

Summary: When the Rebs—a ragtag group of violent mutineers—take over, Jossua and the Homesteaders take refuge in the city underground. But when Jossua is captured and brought to Sin City, she must contend with bloodthirsty ‘lost boys,’ unsolicited feelings for their charming-but-cold-hearted leader, and the startling realization she is starting to forget home.

CHAPTER 1

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

I can't remember the ocean. I don't even know when I forgot it. One day, I realized the sound of waves had dimmed in my mind. The smell of salt had faded. Memories are weird like that. Just like treasures, some of them we hold, some of them we bury.

Still, I think I can almost see the shoreline from the top of this building, the way the land seems to fall to its knees just beyond the trees there. That's the kind of reverence the earth only shows to the sea—moving for it, shifting with it, feeding everything to it. I guess you could call it an agreement between them, the land and the sea. An understanding of power. I'd call it a treaty but I know it's not always peaceful.

The view is one of the few redeeming qualities of my role here in the commune. I get to look out over the whole world from this roof garden—this world at least: Townside with its crumbling sidewalks, green oxidized shingles, blanked-out streetlights that I suppose haven't always been bird houses. All the buildings are the same as this one: pink brick skin and windows that look like fleshy eye sockets the way the plywood shutters their insides—square, soulless bodies squatting on the concrete, echoing of a world before the Resistance changed everything.

YA NOVEL: LOST BOYS OF SIN CITY BY KIMBERLY ST. LAWRENCE

I slide my spade into the soil and turn the cool, dark earth beneath it. I know should be focused on the crops, but this is always when my mind turns to him. He is not a buried memory. The memory of him is still very much alive. It lives in that in-between daydream place and kicks up like a nervous tick when I let my brain wander too deep for too long. Like that snagged thread in your sweater that you try not to pull.

I still have so many questions about that night and the boy. How did he find me? Who was he? Does he remember it like I do?

Where is he now, if he ever was at all?

As soon as I tug at the memory, the past surrounds me like I'm slipping into deep water. It fills my nose and mouth with the scent of the nursery—vaguely lavender and must—and wraps around my skin. It had been so hot that night, like Fires of Hell hot. (But then, you feel things more and deeper when you're twelve.) I had taken my brother Tannen there well before bedtime because the elders had been talking in the kitchen in a tone that even a child could recognize as somber. There were certain phrases that always punctuated those conversations. *The Rebs*, of course, because everything was because of and in response to them. *Concealment*, *confinement*, and other cold-sounding words that made me itch. *Escalating brutality*, which truthfully made me picture them all riding the electric stairs with guns strapped on their backs. I hadn't realized it actually meant there was some kind of scale for Evil, like a temperature gauge, and it didn't necessarily have a threshold. The Rebs had banded together, overthrown the government, taken who and what they wanted, and the violence spread like a plague—hot rashes of anger and oozing grudges that infected anyone with a bone to pick. *Those people*...that was another phrase the elders used a lot, to help us keep our distance.

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Most had fled while we took refuge in the old city. I guess that should make us—the Steadfasters—the brave ones. But it didn't feel that way. It felt like we were hiding. We didn't seek out the others beyond our Townside—like those from the Boardwalk or the Groves or the Basin... a handful of other communes I knew by name and a hundred I didn't. We didn't even try to make outreach to anyone beyond the region. According to Dad, we wouldn't know who to trust, not after the Resistance. According to him, the rest of the world saw us as the rotten, sinking spot on an apple, happy to eat around us so long as we don't spill out onto the rest of the flesh. And as for the Rebs, we were no match for their artillery, their ammunition. Gun powder was power—the bloody currency of this broken world—and we were poor.

So I folded us up in the nursery behind Bible passages and songs, while the elders folded us into Townside behind boarded windows and locked doors, until safety—the *before*—became just another memory.

That night, I had peeled up a corner of the plywood on the nursery window to try to catch the slightest whisper of a breeze. I was desperate for it, so much so that I had snapped at Tannen when he readied his breath to protest. “Tan, I’ll die if I don’t get some air. You don’t want me to die, do you?” I knew he would cry when I said it. Maybe I even wanted him to. That was something I could fix, at least.

“Come on, stop that. Look, it’s a full moon tonight.” I ran my finger along the paper stars I had pasted on the plywood, uncurling one edge of the parchment medallion that made our moon. It was creased and pocked with fingerprints but I thought that made it better in a way, more authentic. And Tan loved it. When he actually saw the real moon a few years later, he had cried, and not in a good way. Maybe he expected it to be better.

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But on that night, he had smiled at the paper one while I stalled in front of the cracked window to feel the cool night on my skin. “Okay, time for bed now. Did you say your prayers?”

Tan nodded. I pulled the covers under his chin and smoothed back his hair—caramel waves mine, like our mother, striking against the soft brown of the skin that our father gave us. “Did you remember me and Mom and Dad and Asher?”

“Yes, Jossy.” He always remembered to pray for us. He remembered because he believed in it, like it held some special kind of magic for him even when the rest of the magic had been snuffed out. I suppose that’s why I sang his favorite song that night, the one that reminded me of Sunday service and Steads crying in pews because the words ripped their hearts wide open. I sang it hoping I would feel the magic too.

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

Tan had fallen asleep even before *hear to fear*, but I finished the second stanza anyway for my own closure. That’s why I hadn’t heard it, the boy coming in the window. He was already sitting there when my eyes drifted over him and snapped around his silhouette darkening the

shadows. Everything in my body clenched. Even my heart felt like it was trying to pull the blood back up.

“Who are you?” I was surprised my voice even came out around the metallic mass crawling up my throat.

“Who are *you*?” His voice confirmed that he was just a boy, the way it teetered on the brink of baritone but threatened to break if he didn’t guard it just so. He held my eyes for a long time. But I guess I held his, too.

“Jossana,” I had said finally.

“Jossana,” he repeated, and the sound of it in his mouth made my stomach clench up real small, like a flower when the sun’s too hot. “You sounded nicer when you were singing.” He had hoisted himself up on the window sill with his back against the frame, rubbing his cheek with a dirty palm while he surveyed me. His face was pleasant, I remember—a generous smile that dug out two shallow dimples when it widened, dark and downy waves of hair sticking out here and there around his head. His eyes might have been blue or green or some curious mix, but I could mostly see the candlelight flickering back at me in them.

“If my parents hear you, you’ll be in trouble.” I placed a hand on my hip, trying to look older than I was. That was about the time I realized that he might have been the enemy. I had never heard of a Reb that young, but a boy at my window at the dark edge of dusk was definitely up to no good.

The boy waved off my warning and crossed his arms at his chest. “So this is what it’s like here, huh? Seems boring.” He snorted in genuine disinterest. *Boring*. It had been the first time I even considered the possibility that my life could be less than, with no one to compare it to. My cheeks became hot with self-consciousness. I wondered if he might be right.

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As if reading my mind, he had reached out his hand toward me. “You could come with me, you know. Come on. I’ll wait here while you get your things.” Like he had decided for me.

And maybe he had, because it felt something in me suddenly yearned to take his hand. This couldn’t be the one my parents were guarding me from, could it? Kin to those who had lit fires in our streets, plundered our food, killed our people? Could Evil look like a boy with dancing eyes and an outstretched hand?

“I have obligations.” Even now, I’m not even sure why I had phrased it that way, but it seemed to displease the boy.

“Fine. Enjoy your boring *obligations*.” He spat the word out of his mouth like a bad vegetable, then slid off the window sill and toward the water pipe he had presumably scaled.

“Wait, where are you going?” I remember not wanting him to leave and regretting my cold welcome. I remember watching the light of the moon replace the light of the candle in his eyes. I remember asking desperately, “What’s your name?”

But he hadn’t answered, so I never knew. Maybe because I wasn’t meant to. Because he was supposed to be a buried memory, and I wasn’t supposed to keep digging him up over and over and over again.