

Nobody

"It had to be done."

"Whatever." Shay's mouth is set in a firm line. She pushes off a streetlamp and stalks ahead, not caring if Zeke and I follow. She refused to come with us earlier, choosing instead to pickpocket ignorant tourists and haggle for a jacket to replace Zeke's ripped one. The heavier jacket isn't brand-new and it swallows the kid's skinny frame, but he's grinning ear to ear.

I rub my hands together, feeling dirt catch and peel off my skin. Dark earth is still stubbornly buried in my ragged nails and the creases of my hand. Zeke seems oblivious to the fact that his clothes and tearstained face are coated in the substance. I imagine Shay pitching a fit if she finds a speck of dirt in our hideout.

"Was it a nice place?"

It takes me a moment to understand Shay's question. She's been silent for the past few blocks, leading us through the narrow alleys and deserted streets; Zeke is the only one talking, making random observations to no one in particular, his voice steadily rising in volume. I expected Shay to tell him to shut up, so the question unhinges me.

Zeke answers, his voice quiet like he also predicted the scolding: "We picked a tall tree. He would've liked it."

It's becoming difficult to see as the sun's last rays are swallowed by the premature darkness of autumn, but I swear Shay's fists shake. She wraps them tightly around the handle of her prized knife, before stepping into the alley's shadows so she disappears from sight.

By the time we arrive at our hideout—a dilapidated and drafty theatre, and the closest thing to 'home' any of us have had in years—Zeke is swaying from exhaustion. At times like this, it's clear the

kid is probably closer to ten years old than his boisterous claims of fourteen. Sprawled over his uncomfortable mattress, he struggles to keep his eyes open. "I miss Flynn."

"Me too, kiddo," I tell him.

"Shay should've come with us."

Across the room, Shay's face is hidden behind a battered novel she stole from a used bookstore, her knife traded for a flashlight. She hasn't spoken a word about Flynn since she found him collapsed from pneumonia four days ago. He didn't last much longer: there wasn't much a group of poor street rats could do when he refused to be treated.

"I'll die like a proper nobody," Flynn told me. "No one will have a record that I was sick or died. Like I never even existed." He was still laughing and grinning like an idiot between bouts of nasty coughs, never once complaining or asking why Shay always conveniently disappeared. Maybe he was just another homeless kid, but he had found each of us wild-eyed and bound to die on the streets, and helped us without question. We stuck together.

Then he just died. Unceremoniously. End of story.

Of course, it wasn't like we could afford a funeral. Zeke and I dug a decent grave in a patch of wilderness, and we spent most of our pathetic savings getting Flynn there.

On the trunk of the tree above the grave, I carved: HERE LIES NOBODY.

With his sick sense of humour, Flynn would've laughed.

We gave him a proper burial. We did the least anyone deserves. For nobodies like us, the kids whose disappearances mean nothing, this means everything.

I can hear Zeke's slow, even breaths, and Shay has flicked off her flashlight. I stare at the ceiling but can't see anything through the pitch black.

"Hey." Shay's hesitant voice. "You still awake?"

"Zeke's asleep."

I imagine her making a face through the darkness. "I'm talking to *you*, idiot." She pauses. "Tell me a story."

Part of me wants to turn my back to her because she refused to go near Flynn's body or his gravesite. Then I swallow the venom because I know why she waited until it was dark. "What kind?"

"Nothing. Anything." Another pause. "Something about Flynn. Something funny."

I smile for the first time in what feels like forever. Maybe Flynn's right—we're all just nobodies. But we're also all we have.

So I turn in Shay's direction and tell her a story. Not because I like her or because I can't fall asleep, but because we are the only ones who will ever remember.

It's not a lot, but it has to be done.