

## Karic Mini #9 — Brothers Don't Run

Rico had promised himself that last night would be the last time.

No more deliveries.

No more meetings.

No more guns tucked under the seat like secrets.

He'd already packed his duffel — clothes, a fake résumé, a bus ticket out of the city. He'd even written a note for his little brother, Mateo:

I'm going to make something better. For us.

But the past doesn't like being left.

The call came as he was locking the apartment door.

"They're lookin' for you," his friend warned. "Said nobody quits."

Rico's stomach twisted. He told Mateo to stay inside, to lock the bolt, to keep quiet. Then the car rolled up outside — slow, hunting — and Mateo stepped out anyway.

"Rico?"

He shouldn't have been there. He was supposed to be safe — still a kid, still believing the world could be fair if you worked hard enough.

The first shot cracked the night.

Rico shoved Mateo behind a parked car, heart exploding in his chest. Tires screeched. Shouts echoed. It all became a blur of headlights and fear.

"I got you," Rico whispered, gripping his brother's shoulders. "Stay down. Don't move."

Bullets sparked against metal.

Rico rose just enough to draw their fire away — hands empty, voice hoarse.

"Hey! I'm right here!"

The street went silent for half a heartbeat.

Then the second shot came — heavy, final.

Rico fell back, breath leaving him in a rush. Mateo crawled to him, sobbing, pressing shaking hands against a wound that wouldn't stop.

"Don't go," Mateo begged.

Rico smiled — tired, soft, proud.

"I didn't," he whispered. "I stayed."

Sirens wailed in the distance — too late for saving, just in time to witness what love had cost.

And under the blurring streetlights, Mateo finally understood:

Some people don't escape.

They just choose who they're willing to die for.

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## Karic Mini #10 — The Train that didn't stop

The night train never stopped in Alder Creek.

It thundered past at 1:12 a.m. every morning — a blur of lights and wind that rattled windows and left the town heavy with silence again.

Eli watched it from the hill behind his house, the way he had since he was a boy. His father used to sit beside him, pointing out constellations while the rails hummed beneath the earth.

Then one winter, his father didn't come back from work.

Heart attack, they said. Quick. Sudden. Unfair.

The train kept coming.

Years later, grief smoothed into routine. Eli worked late. Ate alone. Sat on the same hill, not expecting anything from the night except noise.

Until the train slowed.

Metal screeched. Sparks flared along the tracks. The massive engine groaned and — impossibly — stopped right at the edge of town.

A door slid open.

Warm light spilled out, bright as summer.

Inside, passengers sat calmly, smiling softly. Familiar faces. Lost faces.

His father stood in the aisle, hands in his pockets the way he always had, like he'd simply stepped out for air and wandered back.

“Eli,” he said gently. “Ready?”

Tears blurred everything. The train smelled like coffee and rain and old books — like every safe memory.

Eli stepped forward.

Then stopped.

He turned toward the dark houses below, the quiet streets, the unfinished days.

“Not yet,” he whispered.

His father nodded — proud.

The door closed.

The train vanished into the night without moving, as if it had only borrowed the world for a moment.

At 1:12 the next morning, it roared past again.

And for the first time since the funeral,

Eli waved back.