The old apartment buildings were crumbling with age and neglect. Small pieces of brickwork spilled out of huge cracks spider webbing the buildings. Isaac moodily kicked a chunk. He paused to watch as it skittered several metres before it came to a stop in a blocked up gutter. The sounds echoed, making him nervous. The beginnings of regret crawled up Isaac’s spine, and he wished he had never snuck out of school. *It’s a stupid school anyway*, he thought. He knew it was hard for his mother having to work to put food on the table. But the two of them had managed for years. Isaac still remembered the day that way of life had changed. Some interfering toff had come knocking on their door late one night when he was supposed to be asleep. He hadn’t been. He’d listened through the keyhole. “Melody,” the man had said, “the boy can’t keep living like this. He needs an education, and you can’t hold out forever. You should know his father won’t be coming back. Send Isaac to school. There’s one close-by. It’ll be good for him.” Isaac had heard his mother crying, and knew he’d have to go. Young Boys’ Transitional School of Education, Etiquette, and Learning. *The boys are stupid too*, Isaac mentally added. They bullied him for being poor. He didn't learn as fast as the rest of them either. Probably because he often skipped school to roam the streets. Isaac knew the streets well, and was all too aware that the alleys were never to be ventured down…

Isaac’s musings were suddenly interrupted by the crunch of boots on stone. It wasn’t loud, but in the stillness of the quiet noon hour it seemed to echo. The feeling of regret Isaac had started to feel earlier shot to an alarming high. Abductions straight off the street were unusual, but not completely unheard of. He didn’t turn, but quickened his pace. The footsteps behind sped up too. Isaac paused, expecting the anonymous follower to stop as well. To his dismay, the slightly uneven tread did not stop, or even slow down. His brain processed his mistake seconds too late, and as he geared to run he knew it was futile. He would have to fight. There was no time to turn to meet his attacker head-pm, so Isaac threw himself to the side. The assailant was obviously experienced, and expected this manoeuvre. A black-gloved hand caught hold of Isaac’s ankle, dragging him back through the dust and garbage. Isaac managed to semi-roll to his side and gauge his attacker’s capabilities. Nothing obvious. Clothed fully in black, several potential places one might conceal a weapon, and too muscular for Isaac to easily escape. He tried to twist his leg free, and was not surprised to be met with failure. *Play dumb*, was the next idea that sprung to mind. *Shut up*, he told himself. *This guy knows what he’s doing*. Isaac suddenly kicked, distracting the man from what he was doing with his hands. He was proud of his little blade, a gift from his mother on his last birthday. It felt like years ago…

Isaac threw his weight towards the man, surprising him into taking a step back.A quick jab at his hand forced him to pull his hand away with a grunt. With his foot free, Isaac scrambled to his feet and ran. He’d always considered himself nimble, but the kidnapper gave him a nasty shock. After managing to get a mere two steps, a massive weight hit him from behind. Isaac’s knees gave way and he crumpled to the ground, blackness creeping it at the edges of his vision. With the last of his strength, he twisted his arm back and up, into the man’s stomach. As he started to pass out, he heard the attacker’s voice for the first time. “Cranky kid…” the man grunted, and proceeded to hit Isaac a sold punch on the side of his head. This time, the blackness took hold of his whole vision and he sank deep into oblivion. Isaac didn’t feel himself being tossed over the kidnapper’s shoulder. Isaac didn’t feel himself being dumped into the back of a waiting van. Isaac didn’t hear the mocking laughs of other men teasing his attacker for his slight wounds. Isaac didn't feel a boot nudge him in the side. And Isaac didn’t feel the van start up and drive off into the lesser known parts of the city…

With a great deal of agony, Isaac slowly regained his senses. After a quick mental run through of his body, he decided he was uninjured. That is, aside from a large number of painful bruises. Maintaining an unconscious facade, Isaac listened for any clues to his surroundings. Silence. He opened his eyes slowly, and they hurt even in the dim light. As far as he could tell, he was in the rear of a motionless vehicle. Without any warning, the door swung open. There was no time to revert back to an unconscious position, so Isaac made a point of taking note of his surroundings. The man that opened the door was taller than the one that had attacked him, and was holding tape. Isaac guessed he was about to be trussed up, so spread his hands as wide as he could. “Nice try,” the man said, “Together.” Isaac silently obeyed. Mostly. The man applied most of the tape, and wrapped the rest around Isaac’s mouth “for good measure,” he said to Isaac conversationally. “Luckily you’re wanted alive.” He turned to close the boot of the van. “Otherwise The Butcher would have made mincemeat of you.” he chuckled to himself. “Like my joke?” The boot closed with a slam that left Isaac feeling depressed, not at all reassured, and still clueless as to what was going on. Five minutes later, he felt the van start up again. After several corners, Isaac drifted to sleep. Everything would turn out okay. They always had…

Isaac woke again when the van came to a smooth stop. It couldn’t have been too much later in the day, because he couldn't hear many of the usual rush-hour sounds. There were, however, sounds of an argument coming from close by. Ignoring the oncoming headache, Isaac strained his ears to listen in. Despite not being able to make out the words spoken,. He could tell there were three voices. One was gradually getting louder, and he recognised it as the man who had secured him at the van’s last stop. Isaac caught several sentences, which he stored away as useful information for later, “I didn’t know we weren’t supposed to hurt him! The Boss never told me that, just that he needed the boy.” The incline in the pitch of his voice made him sound much less intimidating to Isaac now. He missed the reply, but could tell it was the one that had been referred to as the Butcher. Isaac gave up listening as the voices moved away, and wracked his brain in an attempt to solve this mystery. *Who would want me? I’ve never been involved with anything! And I’m only fourteen. I don’t have experience with anything. For Pete’s sake, I'm still in school!!* Whatever these guys were a part of, it sounded big, and most likely not under the law…

Moments later, he heard steps returning to the van. A man Isaac hadn’t seen yet opened the floor and dragged him out. The bright sunlight hurt Isaac's eyes and his headache came on in full force, causing him to collapse to the pavement. The tape across his mouth prevented him from crying out in pain, for which he was glad. He didn’t want to show any signs of weakness. “Up,” he was commanded. But without his hands, he couldn’t. He didn’t know if he would have even if they hadn’t been bound. With a vice-like grip on Isaac’s shoulder, the man dragged him to his feet and propelled him forwards. The building they were headed towards was nondescript, and Isaac wouldn't normally have given it a second glance. Only this wasn’t normally, and Isaac made mental note of its few features. It appeared to be a regular two-storied city house, minus the homey live-in feel that most dwellings have. That was all Isaac had time to see before he was pushed inside the door.There was no time for Zisaac’s eyes to adjust to the poor light before he was propelled behind an old crate. He panicked when he was pushed towards a black hole in the floor, but realised it must be a flight of stairs. Feeling for each step, he cautiously followed them down in a spiral motion. The man behind him didn't hurry him unduly. A faint glow ahead revealed torches set in wall brackets. Echos told Isaac it was a huge underground complex. It was amazing the busy city above hadn’t collapsed on these tunnels ages ago.The two of them passed many closed doors, went down two more flights of stairs, and down a long, empty corridor until they came to a massive ornate door. The guard pushed Isaac to the side and quietly tapped on the door.

After a momentary pause, a muffled voice bid them enter. A well-furnished and cosy room met Isaac’s eyes, and he felt slightly less tense than he had all day. It was comfortable here, and a few nicely placed candles lit the room with a warm light. Someone had good taste. That someone was currently sitting at a large desk. That someone was an imposing figure, dressed richly, but not over done. Isaac had never felt as unimportant as he did when the gentleman's gaze passed over him dismissively. “Not him,” he said coolly and looked back down at his papers. “But sir, are you sure?” stuttered the guard. “The others were sure it was this one.” With a wave of his hand, the leader dismissed him, “I would know my own son,” he replied. “And my son would know me.”

Isaac didn’t have time to question this turn of events before he was roughly blindfolded and dragged out the room. He was pushed down the halls once more, too quickly to remember the number of turns they took. No light defeated the blindfold, and Isaac was forced to rely on the guard shoving him along. Moments later he stumbled out into fresh air, and paused, waiting for another direction of the man he was being guided by. Nothing. Isaac gingerly lifted the scratchy material and found himself back in the same alley it had all started in. *Was that my father?* he wondered. *If he’s in some criminal organisation, I would rather not know at all. I should head home.* Isaac looked around him. The old apartment buildings were crumbling with age and neglect. Small pieces of brickwork spilled out of huge cracks spider webbing the buildings. Isaac moodily kicked a chunk. He paused to watch as it skittered several metres before it came to a stop in a blocked up gutter. The sounds echoed, making him nervous.