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The Phasewalker
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THE PHASEWALKER: ATTACK OF THE HOUNDS

by

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FIVE

In the dirty alleyways of Ilkeston a pair of eyes followed a path through the buildings. It was following several scents at once, its stomach grumbling from hunger. It was scavenging for scraps all day, but recently it picked up a new smell that grabbed its attention. It followed it for blocks, zeroing in on it with animalistic intent.

They finished their drinks about thirty minutes later. Thirty minutes of tense conversation with Joseph silently fuming as he glared at Jackson across the table. After their brief battle of wits, where Jackson miraculously came out on top, the squabbling finally died down. The rest of the group were able to laugh and talk peacefully all the way until they finished and walked out of the bar. Nobody addressed Joseph directly until Mira found herself turning to him and saying “By the way, I heard about your dad. I’m sorry for your loss.”

He didn’t respond politely, snapping a look to her as he replied “Save your breath. That guy was always a tosser. He got what he deserved.”

Jack still believed he was responsible for Stoke’s initial death, quickly taking Mira by the arm as Joseph snapped at her. “Yeah, he looks really cut up about it” he whispered.

“That’s because he got his wish” Jordan muttered from behind them, catching everyone by surprise. This was the first time he had spoken all day. “His greatest desire was fulfilled. We all have a deep desire within us, that one wish we want above all else. Sometimes we don’t even know what that wish is until we find it, then we realise it couldn’t be anything else. I know what my wish is, and one day soon it will come true. I just need to wait for the right moment.”

He looked up and realised everyone was looking at him. But he lowered his gaze again and fell silent. The others looked at each other, a mix of confusion and concern. Troy and Jackson locked eyes, shrugging at each other. “Okay, that was illuminating” Jack quipped to

break the silence. He decided to play along and asked Troy “What do you reckon your big wish would be?”

“A night of peace and quiet” he answered immediately, talking about both Jack and Joseph’s rivalry and his other life that usually interrupts them.

“I’d go for another drink” Brodey chuckled as they stood outside in the town square, his blue eyes scanning the various pubs and bars circling the area. “You know, since we’re all here, why don’t we just get the night started now?”

“That’s an excellent idea” Joseph agreed, finding his smirk again. “And I know the perfect place to start” he added, pointing to the new place across the square. “Should be enough to get Jacki-boy into the spirit of the night.”

The change in demeanour indicated to everyone that Joseph was back to form, his smug smile and gaze immediately putting Jack’s back up. Troy checked his watch to find the afternoon had barely started. “It’s still early Joseph” he told them.

“We are all here though” Karl agreed. “It would save us having to split up only to meet later.”

The others all started nodding, agreeing with Joseph, Brodey and Karl. Even Troy had to admit it was a good idea. “Well I need to head home” Mira said adjusting the strap of her bag. “A lot to do for tomorrow.” She snuck a playful slap to Jacks elbow, sharing a knowing smile.

He smiled back, saying “I’ll walk you home.”

“Leaving already?” Joseph asked turning towards them.

“I’ll be back” Jack quickly told him. “I need to make a stop at home beforehand. Get a change of clothes. I’m not going on a night out with you guys dressed like this.”

“You look fine” Brodey told him, examining his outfit. “Though maybe you could lose the stupid hat.”

“Say what you will about my clothes” Jack smiled, pulling the rim of his hat down over his eyes. “But the hat stays.” Brodey broke into a grin, laughing proudly as the boy turned away from them. “I’ll be back before you know it.”

“Or better yet, don’t come back at all” Joseph muttered. Jack ignored him as he and Mira walked away, prompting Troy to lead the others towards the next pub. Joseph stayed where he was though, staring after the two of them. “Be careful with him Mira” he called out suddenly. “He has a habit of getting himself stabbed.”

That caught their attention, bringing them to a reluctant stop, the same for Troy who immediately tensed. *Oh no, don’t do this* he thought as he turned back to Joseph, who had a cocky grin on his face.

“Yeah, I heard about what happened” he continued, chuckling quietly as Jack risked glancing over his shoulder. “Poor little Jackie, all alone in Derby bleeding on the floor, lying in a coma with nobody to visit him. Honestly, you’d have been doing the world a favour by not waking up.”

Mira was the first to turn around, snapping back at him “What a horrible thing to say!”

“Leave him be” Jack whispered. “He’s just trying to wind me up.”

“Oh don’t get snippy with me you lesbian bitch” Joseph laughed, knowing it would make Jack bristle. “It’s not like you were in a hurry to make sure he was safe. Nor was Troy for that matter” he added, turning to face the broad shouldered friend staring back at him. “What was it you said on Facebook when you found out about it mate?”

“Shut up Joseph!” Troy growled, seeing Jack’s head turn slightly in his direction listening. His heart quickened all of a sudden.

“You were having drinks with your brother I believe” Joseph explained. “You were posting about the fantastic night out. Then someone tagged about Jackson in the hospital. I remember the comment well. *Just like Jackson White to ruin a fantastic evening. This is why I*

don't invite him to things. So true and relatable.” He turned back to Jack, who was silent throughout all of this. “So please, go. Don’t come back. You’d only spoil the mood for all of us.”

Jack didn’t say anything, but he could feel everyone’s gaze on him waiting for a reaction. Troy was pale and frantic as he stared at his best friend, waiting for him to say something. The silence only worried him more. When Jackson got upset or angry he doesn’t lash out. He falls silent to the point he doesn’t seem to move, lets the rage fester bottled up inside. He went to step closer, wanting to say what Joseph claimed was bullshit, but Jack would know if he was lying. Instead he snapped “That’s enough Joseph!”

He laughed in the young man’s face. “What are you going to do? What’s Jack going to do? Last time he tried to hit me it barely hurt” he chuckled, neglecting the fact that it was Karl and Troy who had to intervene and stop it coming to blows. Troy looked back to see Mira quietly talking to Jack, who appeared to be taking a deep breath as he ignored the bully. But Joseph wouldn’t let it go. Clearly the embarrassment Jack caused him in the bar was significant enough for him to seek revenge. “What’s wrong Mira? Is Jack going to cry” he goaded, flashing a smirk as she glared at him angrily. “Why don’t you take him home? You can fuck him until he feels better again like a good little slut.”

That was it, enough to make Jackson turn on his heel and glare back at Joseph. Troy watched as the young man took a step forward, his eyes catching a hint of an orange glow in the boy’s palm. Immediately he sprang forward, sprinting across to him grabbing his wrist tightly. “Jack, don’t!” he whispered under his breath, pulling him aside away from Joseph’s gaze. Jack snapped towards him angrily, fury in his eyes, his breathing slow. Joseph had succeeded in getting under his skin.

Troy motioned to Jack’s palm, where the scar was glowing orange, obscured from the view of Joseph, who was grinning smugly, and Mira, who was standing behind Jack shouting at the

horrible young man. Jack stared at the brand in surprise as Troy warned him against using his powers to hurt Joseph, despite the fact he deserved it. “This isn’t me” he whispered back, looking Troy in the eye. His gaze was no longer furious anger, it was confusion and concern.

Troy watched as the boy looked down at his hand curiously before snapping up to glance around him, his irises changing from hazel to purple for a moment like they did when he was doing his reaper thing. He sensed something in the air. That was when Troy realised what it meant, a new brand of fear tightening his chest. “No!” he breathed under his breath, silently pleading as Jack met his gaze again. “No. No! Not tonight” he begged.

The street was suddenly filled with screaming from the square, drawing the focus of everyone as they turned to see a group of people fleeing from a large shape as it bound into the square. The arguments and tension were forgotten as a large hound jumped into the middle of a small crowd of people, scattering them in all directions barking angrily at them. Its skin was lumpy and cracked, coloured red and black like it was covered in blood and slime, its narrow yellow eyes glaring at everyone as it sniffed the air around it.

Twenty feet away the group froze in shock and fear, except for Joseph who grinned and laughed as if he found it funny. Brodey and Jordan immediately backed away while Karl was left rooted to the spot staring at the creature, his mouth agape in shock. A few metres away from them Jackson instinctively stepped in front of Troy and Mira, pulling them by the arm behind him placing himself between them and the monster. Troy was cursing under his breath, muttering “Every time I go out with you.”

“I know” Jack hissed back.

Mira clutched onto his arm fearfully. “Jack, is that...”

“I know” he whispered gently to her. It looked exactly like the hound that burst into the café they ate at last week, and the hound he fought in Kirk Hallam. But they were dead. *How many more of them are there?*

The hound suddenly stopped and looked towards the group, its eyes fixing on them intently. Everyone noticed it face them and start scrambling back, falling over each other as the creature barked and growled before leaping towards them. Half of them screamed as they ran away from it. Mira screamed prompting Jack to take both her and Troy by the hand and lead them out of harm's way. Behind them the four others scattered in all directions, except Karl who stood frozen staring at the hound. "It's not possible" he was muttering, over and over until Brodey grabbed his arm and pulled him back, narrowly missing the jaws of the hound as it snapped at the boy angrily. It came to a stop as Karl was dragged away from it, its eyes glaring at the smaller boy until its attention was diverted by a different group of people.

This group seemed to see themselves as heroes all of a sudden, a group of men running out of another bar seeing the monster and running at it to save the day. One of them was carrying a can, which he threw at the hound until it landed by its feet harmlessly. The hound turned its attention to the new group, snarling and barking, giving the others time to run and hide. Jack, Mira and Troy ducked around a corner into a side ally, safely out of sight of the creature. Jack ushered them behind him as he peeked back into the square, watching the hound as it leapt at the stupid mortals who thought this was an ordinary wild dog. He averted his eyes as it latched its jaw around the first man's throat, ripping it out terrifying the rest of the group, sobering them up and making them realise they bit off more than they could chew. He held his hand over Mira to keep her behind his back, pinned to the brick wall so she didn't have to witness the brutal murder, and she trusted him enough to comply. Troy stayed back by his own accord, listening to the screams understanding exactly what is going on. He was still cursing under his breath glaring at Jackson. He was mad that, of course, monsters had to attack while Jackson was around.

Jackson was doing the maths in his head, counting the number of people in the area including his friends, measuring the distance between him and the hound and the odds of saving

the most people. The biggest issue is he couldn't jump out and use his powers without revealing himself to his friends and rival. He looked across to find Brodey, Joseph, Jordan and Karl standing in the open staring at the creature as it attacked the other group. Karl was frozen in shock, Brodey dragging him by the shoulders, Jordan running down the street while Joseph was laughing like it was the most entertainment he'd seen all night.

Jack turned to lock eyes with Troy. "Get Mira out of here" he told him. "Make sure she gets home safe."

Troy nodded, happy to be told to run away from trouble for once. But Mira was reluctant to leave Jack behind. "Wait, what? We need to go together."

Jack didn't want to lie to her, and every bone in his body wanted to stay with her and make sure she was protected until she was home safe, but he was needed here. "I'll be right behind you" he wanted to say, but he decided to add a little explanation. "But first I have to make sure the guys over there don't get themselves killed."

Troy saw Joseph standing in the street and asked "Couldn't we just leave him to be eaten?" Jack glanced at him with an expression that said *I wish I could*, but they both knew he wasn't that vindictive. Joseph probably deserves what's coming to him, but it went against everything Jack believed to let him get hurt. Mira understood this too, which was why she reluctantly let go of his arm and gave him a kiss on the cheek for luck. "You got this?" Troy asked quietly.

"I got this" he replied confidently, ushering them away as he turned back to the carnage.

Mira was dragged away from the brave young man by Troy, who frantically guided her down the alley away from the horrors happening before them. She turned around to run with him, hooking her bag over her shoulder as they reached the back of the building. When she turned back to check on Jack she was shocked to find him gone. Troy returned to her side, seeing that Jackson had vanished, and quietly told her he'll be fine. She hoped he was right,

trusting Jack to come home safe even though she was now terrified for him. She followed Troy, who cast one last look down the alley praying Jack knew what he was doing.

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