

An Excerpt From

Project 19

The Blazer Saga

Gram listened intently as Jordan relayed his story. After a few minutes, Jordan instinctively rose to his feet and began pacing about the living room, continuing to communicate the unusual events of the past several weeks. Only when he had finished did he realize that Gram had turned away from him.

He stepped towards her and placed his hand on her shoulder.

“You should go to the police,” she said, still not looking at him.

Her voice gave her away immediately. She had been crying. This startled Jordan. He had not expected to draw any sort of emotion from her. He did not know how to control his own confused feelings, much less help someone else.

“Did you not hear what I told you about Nabor Sattah? I got him involved and looked what happened. Whoever is doing this to me is in control. If I go to the police, they’ll send me to doctors. Doctors can’t help me. No one out there can help me.”

“You came here,” she said simply, her voice still heavily emotional. “Doesn’t that put me in danger?”

Jordan took a deep breath and knelt beside the one person alive he still considered family. “I’m sorry, Gram,” he said. “I don’t want anything to happen to you. But I thought this was the only place I could come. I had to take the risk.” Jordan took Gram’s hands and shifted around where her tear-filled eyes could not hide from him.

“Gram, I came here because I thought you might know. What’s happening to me?”

The aging woman sighed and pulled as her hands from his grip so she could wipe her eyes dry. She spoke hesitantly, as if she were afraid of each word that escaped her lips. “When Richard Blankenship adopted you, he was opening a door that would never close. Or at least not close easily. I can help you open this door back up if you want to Jordan, but I would much rather help you barricade it shut.”

Jordan’s eyes hungered for information as he looked at her. “Please, Gram. I don’t want to interfere

with your life, here. I don't want to mess anything up for you. But I need answers. I need to understand what's happening. I can't live like this anymore."

Gram gave another exasperated sigh. "Jordan, my life was messed up a long time ago. You were a blessing to me for many years. When you allowed yourself to be."

Her expression turned suddenly sad. "Maybe if I had told you earlier, if I had not sheltered you, this wouldn't be happening to you now."

Gram struggled to her feet. Jordan immediately reached out to steady her. She did not wait on him to help her down the hall. He hesitated before following her to the back bedroom. Could the answers that he yearned for be so easy to acquire? If following her meant learning the truth, were these steps that he actually wanted to take?

"Had Richard Blankenship not adopted you," the old woman said once Jordan finally entered the room, "I can guarantee that you would not be alive today."

She walked into her closet, reached up with her cane, and tapped an old shoebox. "Grab that for us, Jordan."

He did as she asked, resisting the temptation to rip the small container open as he handed it to her.

"I envied Richard," Gram said. She placed the box on her bed before running her hands through her hair and pulling it into a ponytail. Sitting beside the box, she continued.

"Your father loved his job. He was one of the best journalists I've ever known. He and his editor were close friends, but one day he gave Richard an article that Richard held no interest in. The editor promised that this story would launch his career. I don't know what Richard discovered in full detail, but, one day, he brought you home and said that he had dropped the story. His wife, your mother, felt uncertain about his actions, but she fell in love with you quickly enough. She easily accepted you as her own son."

A heavy wave of emotion slammed Jordan's heart at the thought of his deceased mother.

"Your illness was an issue from the very beginning. Richard never said so directly, but I believe that was partially why he adopted you. Your parents did everything in their power to get you help. They spent their savings, took out loans. Finally, Richard went back to where he found you. He feared that choice, but he had fallen in love with you. He and your mother feared losing you."

Questions riddled Jordan's mind, but he waited and listened.

"By going that route, your father met a doctor who determined a treatment," said Gram. "If this doctor was a part of the story your father had been investigating, or if he just somehow got lucky, I don't know. But he was able to keep your sickness under control for a while."

"They ultimately stopped the illness," Jordan supplied. "The older I got, the less I remember being

sick.”

“You were actually an incredibly healthy young man,” Gram agreed. “He managed to control the illness, but it took a while. During that period, he gave you a special treatment.”

Jordan’s eyes sparked with remembrance. “The slime.”

Gram chuckled at Jordan’s term for his childhood medication. “Yes. Gyogit. I believe that was the term they gave your green medicine.”

“Gyogit,” Jordan said. “I couldn’t even say it back then. I could barely swallow it either. I can’t remember anything else that tasted so nasty.” He looked at Gram curiously. “It’s odd how little I remember about my childhood. But I remember the slime rather vividly.”

“It was a miracle drug, your slime,” Gram said. She continued to keep her eyes away from Jordan. They remained on the box that sat beside her. “That was about the time strange things started happening around you.”

“What strange things?”

“What you’re experiencing now, Jordan. Unusual strength. Invulnerability to pain. It didn’t last, mind you. Sometimes you’d scream bloody murder at a minor scratch. Other times your hand should have been burnt or injured, but not a mark could be found.”

“The medicine did that to me?”

Gram shrugged. “That was Richard’s guess, but he was not certain. You were such an unusual child. He knew nothing for sure. He was just pleased to have found a way to curtail the illness that robbed your pursuit of life.”

“This Gyogit? It’s what cured me?”

“I don’t know.”

Jordan’s expression turned anxious as a realization came to his mind. “I stopped taking the slime when I was eight.”

“Yes.”

“That’s when dad’s plane crashed.”

Gram did not respond.

“Dad was murdered.” A look of terror spread across his face. “Was Dad murdered because of me?”

Gram finally turned to look at him. He could barely comprehend the sadness in her eyes. Meeting

her gaze, he finally began to comprehend that there would be consequences to this journey.

"I can't tell you what to do, Jordan, but let me say this. Whatever you're experiencing, it's not just about you. I know you're becoming obsessed with finding answers about yourself, but you may want to reconsider what you're doing."

Jordan reached slowly over and grabbed her hands. She squeezed his hands in return as if she had been longing for the contact.

He now understood how deeply she had missed him.

More than that, he had missed her.

Is this journey worth it if it means pushing her away from my life again?

"This is about you, too, isn't it?" he said slowly.

She reached forward and hugged him tightly, pressing her head against his chest. After several minutes, she finally pulled away and continued speaking.

"You know you are not the only adopted member of this family, Jordan. Richard was not my son. But it was not I who adopted him; rather it was he and his wife who took it upon themselves to care for an abandoned old woman who desperately needed a family. I actually came into their life after you did. Many of the things I just told you I did not experience, but are details they relayed to me. They confided in me about you. They made me a true member of their family. For that reason, Jay, you are more special to me than you will ever know."

She finally opened the box. "When your father found you, your clothes were tattered and dirty. He was under the impression that you were going to be . . . disposed of. The only thing he found in your pockets was this." She pulled from the box a large, golden key. It had an old-fashioned appearance, with the numeral 19 engraved at the top. "He had no idea what it opened, but he saw it as yours."

Gram handed Jordan the key, stood, and walked stiffly to her dresser. "I always knew you were special, Jay. I always knew that God had spared your life and shared it with us - me - for a purpose.

"But I have always been selfish. I don't want you to do what you're about to do. You want to understand your past, but, Jay, I would much rather forget mine." She sniffled. "There is little information with which I can enlighten you, but I do know that our lives are connected in more ways than you can imagine."

It took her over a minute before she found her words again.

"My beginnings were similar to yours, Jay," she finally continued. "I, too, was found dirty and disheveled." She turned around and hobbled back to Jordan as she spoke. "The only possession found on me was this."

She then dropped into Jordan's hand a key similar to the one she had already given him. The only difference was that this key had the numeral 9 printed on the top.

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"I know I can't convince you to stay here," Gram said as they walked toward his car. The rain clouds had finally drifted away, but had left a soggy mess behind. "Remember this, though. Once you begin this path, you will not be able to leave it easily. If you expect to come back and just begin living this same life again, I'm afraid it will be a difficult task."

"Why did you never seek out these answers, Gram?"

She gave him a genuine smile as she used one arm to keep her shawl wrapped tightly around her. With her other hand, she reached up and lightly touched his cheek. "I found a greater reason to live."

Jordan's expression remained solemn. "Death surrounds me, Gram. You may have been able to turn away from this, but I can't back down. Not even if I wanted to."

"Do you even know where to begin?"

"The man that came to my house. His name was Jeffrey Paulus. He lived somewhere in Upstate New York. I'll begin there."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. I'll find my way, somehow." He opened the door to his car and slipped in.

"The past is important, Jordan. But I chose to let it stay in the past."

"I can't," he replied imploringly. "This has consumed me, Gram. Whatever happened back then, it's haunting me again. I'd much rather make a different decision, but this is what I have to do."

Gram nodded. She had known this day would come, but she still had to wipe the tears from her eyes as she hobbled back to her old, lonely house, wondering how much longer it would remain lonely.