if I have my way, brother," John replied.

He put his knife back in his robes, pushed Silas over, and got up and walked away. Silas retched, and then passed out.

Silas rushed into the bathing room. The group was clustered in the corner where Rat and Sarah had been talking. *Or conspiring*, Silas thought. There was a small hole in the wall that somebody – *Chunk, maybe*, Silas thought – had already crawled into.

"They're here!" Silas yelled. "The army!"

Rat started towards the door, but Sarah grabbed his arm.

"No, son. We need you," she said, and then, gesturing at the children, "they need you."

"I'll go, brother," James volunteered.

"Take this, brother," said Paul, handing James his sword.

James ran from the room, sword in hand.

"I'll hold them off here, brother" Paul said to Sarah. "I don't need a weapon to deal with that rabble."

"Thank you, brother, for your sacrifice," Sarah replied.

Rat had already ushered the children into the tunnel. Seth tried to follow Shadow in but Rat shoved him aside. And followed Shadow himself, pushing the extractor in front of him. Seth scrambled in after him. They could hear shouting in the hallway now.

"Silas next!" Sarah ordered.

Martin looked like he was about to object.

"We need him," Sarah said, "He's our guide. Cousin John, you will come last. You will need to collapse the tunnel after us. There's a cord at the halfway point. I will wait for you there."

"Yes, cousin," John replied, after a pause.

Considering disobedience are we John? Silas thought. *I didn't think you had it in you.* Silas hurried into the tunnel. It was big enough that he could crawl on his hands and knees. But he couldn't see anything. He crawled as fast as he could but was continually pushed from behind.

"Hurry!" a voice – *Micah?* – whispered hoarsely.

I am hurrying, Silas thought to himself. All of a sudden, the tunnel – which to that point been straight and level – took a sharp turn into a steep downward incline. Silas half-slid, half- tumbled down the slope until he landed on the floor of a dark room. After a moment, Micah tumbled down on top of him.

Silas awoke where he passed out – face first in his own vomit. Somebody could have pulled me back, he thought. He lay there, staring at the floor, without moving. After a few minutes he tried to push himself away. His hand slipped in the vomit and he fell back down. Better wash that too, he thought. He closed his eyes and then awoke again. How long I out? He wondered. Was I out? He pushed himself to a sitting position and looked around. Everyone was gone, except for Paul. Who wasn't moving.

"They left me," Silas groaned. "With a corpse."

"Where?" a voice replied weakly. "Who?"

Silas looked around again. There was no one else in the room aside from Paul.

"Cousin Paul?" Silas asked. "Are you still with us?"

"Who are you?" Paul replied after a pause. "What happened?"

Where to start? Silas wondered.

"It's Paul of God's Work," Silas responded. "And you've been stabbed."

"The prisoner?" Paul replied.

"Yes, the prisoner"

"How did your trial turn out, cousin," Paul asked.

"I was found guilty and responsible," Silas replied bitterly.

"Congratulations, cousin," Paul said.

Silas nodded and then pulled himself to his feet. His head was throbbing now. A wave of nausea overtook him and he retched again. But nothing came out. He stood there hunched over for a few minutes with his hands on his knees.

"Who stabbed me, cousin?" Paul asked suddenly.

"God's Hammer, cousin," Silas replied. "It's a long story."

He straightened up and walked unsteadily towards the door.

The door war ajar, but Silas knocked gently on it anyhow. There was no reply. He poked his head out and looked around. The guards were nowhere to be seen. He stepped out into the hallway. The main door was propped open. He headed the opposite direction and went into the bathing room. He removed his robes and cleaned himself up as well as he could. He then dressed again and headed across the hallway into the storeroom. He found a satchel and a waterskin on one of the lower shelves. He filled the satchel with dried food, and then filled both the waterskin and his flask with liquor from the jug. He also poured a little into the glass he had used before and took a small sip.

"I told you I'd be back for you, my friend," he said to the jug.

Silas headed back down the hallway and went into his old cell. He stashed the waterskin under the cot. Just in case, he thought to himself. He lay down on top of the cot and closed his eyes. He awoke to the sound of voices. He got up and went across the hall into the library. My fellow prisoners have returned, he thought when he saw who was now present. But they've left our guards behind.

Silas pulled his legs out from under Micah and crawled to his feet. He offered her his hand.

"May I help you up, brother?" Silas asked.

Micah waited for a moment before taking his hand. *I'm still not rehabilitated in her eyes*, Silas thought.

"Thank you, brother," Micah said, after he pulled her up.

When his eyes adjusted to the darkness, Silas saw that the chute he had slid down opened into a small room. On the opposite wall there was a doorway, from which he heard the sound of whispering. He walked over and looked through the door. It opened into another small room. The children were clustered together on the floor, with Seth watching them closely. Rat and Chunk were conferring by another door. Which appeared to be chained and locked.

Silas heard a rustling behind him and turned to see Martin glide gracefully into the room. *Prig*, he thought to himself. Micah helped Martin to his feet and the two of them conferred quietly while staring back at the chute. Silas turned back towards the doorway an explosion – from up the chute – shook the room. Silas turned again to look, holding onto the doorframe for support. In a few moments John and Sarah tumbled into the room. They were followed by a plume of hot, dusty air. And what appeared to be a human arm, sword still in hand. Silas rushed over and helped Sarah to her feet.

"Thank you, cousin," she coughed.

Rat rushed into the room, just as John pulled himself to his feet. *Scowling as always*, Silas thought.

“What happened?” Rat asked worriedly.

“Don’t worry, son, ” Sarah. “Everything went according to plan. More or less.”

Rat visibly relaxed. He walked over to the severed arm, knelt down, and retrieved the sword. He scanned the room quickly before handing the sword to Silas.

“Here,” he said, “you might need it.”

Silas eyed it suspiciously before carefully putting it into his satchel.

“Thank you, son” he replied, and smiled at John.

“Shall we get going, son?” Sarah said to Rat.

“We’re locked in,” Rat replied.

Sarah smiled, reached into her own satchel and pulled out a large key.

“I believe this may be of assistance, son,” she said, offering the key to Rat.

Rat nodded, took the key from her hand, and headed into the second room, followed closely by Sarah. Silas waited until everyone else had followed him as well.