

CHAPTER 50: JAMESON

In this chapter, Jameson Hawthorne finds himself in a high-stakes negotiation with the enigmatic Proprietor of the Devil's Mercy. After Branford is taken away to face consequences, Jameson is tasked with writing down a secret on a scroll using a sharp, blade-like quill and dark purple ink. The Proprietor explains that the secret must be compelling enough to grant Jameson entry into the Game, and he will need to provide proof if it passes scrutiny. Despite his body's physical reactions—dry mouth, sweating palms, and a racing heart—Jameson remains composed, calculating the risks and rewards of revealing his hidden knowledge.

Jameson reflects on the danger of his secret, which he has kept even from his brothers and Avery, recognizing that some truths are too perilous to share. He sees this moment as his only opportunity to seize an advantage, driven by his innate fearlessness and ambition. When the Proprietor questions his resolve, Jameson responds with calm irreverence, asking about the fate of his secret if he wins or loses. The Proprietor clarifies that a victory would result in the scroll's destruction and the return of his proof, while a loss would grant the Proprietor unrestricted use of the secret, even beyond his lifetime.

Determined to proceed, Jameson writes his secret in four carefully chosen words, leaving the ink to dry as the Proprietor evaluates its worth. Once approved, Jameson reveals that the proof lies in a hidden compartment of his pocket watch, which contains a translucent bead filled with liquid. The Proprietor, seemingly satisfied, hands Jameson an envelope—an invitation to the Game. However, when Jameson opens it, a powdery substance incapacitates him, causing his muscles to fail and his lungs to seize.

As darkness overtakes him, the Proprietor delivers a chilling welcome: "Welcome to the Game, Mr. Hawthorne." The chapter ends with Jameson's fate uncertain, leaving

readers to wonder about the true nature of the Game and the consequences of his calculated risk. The encounter underscores the themes of danger, secrecy, and the high stakes of power plays in this shadowy world.

