

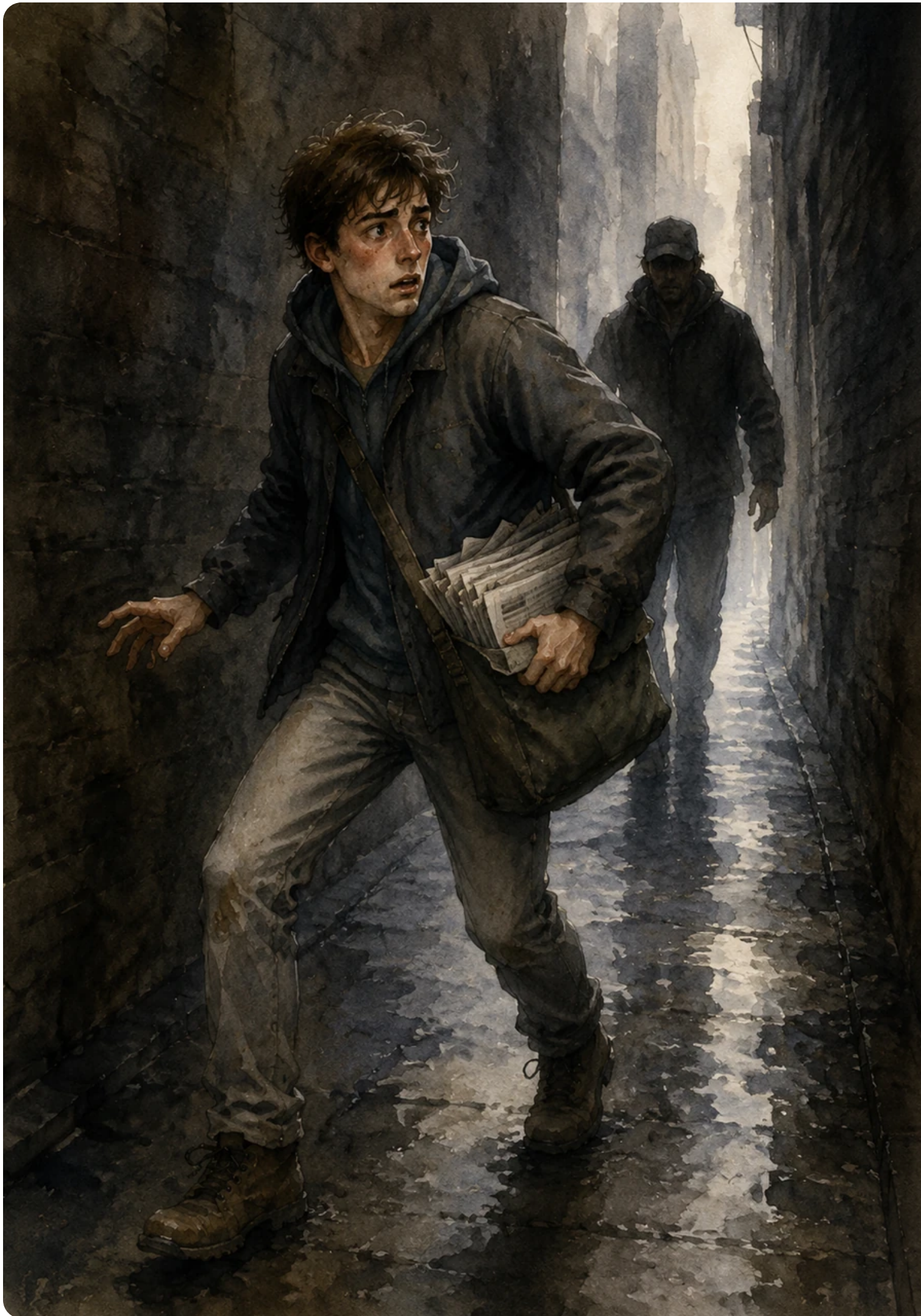


## Jake's Big Showdown

Micahel Mifsud



Jake walked home quickly, his feet tapping rhythmically on the cool, damp pavement beneath the faint glow of scattered streetlights. His shadow stretched long and thin, keeping him company in the silent evening.



Suddenly, a sharp \*clack\* echoed behind him, followed by another and another—unmistakable footsteps, growing louder and faster. In a dark, narrow alleyway, his breath hitched as a tall silhouette materialized against the deeper shadows, closing the distance.



Heart pounding like a trapped bird, Jake knew running wasn't an option. Spotting a metal trash can gleaming faintly near some recycling bins, he lunged, grabbing the cool, heavy lid like a warrior's shield.



Spinning around, Jake raised the dented metal lid high and bellowed into the darkness, 'STAY BACK!' His voice shook slightly but carried determination, surprising even himself.



The tall figure, caught in the sudden, unexpected glare of a newly illuminated streetlight, stopped abruptly, hands slightly raised. It was merely the tired paper carrier, surprised by the sudden confrontation, while Jake stood triumphant in his brave stance.