

FIGHT FOR

JUSTICE

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Chapter 1

Justice Stoneypain stepped out of his house and sucked in his breath. The cool air caught him by surprise. There was an autumn bite in the air of Monarch City that hadn't been there yesterday and he shivered as he shrugged into his jacket.

Justice was on his way to the Shop 'n' Go for a treat. His five-dollar allowance, fifty cents for every year of his age, was burning a hole in his pocket and he knew chips and chocolate bars were waiting for him there.

It was Saturday, Mom's "chore day." Justice was glad to be done his jobs. His twin sister, Charity, wasn't so lucky. Being a girl, she had to vacuum and wash the floors. Justice got away with doing the dishes and taking out the garbage. He knew it was easier but he never said anything to Charity and she didn't seem to mind.

Rounding the corner, Justice noticed a group of kids ahead. There were five or six boys and a couple of girls, some from his school. As he zipped his jacket up, he glanced up and down the street. It was quiet for a Saturday.

No one he knew was outside. Now he wished he did have Charity with him. She had an easy way with people and their mom said she could talk her way out of anything.

The kids huddled together, talking, but broke away from each other as he drew closer. Justice couldn't help but be reminded of a bunch of geese he saw down at Oskana Park last summer. He wondered what they could be up to so early on the weekend.

"Hey, Pretty Boy," the tallest boy called out. Trey. Justice knew him from school. Trey used to be friendly, but when he called Justice "Pretty Boy," it wasn't a sign of friendship. He was getting even for something – Justice could only guess what.

Trey came from kind of a rough family – his older brother had lots of parties at their house and the police were called there by neighbours every once in a while. Trey was athletic and fast on the playground, but Justice could pretty much keep up with him.

"I'm talking to you, Pretty Boy!" Trey spoke again, sounding loud and harsh. He looked bigger than Justice remembered, too.

"What?" Justice replied, trying to keep his voice low and steady.

"Whatcha doin'?" asked a boy Justice didn't know. Was he from another school in the neighbourhood?

"I'm just going somewhere." Justice shrugged. "I – uh, I'm kind of in a hurry."

The crowd of kids laughed together. "Oh, he's in a hurry," mimicked one of the girls. "Did his mama send him out for some milk?"

Justice almost said something back, then thought better of it. There was no sense in giving them another reason to pick on him.

As Justice edged his way through the group, somebody's foot went out and he tripped. He caught himself just before sprawling on the sidewalk. Great! That would've been the last straw – falling in front of everyone.

“Nice dance moves, Pretty Boy,” giggled another girl, loud enough for him to hear. The whole group laughed. Justice felt his face flush. *I should tell them what I really think.*

“Don't be stupid,” he muttered to himself. As he crossed the road toward the store, he glanced back at the crowd. They had already turned back together. *What are they doing?* Justice wondered. They seemed to have forgotten all about him, except for one boy, Jimmy, whose eyes followed Justice. When he noticed Justice looking back at him, he turned away. Justice thought he saw a sad look cross Jimmy's face. *Why would anyone stay friends with kids he doesn't like?*

Justice was relieved to reach the doors of the Shop 'n' Go and feel the warm air engulf him. Charlie, the weekend guy, was at his usual spot at the till.

“Hi, Justice,” called Charlie in a friendly voice. “You're out early today. Got paid, eh?”

“Yeah,” Justice chuckled. Charlie knew Justice always spent at least half his allowance every week. His mom told him he'd never save enough for a game system, but he didn't care too much. He liked his Saturday treats.

“Where’s Charity?” Charlie persisted. “She don’t get no treats today?”

Justice thought about Charity, at home finishing her chores and maybe setting out for here – alone. Guilt stabbed his guts.

“She’s coming later,” he tried to explain. “She’s busy.” That sounded hollow, even to Justice’s own ears.

As he browsed the shelves of junk food, he wondered where she might be right now. Was she on her way already? Justice picked up a Chunky Peanut Bar and replaced it without looking at it. Charity would probably have to pass the same group of kids he’d just encountered. He glanced over the various types of nacho chips and cheese snacks. Charity might be coming out of the house right now.

Justice finally gave up trying to enjoy choosing between candy and chips, and headed for the door.

“I’ll be back later, Charlie,” Justice called as he shot out of the store, leaving Charlie with a puzzled look on his face.

JUSTICE COULD STILL SEE the group of kids milling around down the street. He decided to take the alley home. “I should be able to walk where I want,” he mumbled. Head down, mulling over his decision, he almost ran smack into Shaunie, a girl from his class.

“Hey, Justice.” Shaunie smiled, the new red streaks in her hair catching the sunlight.

“Hi,” Justice muttered. He never knew what to say

to Shaunie and he could tell it wouldn't be any better this time.

"Where you goin'?" Shaunie asked.

"Home." *Very smooth*, thought Justice. *You're so cool, Pretty Boy.*

"Oh." Shaunie's smile faltered, her dark eyes losing a little of their sparkle. She seemed to have run out of things to say, too.

They stood for a moment in the crispy leaves behind someone's garage, not looking at each other. The wind whistled in Justice's ears. A moment dragged by, feeling like an hour. Shaunie kicked at something in the gravel. Justice began to feel uncomfortably hot inside his light jacket, despite the cool temperature.

"Well, I better go," he said, backing away and trying to sound as though he really had to leave.

"Okay," said Shaunie, her voice relaxing. "See you later."

"Yeah, see ya," called Justice, already metres away and moving in the other direction. A minute later he burst in the door, almost colliding with Charity on her way out.

"What's the matter?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing!" Justice sounded gruffer than he meant to.

"You look like a ghost is chasing you!"

"I'm just in a hurry. Why is everyone so surprised about that?"

"Okay, don't be so touchy! Jeez!" Charity crossed her arms and huffed. Justice pushed past her, bounded up the stairs to his room and flopped on his bed.

“Jus! Shoes!” his mom called from the living room. *How does she know?* He kicked his shoes off. Charity was right behind him.

“Aren’t you going to the Shop ’n’ Go?” Charity persisted, her eyebrows raised in surprise.

“Nah,” he said, making his voice casual. “I’ll go later. I got stuff to do.”

“Okay.” Charity paused for a moment before turning to go. “See you later.”

“Yeah, see ya.” Justice turned to the wall. Why was everything so complicated? His stomach lurched as he pictured Charity walking past Trey and the others standing around on the sidewalk.

“Charity, wait!” he called, “I’m coming with you!”



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