Black pine

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( Rough draft ) Chapter 1

House of boxes

I like packing, I hate leaving, I could except that,

I jumped over a brown cardboard box, ducked behind a full-length mirror and crawled into my room under stacks of “junk”. home, it smelled like my mom's flowery perfume and paint.

I stood up in my room, light poured in from the large window that was partially covered be navy blue curtains and on to my sky-blue wall, black dresser and shined off my silver metal bed, I was a pretty basic room the only special thing about it was the book shelf it was tall, taller than I was at least. it was made of dark oak wood and was covered in not only books but everything important to me, soccer medals, a few polaroids of places I've been, post card of places I want to go the efile tower, big ben, the siem reap temples all hung in miniature form on my wall .

except this wasn’t really my home anymore.

I know I should have packed my room days ago like the rest of the house, but the moving truck wasn’t coming for-- I checked my watch 37 minutes?! that wasn’t enough time to pack up everything I'd ever owned!

I grabbed a few boxes and started shoving stuff in, nothing was folded, and it got messy.

At this point I didn’t know why I didn’t want to leave, I hated my school, I had no friends, I got bullied constantly my soccer team had never been good it was just..... home I can’t explain it.

but back to packing. I shoved in ripped jeans and the blue and black button downs and t- shirts I wore to school,

till finally I got to the band tee’s , nirvana, 21 pilots, Metalica, and not the cropped fake ones you get from h and m these were real, of course they were banned at the prep school I went to, I found that out the hard way the school took my only ACDC shirt and handed me some hideous orange “team spirt!” shirt on day one, so that kind of sucked. but me in an object would be my band tee’s kind of over looked but special in some ways, I loved’em.

But it wasn’t just the band tee’s that were important to me, all of my books, the tiny pencil drawings I'd made all over the walls of my room, the hair chalk stains on my carpet everything was- different now.

“ Safina we Gotta go” my mom yelled out to me “ the trucks nearly here”

My mom could yell unbelievably loud and could get almost scary at times, plus I knew her and dad were already on edge about the move

Ok clothes and junk box down, bed sheets and books to go, I assumed the movers would be packing up the furniture too.

there was one thing that I still had to do I climbed up the loft bed, checking out my window that my parents weren't watching, ok good they were packing the car. I leaned out over the side till I barely touched the wall and pealed back a bit of the blue wallpaper behind it was a small hole in the wall.

it was where I kept the presents....



If your not in my family or you’ve never met me then you won’t know what the “presents” are every year on my birthday my parents give me one present and hide one with very complex clues, we’ve done it for decades, probably centuries it was one of the things we just did, I’d never known anything else,

it was just a fun thing that we did as a family I never really learned where it started but I heard it was because my family used to be very poor and had very little, it was a way of making presents seem more special.

it was a fun tradition but it got... competitive my dad and his twin sister competed on his 18th birthday to win there fathers fortune neither of them ever found it, and so when my grandpa passed away his house was left to my dad,

both my dad and aunt left home after realized that there whole life at there fathers house had been a contest to prove them selves worthily of his money,

my dad moved to Milwaukee and met my mom,

my aunt moved to France, we haven’t heard from her since. My dad refuses to talk about anything from before Milwaukee, but I guess I'm going to find out about the town he grew up in, because that’s where we’re going now.

Weirdly enough I was- Concerned to go there, my dad had such an aversion to even the memory of the place it has to be awful,

its in the middle of no where of course its awful! and with that cheery thought I started pushing over filled boxes out into the hall.

the long red and green embroidered carpet was covered in boxes of all shapes and size, several of which were blocking the door making the hall way dark and claustrophobic.

I crawled out under the long mirror and stood up, my mildly insane looking curly dark brown and blue hair looked like I'd been pulled through a lake and it had been tied in a bun before it had a chance to dry and my eyes were still red from not getting any sleep, well they were red and almost black brown and I had a random spray of freckles across my nose. I rubbed some Dorito dust of my face and brushed my hair out of my eyes,

“Safina” my mom shouted,

down to one world, she must be mad now, I crawled as quickly as possible jammed a last few thing in my backpack and prepared to leave,

I looked around for one last time and smiled “bye... I guess” I whispered,

ok deep breath; I crawled out of my room and bolted out of my house down the lawn and turned around,

the window and doors almost looked like a face, an old friend ready to say good bye, how had I never noticed that before.

“ Safina c’mon” my dad snapped,

he’d been uptight since we decided to move back to black pine. Black pine, black pine, black pine.

I ran the name over in my head, it was a cool name for a town.

I looked back at the house, I thought about waving bye to the house but that was childish, so I took my backpack and hopped in the car.

my mom turned around “ what took you so long”

I blushed “ I forgot to pack a few things”

she smiled “oh, ok just a few things?” she winked

“ just a few” I smiled,

and with that my dad speed out of the driveway,

I looked out the rear view mirror for one last look at the house it was old and quaint, it was made of bricks and had the most beautiful garden, and it used to be home.

* Chapter 2
* Musical interlude
* As we pulled out on to the high way headed north: I put in my ear buds and it drowned out the noise of the car and my parents talking a fell into the world of alt pop. Some of my favorites were nirvana, 21 pilots and Taylor swifts resent stuff,
* I checked my phone “no new messages” sign popped up on the screen, I quietly laughed to myself you’ve lived in the same town your whole life yet no one even knows your gone
* “ funny movie kiddo” my dad asked

I took out a headphone “ sure dad”

he seemed a lot calmer now that we were on the road, maybe he was like me, indecessive till someone makes you do something, then it’s the best moment of your life, that’s why we needed my mom she ran in head first, she had moved to America by her self when she was 18! Only four years older than I was, I took comfort in that, if she could do that, I can do this.

* We drove through only forest for a long time, not passing anything other than a few rest stops, an old dinner called “the pine tree” and a motel that was literally called “the rest stop” with a bunch of z’s coming out of the rest on the flickering neon sign, I guess the word “rest” was asleep,
* we’d been on the road for what feels like hours but according to my phone had only been about 90 minutes. So, I started scrolling through old photos; most people had pictures of them and their friends by the side of a lake or at a mall, or where ever normal teenage girls hung out, I had very random pictures of forests, the skyscrapers from Milwaukee and a picture of a juice bottle, for some reason unknown even to my self.
* I ran out of pictures pretty quickly but I felt cramped in the back of the car I tried to read but it made me feel sick so I tried to open a window which still did nothing,
* I want to crawl out of my own skin just so I can move, but in this stupid hot car I felt worse and worse so, I wanted to get out and run around on the side of the road but my dad said we were on a tight schedule, what schedule!
* I thought to myself the moving truck wasn’t coming to black pine till 8 or 9 and it was 10 am!
* my mind started to wonder about possibility's, maybe the neighbors were going to through us a welcome party, was that normal? I'd never moved before, I didn’t know how other people reacted, would there be chips? Because I was starving I honestly don’t know, maybe we had to do something to set up the house before the movers got there,
* I was letting my imagination wander and as I looked out the window I started to dream about the forest, it looked so open and cool I saw a deer poke its head out of a bush and watch our car go by,
* we put animals in a zoos, just so that we could observe them and see them, but I wonder when animals are in the wild, do they stare at us in our cars like we’re in the zoo?
* my mind drifted to all of my thoughts I thought about gardens and tree houses and milkshakes. this was when I think I started to drift off.
* I don’t really know how long I was asleep for I just know that when I woke up, it had gotten brighter out, it must have been 1 or 2 by now ,
* I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes and squinted at something in the trees, a glittery star was hung off a branch “ hey mom?” my voice still sounded groggy “ what was in that tree”
* she turned around to face me “ the star?”
* “ uh huh”
* “ sweety that’s to mark a drive way it’s hard to see them through the trees so people hang stuff off of the trees Infront of there houses”
* I sat bolt upright “ are we in black pine!?”
* she smiled “ well the out skirts at least”
* some one might as well have glued my face to the window I wanted to see everything even if it was just a bunch more trees “ hey dad”
* “ yes” he said
* “ how many people live here”
* “about 200”
* “ is there a school”
* “yes”
* “ how many students?
* ” “30 ish”
* “ what does the house look like”
* “ Safina we’ll be there in a few minutes, no more questions” he was clearly getting nervous he was humming blackbirds by the Beatles he always did that when he was nervous.
* we pasted another star about 5 minutes later, then two minutes after that then one minute after that!
* They were getting closer together till we hit the main road,
* ok road was a stretch of dirt with no trees or brush; we pasted a few stores but nothing that looked like a house.
* then we pasted the school it was about 3 minutes from the nearest store and was definitely in the middle of the forest,
* we kept going down the dirt road until we got to a blue star on a tree, my mom checked her phone “ this is us” she said as we turned down the drive way.
* we went for a few minutes down a winding drive way, and then I got my first glimpse of the house it was tall and made of dark wood, it looked colonial era and had a spire on top. all of the windows were shuttered and ivy was growing up one wall, it was the only clearing in a massive forest.
* then I rolled down my window I smelled strong pine and dirt “ this is home” said my mom, suddenly my stomach dropped, I felt like I was about to throw up, this *was* home we weren't going back to Milwaukee this was where I lived now, it was the middle of nowhere, there was no super markets, no McDonalds, no high-rises. What if everyone here hated me,
* I bet forest kids are rough what if they killed me, my mind was going faster than the car was, it was a like a dream as the car stopped and I grabbed my bag and went inside, it was a blur,
* as I walked down the long entry way and up the dark spiral stairs holding the curved railing like my life depended on it a voice broke my trance “ Saf your room’s the second on the left” my dad yelled. Ok deep breath, only a few more steps I turned and walked through the door.
* The room was made of the same wood as everything else, the rug in the middle of the room was a beautiful dark green and the bed had a canopy with dark green mosquito netting,
* light came in from the back where there was a arched green sained glass window with a pine tree in the middle as well as a large picture window,
* I dropped my bag on the bed and walked over to it all I could see was trees I looked at the ground, first I saw a path leading away from my house the I noticed a rope ladder hanging out of my window, good, an opportunity to just run and not be cramped anymore,
* I ran over to my backpack , ripped a piece of paper out of my note book and scribbled out a note “ going out to explore the grounds – saf" I dropped the note on the bed and climbed out the window, down the rope ladder and started following the path

* Black pine chapter 3
* At first, I only walked through forests, after about ten minutes I came to the end of our driveway, then I turned and started walking down the dirt road and eventually into the town. He town didn’t look much different from an old western town from movies, it had a genral store, a diner and a few buildings that, while they weren't clearly marked, looked like more stores. There was nothing familiar, I saw no brands or logos, I couldn’t have told you what time this was built, the town would have looked just as appropriate as a set on a old frontier movie as it did for me to be walking through it.
* This place is stupid, I mean, yes the massive house is cool and I'm in to the rustic feel but it’s dumb! the nearest town with more than 200 people is 75 miles away.
* I looked up and saw a few things the first was an old genral store made out of some stupidly beat up wood it looked like the was a gun shot or two in the porch and only one of the 3 windows wasn’t broken.
* I figured I should stop starring at the broken building because it was making me nervous, so I closed my eyes and listened, my school councilor had said that centered you or some crap like that once, so I tried it; I heard a bird, some wind in the trees and bushes and a bell, it sounded like a school bell, at least they had a school, although apparently the high school only had 30 students. I could barely hear the chatter of students leaving and they all seemed to be moving away from me.
* Like our family mansion I guess most people lived in the forest.
* I stood with my eyes closed until I heard something else panting and fast foot steps I looked up and saw a girl 20 or so feet away. She had long coffee brown hair in a braid that went to her waist, vivid green eyes and pale skin first she turned I thought she was looking at me, but she called out “ David” then turned the other way and smacked me in the face with her braid.
* It didn’t hurt, the people on my soccer team would hit each other in the face with our hair all the time, it woke us up for early practice, but the girl looked horrified “ohmygodi’msososossorry” it came out all as one word.
* “hi” I said
* “ don’t worry it’s not a big deal”
* “still I feel terrible” she stopped and looked surprised then she looked me up and down and paused “ are you.... new here?”
* “ oh um ya I am actually”
* she turned around and screamed “David” at the top of her lungs
* “what?” I heard a guy yell back.
* he rounded a corner from about 30 feet at first there was something about him I couldn’t quite place he looked familiar, I just couldn’t figure out why... then it hit me He looked exactly like the girl, I knew a boy and girl couldn’t be identical twins but these two must have been as close as you could get.
* “ this is David” said the girl she pointed back at who I could only assume was her brother.
* “ well alright but who are you” I was on edge and must of not sounded friendly because she recoiled.
* “ oh opps sorry I'm Anniya it’s nice to meet you” she said.
* she was half smiling but still seemed weary of me like she had a million questions that she was deciding if she wanted to ask me.
* Even though she was about 3 inches shorter of me she was immediately intimidating, maybe it was the old football gear sticking out of her bag or just the way she was staring at me but she made me nervous. “ David this girl is new here” and gave her brother the weirdest look like she was trying to ask if she should run away from me.
* That’s when I started noticing the differences between the two of them, he had on paint splattered jeans ( not in an intentional way but in an I paint so much this is just what I look like now way) and a navy blue t-shirt.
* she had on a forest green tank top, basketball shorts and her legs looked like she’d recently fallen into a blackberry bush.
* Finally after 30 seconds or so the guy spoke up “ sorry we don’t exactly welcome new people” he was not intimidating in the least.
* he was almost shrinking away from me he looked so shy and scared and his voice was shaking a little.
* “ ok why don't you like new people”
* Anniya whispered something to David so quietly I couldn’t understand and Anniya finally responded to me “the last new person in our town killed some body” she said unbelievably bluntly.
* “what?!” i screamed, “oh my god”
* Anniya seemed more conferrable with me after my reaction to hearing about murder, she now spoke without looking like she was ready to tackle me “ any way what is your name?”
* I started to laugh, I'd forgotten about the whole introducing my self thing “ I'm Safina Dupont.”
* “ oh you’re the new people in the Dupont house”
* she suddenly relaxed and her and David walked a bit closer to me “thats so awesome our parents knew the people who used to live there I think they were probably friends with your... parents?”
* she seemed so questioning like I was royalty, as if I had a social standing just out of reach and if she said the wrong thing I would banish her, I wasn’t used to that I was used to within 30 seconds of meeting someone, seeing the inside of my own locker, she gave me power, the power I'd allowed my self to give to bullies, and I didn’t like it “ oh umm I guess my dad and my aunt maybe”
* I was trying to be nonchalant to make her feel comfortable, but it only seemed to make her more stressed, maybe she thought I didn’t like her or something? “ that’s really cool that you play foot ball I used to play soccer at my old school”
* “ oh!”
* she looked surprised but I couldn’t quite tell by what. “ you noticed, I love foot ball we have a stupidly small team and can only afford to play one game a season but were really good”
* “ she’s right they are” David chimed in.
* “ oh do you play too David?”
* he raised an eyebrow at me almost as if I'd asked the dumbest thing he’d ever heard the gestured at his paint splattered jeans “ I'm to busy with my art to play foot ball” his voice was still shaking a little bit .
* “ oh that’s really cool” I said “I'm not nearly talented enough to draw”
* “ oh it’s really not that hard” he seemed to be blushing.
* I guess he didn’t get a lot of complements “ oh he’s just being modest he’s amazing at art” Anniya seemed to be standing up for him against, well no one.
* maybe he got teased for his art? I could relate a bit to that, I just wish I had a twin who would stand up for me. Suddenly Anniya spoke up “ hey do you want us to show you around”
* “ okay that would be great”
* I beamed at her she seemed so welcoming now, I did not at all feel like I was about to be tackled.
* She pointed and talked like a tour guide at first, pointing from where we stood to all the important buildings, although there didn’t seem to be very many buildings, important or otherwise
* “ ok so here is the genral store” she started walking up the steps
* “ hey a weird question Anniya but why are there bullet holes in the porch?”
* she started laughing “ oh my god that’s such a weird story, but those aren’t bullet holes. The high school is really famous for their track team Davids on high jump I'm on the 1500 meter and 200 meter run, everyone has to participate it’s the only sport other teams come here to play against us, any ways, one time our javelin team one by A LOT and they stared celebrating like crazy and started having a contest about who had the most accurate shot. no one was in the genral store so they started using the post on the veranda as a target that’s what the holes are and why all the windows are broken!” she told the story so comically and animated I started laughing, so did David.
* “ besides” she said
* “ this place has the best ice cream in the world, you need to try it” so we walked inside “hi john” she said happily to the cashier “ 3 of the usual”
* “alright” he said
* and passed her 3 cones with pale purple ice cream, and she turned to me “try it” I must have looked nervous “I promise it’s good”
* And after she handed john a few coins, we all walked outside and down the front steps, I cautiously licked at the ice cream “wow ok, you were right Anniya this is awesome!” I said.
* and I wasn’t lying it tasted like blackberry with a bit of vanilla and some type of herb like maybe basil? it may sound weird, but it was awesome. After that no one said much, We all just walked and attempted awkwardly at small talk. then David spoke; it was surprising his voice wasn’t shaking and he sounded suddenly confident “ok i need to show you this if your new here”
* And then ran into a stand of trees I looked at Anniya and she looked just as confused as I did but we followed we ran for at least 10 minutes I saw houses and a few smaller stores when we were near the main road but deeper into the woods there was nothing.
* suddenly he stopped at a gate, a sign hung off it, it read “private property” in big red letters Anniya looked over at David “hey uh David this just sort of looks like a fence and uh I don’t think we can go in”
* “your right, we can’t but she can” and he pointed at me.
* I must have looked super confused cause he pointed at some fine print “property of Dupont family” Anniya looked confused and just shrugged at me, like, do you understand what's happening, sadly I didn’t, so we all jumped over the low fence.
* “how do you even know about this place if its private property” Anniya asked skeptically.
* David smiled “well uhh I used to help Mr. Dupont set up his computer and one day a landscape painting fell out of my bag he said it was good but I told him I needed something else to paint because well...l... I've painted everything in this town so he told me I could come back here, and paint this”
* as he said that the trees parted and we were standing at a lake; it wasn’t your ordinary lake either, this was emerald green and yet the water was so perfectly clear could see every detail of the bottom. I could here a little waterfall and the sound of little animals, squirrels or something scuffling around, Anniya looked like she was I shock and just stood there smiling as the two of us looked down into the crystal-clear water.
* “ David” Anniya paused, like she was still deciding on her emotions “ why didn’t you bring me here sooner?!?” her voice was weird, like she was laughing and getting a tiny bit mad.
* David frowned, clearly not understanding her expression better then I was “ I really wanted to” he said “ but he only let me come back here a few times and said I couldn’t bring anyone”
* I stared off into the lake I must have looked concerned because Anniya sked me what was wrong “ oh” I said “ I guess I don’t Remember hearing about my grandpa being so strict”
* David looked super confused “ he was never strict we would let me go where ever I wanted in his house”
* “ then why wouldn’t he let you back here?” Anniya asked. I was squinting against the sun at this one point where there was something across the lake but for the life of me, I couldn’t figure out what the heck it was, as the two of them talked, this weird structure drew me in, I was hyper focused on the one point.
* now I'm not an impulsive person but I just took off running down the lake shore, something about the object just made me curious. I was jumping over logs and boulders I'd already cut myself in a few million places but I kept going.
* it was cold and the wind was whipping my hair around my face, I looked back only to see Anniya a few feet behind me apparently she didn’t mind running towards nothing at all either. I'd ran so fast I was nearly at the opposite side of the lake and i darted into the forest I'd only ran 100 meters or so and I stopped dead in my tracks.
* It wasn't a mirage, it wasn’t a deformed tree, but that didn’t mean I knew what it was.
* We'd come to a clearing there were no more trees the clearing was dark and cold the air was still, I looked down at the grass and there was a small pile of bricks and charred wood, that’s when I noticed the size of the clearing as I walked deeper the fog rolled in gray and thick, what looked like the burnt foot print of a building appeared through the fog; I walked into the center.
* the ground was covered in bricks and charcoal even though we’d ran a good 5 minutes I could still hear the lake echoing through the trees. it got colder the deeper I walked into the clearing I looked back over my shoulder Anniya was following me, walking along almost cat like swerving around bricks and gracefully jumping over charred 2 by 4’s.
* through the thick trees I could barely see David standing on the beach trying to see us, finally I saw it, the thing I'd seen from the other side of the lake it was a building!
* It was small maybe only a story tall and one side of it was burned, but it looked mainly intact Anniya must have seen it to because she gasped “ what is that.”
* I turned around “how should I know I've only been here for like an hour” I paused “holy crap I told my parents I would just be out exploring the grounds for a few minutes!” I hit my palm to my forehead.
* suddenly David broke through the tree and I could see his outline in the fog “ you are technically exploring the grounds of you house” he said sarcastically.
* I mean he wasn’t wrong “ but still I should go” I paused “ David... how do I get back?”
* he sighed and reluctantly said “ follow me” at first I though he didn’t like me but then I realized, he wasn’t ready to leave the burnt building yet he had questions that needed answers “ what if we meet here tomorrow?” I suggested “ it is Saturday tomorrow” Anniya chimed in “ ok lets do it” and as Davids words rung throughout the clearing I knew we’d made a promise we weren't going to be aloud to break.

Chapter 4

I woke up way, way to late school starts at 9 and I woke up at 8, not a big deal right? Wrong, I thought I was right though, so I calmly changed into some jeans and a gray hoodie washed out the last remaining streaks of yesterday's blue hair chalk and walked down the hall way to my kitchen, I expected to see cereal or something; instead I saw David and Anniya, I did a double take “ wait why are you here?”

Anniya started at me “ because we needed to leave like ten minutes ago”

I glanced at the clock “ but it’s only 8:10”

“ and it’s a 45 minute walk” said David like it was obvious.

“ just follow me” I said and with that I grabbed a granola bar and walked out the back door.

“where are we going?” Anniya asked

“ there's a short cut through the forest I tested it over the weekend”

we walked past the trees I'd marked with ribbon and twenty minutes later we walked out of the forest and could see the school “ it’s only 8:30 what are we going to do now” I asked.

“ we could go to the library” David suggested

“ or maybe we could introduce you to the teacher and show you where stuff is” Anniya chimed in.

“ hmmm... option two I think” I said.

Anniya grabbed my hand a dragged me towards the school, although it didn’t really look like a school, it was about the size of a large house and had “school” written over the door.

as we walked in I realized there were only about 4 rooms one that looked like a class room, it had some math questions written on the wall, another classroom that had a map then what looked like an art room and a school office, there were flickering florescent lights and the air felt thick with chalk dust the school just felt.... old, I guess, like it hadn’t been touched since the ‘70s, or something.

the bell rang it was loud and shrill, I turned to Anniya “no-ones here yet”

“oh that’s just the warning bell the class starts in ten minutes” she replied.

she still pulled me into the class with the math on the wall so forcefully it almost ripped my arm out of the socket. “ Ms. Edwards!” she said, waving cheerily.

“this is Safina, she’s in grade 8” Anniya shoved me towards the desk.

“well it’s very nice to meet you Safina since you're in grade 8 you’ll start mornings in my math class the go over to Mr. Owens history and English class” said Ms. Edwards.

she was young; maybe only 20 or so she had curly brown hair in a ponytail and bright red lipstick and, as I looked around the room and saw that this class was going to be- Interesting, seemed like the right word.

not bad or anything there were meme posters and a few printed out math joke Instagram posts on the walls, it was the only modern thing about this place.

just then more kids started coming in and taking their seats I got some weird looks and raised eyebrows but no-one said anything, which made me feel awkward almost like I was display, I crossed my arms and looked out the ground, which I'm sure didn’t make me look more social, but I didn’t care I just wanted to melt into the wall.

I waited by the door until everyone took their seats hoping that the seat across the Asile from Anniya would stay open, but just my luck someone sat down, so I grabbed the last seat left and of course it was the only one I didn’t want to take, it was right at the front and center, I sat down and hid my face in my text book, there were only 15 people in the class but it felt like all 30 eyes were on me, waiting for me to mess up. “good morning class! Welcome, has you can see we have a new student” I held my breath praying Ms. Edwards wouldn’t ask me to say anything “ her name is Safina, now, I won’t make her introduce her self so you can all get to know her yourselves” said Ms. Edwards.

I let out a sigh of relief as she turned around and started writing out some math questions on the chalk board “ turn to page 73 of your text books and answer questions 3-12”

and soon the class went silent aside from the sound of pencils and erasers scratching.

After lunch we walked down the hall to Mr. Owens room and sat down in rows of desks, Mr. Owens was old, maybe 60 or 70 and immediately scowled at me “ oh good” he said sarcastically “a new student, here are the rules... don’t talk.” he said gruffly, he then rolled his eyes at the class, like they should have all known what he was about to say ( we did not.) “Turn to page 49 and write an essay on the American civil war, short form. Due Monday. Any questions?" no one spoke. “good” he said, then slumped back in his chair. Soon the familiar sounds of erasers and pencils filed the room.

About thirty minutes into writing, something hit me in the back of the head at first I thought it might be a bug or something but when I turned around I saw a folded-up note on the floor, I picked it up and quietly unfolded it *Wanna go to the weird structure thingy in the forest after school? - Nyia.* I turned and nodded her and David smiled at each other. after that I swear the clock started moving slower, I was completely thrilled to leave school, and for such a different reason then I usually was. Nine times out of ten I wanted to leave school because I hated it now, I wanted to leave to hang out with friends. The thought seemed almost foreign.

When the bell finally rang we all ran out of school and into the forest until I could hear the lake, the forest felt wet and got dark the deeper we went until we hit the clearing.

the fog was still thick but that didn’t bother us as we went to our routine that was starting to seem more natural, despite the fact we’d only been coming here for a few days.

David climbed the tree in the corner and sat on a large curved branch and did his art and homework, Anniya started wandering around the building ruins and I lay on the ground doing my essay.

It was cool and tranquil, the only things breaking the silence was the distant lake until Anniya turned to us “ why is this here?”

I sat up “what do you mean.” it felt like a dumb question.

“ well” she said “there aren’t usually burnt buildings for no reason, we should look into it.”

I knew I should have wanted to figure out why there was a burnt building in the middle of nowhere but, I didn’t want other people to be here, it was a safe space, I liked being here and being alone but with others, others that I weirdly trusted not some random tourists or something that wanted to see some burnt building.

“ its probably nothing” I said

“ how is a burnt building nothing” asked Anniya.

“ well it could be a barn or something boring” I said.

then a voice came down from the tree “ yes a boring case of arson” said David “ very plausible” his voice was dripping with sacrarium.

I looked up to the trees, he was still focused on whatever he was drawing, his eyes were squinted at the page and his tongue was poking out of the corner of his mouth.

“ ok David I get it, I’m just saying” I paused.

I really didn’t know what I was saying, they wanted to find out what happened so badly I could see it on their faces, I hated that I didn’t want the same thing, I took a deep breath “ we could get In trouble for being here”

“why it’s your property” Anniya interjected

She made a good point “ look guys maybe there's some safety code or something that we’ve never heard about because this building clearly burned down a while ago, but um.. Maybe we could search the library or something so that no one knows that we’re here” I said.

I hated lying to them, its just that they wouldn’t understand, they’d call me selfish and leave. “ok I guess that make sense maybe.. A bit” said David.

“ why don’t we go to school early tomorrow, say... 8 so we can look around the library?” Anniya suggested.

“ that works” said David.

then like nothing happened David kept doodling, Aniya started pushups and they didn’t say a word for the next 2 hours. I was afraid the whole time, afraid I'd upset them, afraid that they’d hate me and too scared to say a word.

Chapter 5

After the near disaster on my first day I knew better, I got up at 7 and was already out on the back porch when they walked through my back gate.

I walked down the back stairs and we headed into the forest, today however was different, David was the hyper talkative one, or at least as talkative as David could be.

Anniya walked on the side of the “trail” she looked deep and thought and as we emerged from the forest, she still hadn't said a thing, she pulled open the school doors and we all walked inside, she seemed to make a point to not make I contact with me or David, instead taking a great interest in our shoes.

Today the thick smell of chalk was accompanied by complete darkness aside from some light from the windows I turned to Anniya “ are we really aloud to be here?”

she jolted the stand straighter “ oh! Ya totally, we just have to walk through the school to get to the library of records out back, it’s connected to the normal and school library's”.

As we walked up the most high-tech building was easily the department of records, it seemed to have been made mainly out of glass and just looked shiny and new, the other building seemed duller and looked like an old fashion log cabin just a bit bigger.

I tugged on the door for the library of records, it was locked. “ are we too early?” I asked Anniya.

“ no, only the mayor, librarian and sheriff are allowed in there”.

I guess that made sense, so we walked into the normal library and headed to the back, it was dimly lit from skylights and lamps, there were tall bookshelves covered in beautiful old leather books.

It smelled warm, if that was even possible, the light from the windows gleamed of the shiny reading tables and I quickly sat, it wasn’t one of the defaced ones I was used to it was honestly the nicest library I'd ever been in “where should we start looking?” I asked.

Silence.

then Anniya said “ I guess we should look in the” she paused and said questioningly “ arson section?”

“ ya I don’t think they have one of those” said David “ maybe we should check town history section” so we headed off to scan the shelves.

I grabbed a few books and started skimming through them “ do either of you have any idea when it might have burned down?”

“ I’m guessing between the ‘40s and 80s it seemed too modern to be too old like the 18 hundreds but any more resent and I think we would have heard about it” David seemed confident, so me and Anniya were too.

we speed read, only trading the occasional word when it was completely necessary until school started and walked to class “ did either of you find anything?" I asked.

“no” said David.

“me neither, we have to ask someone” Anniya spoke with force.

“no I don’t want to get in trouble” I said (which was a complete lie.)

“c’mon Safina we need to ask someone, won’t it be worse if we never find out why it’s there!” said Anniya, as she spoke, she waved her hands, trying to communicate the severity of the situation.

“what if we ask someone who doesn’t care enough to get us in trouble?” David suggested.

“like who?!” Anniya crossed her arms.

David pointed down the hall to the history classroom. “he might even be old enough to have been there when whatever it is happened.”

Which seemed like a pretty good idea, good enough I didn’t bother fighting it.

I was nervous as we sat in math my foot was tapping so hard from nerves everyone must have heard it, time slowed down, finally when the lunch bell rang, everyone else went outside, we went to the history room.

me and David hung back near the door, but Anniya walked right up to his desk “oh what is it now” Mr. Owens growled.

he didn’t look up from his newspaper “ hey sir do you know about any.. Erm, cases of arson in the last 80 years” Anniya tried to sound nonchalant.

he didn’t just look up; he sat bolt upright, “what are you talking about how you know about that?!?” he looked instantly concerned.

he walked over to the window and closed the blinds then walked to the door and locked it I crossed my arms “what are you doing” I said exasperatedly, I really felt like I’d had enough conspiracy theories.

he glared at me then unlocked the door and pointed at me “you. Out. NOW!!” his voice crescendo as he yelled.

I looked shocked but walked out. I placed my ear to the door and tried to listen I heard muffled voice and I couldn’t determine who they were

” who is she” came an angry voice I could only assume was Mr. Owens.

“Shes a Dupont.”

“ oh yes a new person suddenly comes in asking these questions”

“ it was my idea.”

“ and either way what's the big deal.”

then the talking got too quiet for me to hear.

5 minutes later David and Anniya walked out “what the heck was that!” I yelled and stomped my foot.

David looked shellshocked “ I really don’t know”, he held up his hand defensively.

“ why did he get so angry?” I asked

“ I don’t know but clearly this is a bigger deal then we thought” said Anniya.

“ did you see how freaked out he got, I'm scared, I don’t want to get wrapped up in something” David said and then looked pointedly at Anniya, which confused me greatly.

“what the heck would we get wrapped up in, we live in the middle of no were!” I yelled.

David shrugged “ I don’t know just... something bad, I feel off, I can’t explain it” he gave Anniya the same look, I read it as a mix of fear and “drop it”.

“ guys... I think Anniya's right we need to figure this out , it feels too big to forget, but if the only person we can talk to won’t talk to us what do we do now?” I asked.

“ we should research it” said Anniya, who apparently was not interested in dropping it.

“ but how? the library had nothing” I asked.

Anniya sighed “ I think we need the internet” “ but we only have cell service here, Theres rarely any Wi-Fi and you can never predict when the next 1-minute burst of Wi-Fi will come” David seemed to be trying to create problem at this point.

“ the gas station 35 minutes down the road had free Wi-Fi I saw it on my drive here”

Anniya gave a satisfied smile, but David looked angry “ alright, you know what fine, you do this at your own risk.”

“ ya look buddy, you're coming with us, whether you like it or not.” Anniya shifted her weight, as if reminding him she could force him to go.

“ Anniya” he hissed, he was giving weird gestures and eye movements, clearly trying to use twin telepathy or something to communicate a point.

Anniya simply looked away and said “ you're coming.”

“ Anniya” he was almost pleading.

“ we don’t do what ever they want, we’re our own people.”

I was lost.

He seemed to be on the verge of tears “ugh... you never listen.”

She tensed.

“but I know you can make me go, so fine, I'll come, but I'm not putting in any work, and you need to know I am going completely against my will. And besides how do we get there, with how defensive Mr. “ I don’t care” Owens got we’re never going to get our parents to drive us there”

now I was smiling, even if he refused to make a plan, that was fine because I had a good plan.“ how good are you to at biking?”.

Chapter 6

We had to wait until the weekend which was disappointing, but we couldn’t miss a day of school without raising suspicions, so what are you gonna do?

On the morning that we were preparing to leave on I went to find the old rusty bike that I knew was in a small storage shed behind our house, the only problem; there were about 10 crumbling old shed sized buildings, many of which were completely grown over.

After using a corroded golf club I had found to pry open a few doors of shed like buildings, I eventually fought my way through enough cobwebs to find the old bike leaning up against a back wall.

It must have somehow rusted to the back wall since it took me a good five minutes and two scraped knees to finally drag it out of the shed but once I did I was on my way. The bikes chain made a noise like a screech owl but once I'd patched a tire and ‘fixed’ ( I hit it a few times with a hammer) the bent front wheel; I was off and pedaling down the driveway.

It was so steep, long and twisting that by the end I'd picked up too much speed to stop, I speed past David and Anniya and had to swerve sharply to avoid hitting the tree across the road from my driveway.

When I eventually stopped my heart was going a hundred miles an hour, David ran over to make sure I wasn’t dead, but Anniya just kept putting up one finger to ask for a second since she was laughing too hard to breathe.

“seriously Niya, she could have died.” David looked appalled at his sister and said quietly “I apologize on her behalf.”

“it’s ok” he was still trying to make sure nothing was broken but I waved him away since I was giggling along with her, Anniya just had that kind of infectious laugh.

“shall we go.” Anniya suggested, still stifling a laugh.

David mounted his bike “fine, I still think this is a terrible idea though.”

“if it’s any consolation, so do I.”

“that doesn’t really help Safina, especially considering it was your idea.”

“I know.” and with that I jumped on my bike and started riding.

It took us a few minutes to get out of town, and much, much longer to find the highway.

There weren’t enough cars for us to follow any sounds and it didn’t seem like David or Anniya had been this far out of town in months, possibly years, which seemed a little strange considering that there didn’t seem to be very much to do in black pine, however once we found the highway we were too busy biking to ask questions.

We stopped occasionally for water, but aside from that, we had a mission and there wasn’t anything distracting us from that, however it seemed that every time we stopped Anniya would just watch what ever was going on in complete amazement, any view point, anything you couldn’t see in black pine she just absorbed. David stood a bit to the side looking skittish and practically jumping out of his skin whenever anything made a sound; each time we dragged Anniya's attention away from whatever she was observing, (which seemed to be a lot, I suspect she was asking to stop for breaks more than she needed), we would simply reset our focus, we were going to get to that gas station, we were going to at least try to look for answers.

Even though me and David honestly didn’t think there’d be anything to find, we went along with it partially to make Anniya happy and partially just for the adventure of it all.

We were an hour in and about half way there, our parents thought we were hiking in the forest not half way to a gas station, and I was questioning what we would do once we got there, I was the only one of us that had a phone ( or had ever used a cell phone, there parents wouldn’t let them use cell phones). So I wondered if I would have to give them I minor crash course in technology once we got there.

As well there were so many things that could possibly go wrong, what if the gas stations wi-fi was down, it was unreliable up here. What if my phone died and most importantly, what if we actually found something? What if we found out our family's were somehow involved, what if we found out some truly terrible thing that had happened in David and Anniya's home town, what if they couldn’t recover from whatever we found? The eventualities were almost to terrible to think about, and the tiny voice in the back of my mind spoke again ‘what if what you find makes them leave you just like everyone always does.’ “guys what if we just turn back” I yelled over my squeaking bike and the wind.

David nodded profusely. But Anniya was resolute.

“ we’ve come this far, there’s no going back without this information.”

So, we all kept riding in silence because neither of us was going back without Anniya, and she wasn’t going back without answers.

I was trying to distract myself by being as attentive as possible, warming up my detective skills I guess; so far I’d noticed we’d seen a grand total of 2 cars and neither of them seemed to question 3 teenagers, two of which weren't wearing helmets and one of the 3 was wearing a football helmet, on beat up, old rusted bikes, riding down the highway.

We were so nervous to be out of the town that time flew by and, sooner than I would have liked we were at the gas station, I thought maybe, if I'd had longer I could have found a plan to just turn back without the information, but by this point, I was nearly as curious as Anniya was, even David seemed to be coming around.

Anniya excited ran up to the gas station and went to push the door open but I grabbed her arm “ they don’t let you use the Wi-Fi unless you buy something, lets just sit on the bench around back it should reach to there”.

She looked confused for a second, but nodded in agreement.

We sat down on an old bench behind the gas station, only inches from the edge of the forest. I looked at the two of them like ‘who's going to stop us before we do something stupid?’, but after a minute of no one speaking I took my phone out of my pocket.

Anniya attentively leaned over my arm, watching everything I typed in, David kept more of a distance, staring at my phone like it was atomic bomb.

“ so what do we type in?” Anniya asked me.

That probably would have been a good thing to think of on the ride over.

David shrugged “ I guess just try googling the town and fires?”

Which made sense, so I tried key words: *arson, black pine, north Wisconsin fire.* I got a few fire station websites, but aside from that absolutely nothing.

After a good 15 minutes on that bench we were getting desperate, and our searches were getting obscure, Dupont *fire, Dupont grounds, burnt forest buildings,* “maybe this was before the internet” David suggested, “ we checked old newspapers in the library already, I don’t think there is anything” Anniya said, the paused and added “is this normal for the internet, you know, to not know.”

“ not from my experience”

“ well this seems weird right guys.” she needed us to accept there was something more here and I was starting to agree with her.

“ ok well if its weird what exactly do you think is weird about it.” David gave her that same weird stare.

She sat back on the bench and stared David right in the eyes, seeming to forget I was there she said “well David, I think this was a cover up.”

Chapter 7

“ a cover up of what!” David yelled “ we live in borings Ville U.S.A no one has anything to cover up!” and then gave Anniya an intense stare, he seemed to be telling her to just shut up.

Oddly enough I cover up actually seemed reasonable. I started racking my brain for anything I'd ever heard or learned about black pine, old snippets on overheard conversations, I looked through ever piece of information I had stored in my brain, and suddenly it hit me, I didn't need to go years back, only about 3 weeks.

my head jerked up from my phone I looked Anniya right in the eyes and said “ you know exactly what there covering up, don’t you”

“ what are you talking about!” she sounded offended

I looked towards the gas station, “ get on your bikes, c’mon lets go!” they didn’t question me.

we got on our bikes and rode, even though we were cycling quickly I could still hear Anniya “ what are we doing”

“ do you remember what you said to me the first time we met?” I yelled above the wind

“ sure, I told you about track and field, I introduced us and I said that my parents told me about your parents and I...i... I told you about the murder” she stopped so quickly that she left skid marks on the road and left us behind.

I yelled out “ how much do you know about that?”

She slowly rode up to us “ I don’t really know that much, just that they died in a fire after a person new to the town set a building on fire”

“oh my god that’s it” David yelled

“ who died?! What kind of building did they die in?!! When?!”

“I don’t know you already know everything I know” she yelled back

I stopped “ lets pull over” I looked back making sure we were far from the gas station.

we all headed to a log on the side of the road “ ok so what do you know Anniya? What's the story here”

she looked at David and then back at me “ well, a long time ago, like the 50’s or something, this guy showed up in the town, now as you know the town doesn’t get many new people, but no one really gave him a second thought, until a building burned down with someone inside and they died and someone saw the guy running away from the building. That’s all I know!” she held up here hands as if trying to prove her innocence.

“ ok” I said “we need to find out more”

Anniya and David both looked deep and thought, Anniya went to say something, then stopped then as if clearing an emotional block said “ maybe I'm crazy, but lets break into the department of records”

We both looked shocked, I mean I knew Anniya was impulsive and I'd only known her for a few weeks, but this was on a whole other level of nuts!

“ no.”

was the only word David could say at first , until the most I'd ever heard him speak at once came spilling out of his mouth “ are you crazy or just stupid! lets just think for a second here, only the mayor, sheriff and librarian have a key, and we don’t know them that well so we can’t get a key, and when There’s a sloppy break in at the department of records who are the police going to suspect. option a) their own sheriff. option b) everyone in this town who just keeps there head down and has never questioned a thing their whole lives or c) the teenagers who started asking questions! Yes I want to know what happened here just as much as you do but *I'm* not going to jail and if you do, well I'm-I'm - ugh!” he stomped his foot and some how he managed to say the whole thing with out taking a breath.

“ strong argument dude.. Until the last part ” Anniya said, although she looked just as shocked at this outburst as I felt.

“ Anniya... your not serious, are you?” I wasn’t as brazen as David but I felt equally as scared by her idea

“ I don’t want to be but I think I am, this feels so deep and dark and” she paused “don’t you want to know?”

“ yes but if we break the law to find it then.. Then" I was about to say we’d be doing something just as bad as the coverup or the murder, but we weren't, we would be solving a secret and possibly a murder but, then again I barely knew Anniya, she could be wanting to break in for a different reason or something more sinister than it appeared “ then I don’t want to do it”

I laughed but didn’t mean it “ I'm a goody two shoes”

Anniya looked confused “ you do realize that your parents currently have no idea where we are and the first time we met it was because you snuck out”

“ and that's why we should head back!” I said hurriedly and hopped on my bike and started quickly riding back up the high way.

I could feel them staring at my back, I knew I was acting weird, and I felt like they hated me now, I knew David didn’t hate me too bad he didn’t want to break in either, but I knew Anniya would never want to talk to me again.

\*rinnngggg\*

The school bell was loud and shrill, I sat at the front in my seat far away from David and Anniya, Mr. Owens was droning on about something or another, then he said “group project” and my head jerked around to look at David and Anniya, I wasn’t sure that they’d want to work with me but Anniya smiled at me and I smiled back.

Ok: apparently in this town abandoning your friends by the side of a highway wasn’t a big deal, she walked up and knelt down beside my desk “ so what do you want to do our project on?”

David walked over “how about we do it on something in the forest, you know so we can just hang out at the tree house” that was what we’d decided to call the burnt ruins in public.

“ ok well what exactly are the parameters of the project?” Anniya asked.

David laughed “ so you don’t listen at all. ok, we have to do it on local flora and fauna”

“ what in the heck is that?!” said Anniya.

“ scientific talk for plants and animals” I responded.

“ but yes lets do it on-” I paused I didn’t pay much attention to flowers or anything like that.

“ I saw some blackberry bushes near the lake” said David

“that works” Anniya smiled and we had our excuse to spend extreme amounts of time by the lake .

After school we headed down to the “tree house” walked through the trees and the fog and sat in our usual spots, David began drawing the blackberry bushes and leaves from a tree branch near the lake, Anniya started writing some notes near the building, and I just sat there unable to focus on work just staring at the ruins until my eyes had been open so long and I'd been staring so hard it started to go blurry the building stretched out and seemed to get taller the harder I started, it looked like it was slowly building up out of the grounds from fog and began to look like a ghost building, I blinked and the fog crashed down like water and as fast as it was there, it was gone.

I shook my head, ghost buildings weren’t possible, I was a mirage from eyestrain, yes; I told myself, that made sense we’d read about that in science at my old school, or maybe I was dehydrated or something, but as we went on for the next few hours, taking notes and making posters something was nagging at the back of my mind, the building looked so, so real and without really thinking I blurted out the thing I'd been wanting to say for days “ lets do it!”

“ do what?” Anniya raised an eyebrow at me then I dawned on her,

I saw everything click for her “ oh, I wasn’t serious when I said we should break in there”

I sighed “ but you should have been, no one will tell us about this place, and I want answers”

Anniya giggled “oh ya no, I was completely serious, lets to some burglary” she pumped her fist.

“that’s a really crappy idea” David said.

his attempted reality check was unsuccessful and Anniya started chanting “burglary! Burglary!” I started chanting with her.

we were both crying laughing and gasping for air before David yelled “fine!” and the forest went dead silent.

“so wait, were actually doing this?” Anniya said

“yes ok let's do this” said David “but we need a plan first”.

Chapter 8

We were nervously standing outside the department of records at 7 am as David paced around the perimeter looking down at his notebook and erasing and drawing again as he walked around trying to draw a blueprint of the building occasionally peaking in the window, trying to figure out where the records from the ‘50s were.

“are you done yet? I'm cold and the librarians coming in like 15 minutes” Anniya whispered.

“Almost, I've got most of the file cabinets near the windows done I just can’t find the one from the ‘50s” David whispered back.

“Hey, what's that one?” I said much too loud.

I walked over and put my hands to the glass and peered inside “what’s that in the middle”

“ I think it says- erm, 19 so?” David said.

“Or 1950’s” I said “oh” David blushed

“guys-” Anniya said nervously from behind us

“ what is it” I turned around to see the librarian coming down the street a few hundred feet away.

“ the shrub” David quietly screamed and pointed to a large rhododendron bush on the side of the building.

we all not so gracefully clambered into the bush and hid, barley being willing to make so much noise as breathing, Anniya was silently laughing with her hands covering her mouth as we heard the librarians clicking high heeled shoes on the concreate and the key turn in the doors lock, her footsteps faded as she walked inside and the door slowly closed on old hinges that clearly needed oil, I looked over at Anniya only to see, she was gone!

David must have seen the look of horror on my face “ you look like you saw a ghost” he said as I crawled out into the open air, army crawled across the grass and on to the concreate to look through a low down window I saw anniya inside, crouched down beside the 1950’s filing cabinet

“ what are you doing” I mouthed to her she pointed to the cabinet gave me a thumbs up and smiled David crawled up next to me.

“ once she has the file how is she going to get out of there, you heard how loud the door was” as he said that, we saw the librarian walk into a back room that I only could assume was the washroom.

instead of going into the filing cabinet she sprinted over to the desk grabbed the librarians key ring, used it to unlock and open a back window jumped out and took of sprinting towards the school “Anniya what are you-” she ran by me before I could finish.

she ran in through the back door and went into the art room. Anniya came out about 30 seconds later proudly holding some clay “Anniya-” it was David who tried to talk to her this time but she cut him off “I need an imprint of the key for the front door, convenient she labeled them.”

she pushed the key into the wet clay, then ran back to the open window and threw the key in and it landed on the desk! This time she let David speak “ what in the heck was that!”

“ I saw an opportunity and I took it now, we gotta go because I just heard the toilet flush”

and we ran to the side of the school “ ok I have to ask, why didn’t you just grab the file” I said.

“ I opened the file cabinet an inch or so, there were 3 drawers and a few hundred files in each, the town was a lot bigger back then, I didn’t think I'd find it in time, this way we can make a key and get in and out as we please”

“you’re an evil genius” David laughed

“how do you make a copy of a key?” I asked.

“ that’s the easy part” said Anniya “if you take the clay mold you can make a copy of the key”

“ do you want to elaborate, perhaps on how you know that?” I asked Anniya.

“not really-”

“Davids right, you are an evil genius.”

After the whole day of sitting in school day dreaming and planning about the criminal activity we would be participating in later, after the bell rang we went our separate ways, with them walking towards there house as I walked up the driveway to mine, I walked through the door, I was hit with the smell of oil paint, which meant our house was starting to feel like home.

I noticed my mom had placed the green and red carpet in the hall, I looked up to see my mom sitting by a back window painting the forest, “ hi mom”

she didn’t look up from her painting “ hi sweetie how was school?”

“ it was fine”

“anything exciting happen?”

“nope”

“alright, do you have any homework”

“just an English paper.”

she looked up from her painting and walked to the kitchen “would you like something to drink?” that was her standard question when I got home

“ok mom.”

the house felt, quieter and empty “wait, where's dad?”

my mom walked over to the sink and filled up the kettle she put it over the stove and took out some mugs before she answered, I noticed she looked nervous “he decided to go out for a walk around down, he’s decided to take over grandpas store”

I knew that our family's money had come from running a genral store that had been taken over by a family friend in the town, I also knew that the town viewed my dad as a bit of a traitor for leaving and this was the first time he’d left the grounds since we got here “ that’s really good for him mom”

“ it is, I'm proud of him” she didn’t look too thrilled.

The tension could have been cut with a knife. “ I should get to my homework, though”

I grabbed the ornately painted mug of tea of the counter, it felt warm and smelled like Christmas, I quickly grabbed my bag off the floor and I walked up the stairs careful not to spill my tea on my backpack I opened the heavy door of my room dumped my bag back on the ground immediately.

I flopped down on my bed, me David and Anniya had already made our plan over lunch, the only part left was how I would sneak out my window at one am to meet them, I had the rope ladder to climb out the window but in the silence of night, would the window opening be too loud? Would I disturb something?

As I went through my homework, all I could think about was sneaking out the window, I could fall and get hurt- or worse, my mom called me down for dinner a few hours later and still all I could think about was my window, my mom dished out beef stew, it smelled so good, I looked up from my food and smiled at my parents, and I suddenly felt like crying this was the first time it really hit me, I'd be lying to them! This was a big lie I wasn’t telling them I'd finished my broccoli; I was breaking the law!

They had so few standards for me, and I was breaking one of them, even if they didn’t find out I would know, I would know that I let them down.

“are you okay Saf?” my dad asked, it was nice having family dinners again, my dad had been so busy at the bank when we lived in Milwaukee, we never had time to do this.

“ ya dad I'm fine just kind of tired, so i think I'm going to go to bed early”

“ ok saf” he said.

I could tell that he was already distracted, probably with- however you manage a genral store in a tiny off the map town in northern Wisconsin.

I finished my stew and headed up the stairs to “sleep” in my room, I started to plan out what I was going to do, I knew that if I started to open the window an inch or two it wouldn’t be so loud in the middle of the night, I put a black hoodie into my back pack along with some bobby pins in case the filing cabinet was locked and other than that, I could only wait until the clock struck one.

01:00 am, the neon green of my alarm clock gave the room an eerie green light, I was ready to go, as I opened my window the rest of the way I was hit with a rush of cold air and this strange unexplainable smell, it smelled like smoke and made my nose burn with a cold sting, I carefully shuffled out of my window and on to the rope ladder outside of my window, this was when it hit me, it was really strange that there was a random rope ladder out side of a window, but I couldn’t focus on that, I was climbing down an old rope ladder out of a 3 story building a misstep could be fatal, and of course as soon as I thought that my foot slipped off into darkness, my brain was flooded by a perfect storm of adrenaline and udder fear, my legs started flailing in the blackness until my foot brushed something I screamed thinking I'd kicked a bird an to stifle my scream took my hands of the ladder to cover my mouth.

I saw my whole life flash before my eyes; I was about to die, but I only fell about two feet, I got up and brushed myself off.

apparently I was much better at climbing down ladders then I thought.

I turned on my phone flash light and maneuvered to the tree line on the side of the driveway so that the light wouldn’t be seen.

I ran down through the trees to the end of the drive way and met David and Anniya “ ok guys look we can’t go through the forest there's too many obstacles and there could be bears so we have to walk the 45 minutes through town and 45minutes back that’s 90 minutes, it should only take us 5 minutes to get in and out of the doors since Anniya has a copy of the key, but with the amount of files Anniya said she saw and the fact that we can’t take the file with us since someone might notice it’s gone so will have to take pictures of everything that should take us up to another 90 minutes that’s a total of 3 hours its 1:15 now and you guys need to be home by 5 when your parents wake up so we need to go quickly” I said

“ wow so you really planned this out!” Anniya said way, way too loud.

“ Anniya, shut up” David said.

We started running down the side of the road, an old dusty dirt road, is apparently quite hard to run along in the dark of night, we all kept tripping over the ground and were all covered in dirt, it was also freezing I had to stop and put on my hoodie, and we continued on, after 45 minutes of walking and tripping, we reached the library, Anniya pulled a copy of the key out of her pocket “ lets hope this works” and held up her crossed fingers.

she stuck her copy of the key in the door and we all held her breath as she turned it, to my surprise the door swung open , the only problem, as the door opened, a blaring alarm sounded.

“How did we not realize this was going to happen” David said over the alarm.

Anniya rushed into the alarm box in the back and typed in a few numbers then the alarm turned off “how did you know the alarm code?” I whispered to her.

“The idiots have it on a posted note next to the alarm box” she yelled back we ran inside and shut the door.

we didn’t want to turn on any lights and wake anyone up, which now seemed pointless since we’d just set of the alarm.

we ran to the file cabinet, it was locked but that wasn’t a big deal, I picked it with one of my bobby pins and started going through the files “where did you learn to do that!” David sounded surprised.

“ I got really good at losing diary keys when I was 5 so I got very good at lock picking”.

I kept going through files but then I realized something “what are we looking for” I asked.

Anniya snorted “maybe that one that says unsolved arson.”

“oh”

I was embarrassed it was written bolded lettering, how did I not see it, Anniya pulled out the file and started reading, “location wise this sounds right, it said it was in a forest near the old Dupont property. are you guys ready for this?”

I was about to agree, until I realized maybe I wasn’t ready, I felt so nervous I thought I would puke, I felt my knees shaking then David gave me a fist bump “ lets do this thing” he said, with more confidence then I would have be able to muster.

so Anniya opened the file and began to read, she didn’t look up for a few minutes, me and David just stood there nervously not even making eye contact, then she looked up to both of us, “I know what happened” she looked shaken to her core, like she’d seen a ghost “ a girl was murdered.”

“ oh my god” I finally broke the silence.

“ she was only 13, the building that was burned down was a school, a unknown man came to the town stayed in a hotel for a few weeks then burned down the school” Anniya said, still shaking.

“ why did he burn down the building!” David yelled, he sounded angry.

“According to the report there was evidence of a fortune underneath, h-he was trying to find it” Anniya wasn’t even looking at me anymore.

“ he killed a 13 year old for a treasure!” I yelled, I wanted to scream and cry at the same time, some one killed a girl a year younger then me, for what a few bucks.

Anniya suddenly blurted out “ it was the Dupont fortune.”

my heart stopped, I knew it wasn’t my fault, of course it wasn’t my fault, I wasn’t alive in the ‘50s, I didn’t tell him to burn down the school but still I tear fell down my cheek “ hey dude, it wasn’t your fault” Anniya said.

I wiped my face with my hoodie sleeve “ I know, its just- weird that someone would kill someone for something my family did.”

“ yes it definitely is, but it wasn’t your fault and that’s the important part, but, it is getting late, or early since its 2:30 am so we should take pictures of this file” and for some strange reason, her blunt comforting really calmed me down.

I took out my phone and started taking pictures of the pages of the file, I saw the gruesome black and white photos of the burning school and what I can only assume was the burnt remains of the poor girl, then I flipped to the last page the names of the sheriff as well as others had been blacked out, no one seemed to want to be connected to this, I wondered why there had never any news papers written on this and why Mr. Owens had gotten so defensive “ guys look at this” I showed them the blacked out names.

“I think Anniya's right someone didn’t want this to get out”

“ but how would they have made a whole town forget about a building burning down and a girl dying!” Anniya had a point.

“ I hate admitting Anniya's right, but I think I know how” David was still looking through the filling cabinet “this is an old police report, it was under a false bottom of the drawer”

I grabbed the report “it seems like the sheriff was also trying to look for the treasure, he was part of it! The whole police force was!”

“they could have forced the town to cover it up!” Anniya exclaimed, we had it, for the first time in weeks we felt like we knew what was happening it was exciting we were almost brought to the point of hysterical laughter, then we heard a key turn in the lock.

“hello who's there!” a voice came from the door way.

“ who is that” I said almost silently to Anniya.

she peaked around the bookshelf we had hid behind “ it’s the sheriff, he must have heard the alarm.” she whispered.

“ come out right now, I'm armed” David gave us such a horrified look that I thought he was going to have a heart attack right there.

“ ugh stupid mice must have chewed though the trip wires again” he grumbled to himself from the door and walked out closing and locking the door behind him.

we all let out a collective sigh of relief and collapsed on to the floor laughing this time from sheer relief, we all sat up still laughing “give him 5 minutes to walk away then we better go” Anniya said.

we were all still in shock as the thought crossed my mind, I knew I should have thought of it sooner, it should have been the thought nagging at me for weeks now that we had the file, what would we do with It?

We knew that there had been a girl murdered at the burned down school, but what could we do? We were just kids, there was nothing we could do, our only proof was based off a crime, we’d figured it out we just couldn’t do anything about it. I looked at Anniya and David, they were so happy and smiling, it was late and we were tired, I wasn’t about to tell them that the last 3 weeks of our lives had been useless, or at least not until the morning.

Chapter 9

After climbing back through my window at 3:23 in the morning (according to my alarm clock) and getting a good night sleep, I woke up and realized it was Saturday.

I went down stairs and grabbed some toast, as I was walking out of the house my mom called out to me, “ saf you really should go check out your fathers store, he officially took over it today” she sounded excited

“ cool I'll check it out” I said with no ethusasium.

“ you do know that I can ask your dad if you actually went right”

“ I know” I closed the door behind me and jumped down the front steps and started running down the twisting drive way, then I saw Anniya come around the bend, followed by David

“ you ready to go?” she yelled out

“ go where?” I said back

“ the burnt- I mean tree house” David said

“ oh, my mom said I had to go see my dads genral store”

“ I could go for a breakfast ice cream, if they still have that” said Anniya

“ a breakfast ice cream?” David laughed

“ we broke into a government building last night, I need ice cream” Anniya said, as if amazed that this logic didn’t make sense to the two of us

“ fine, lets get a breakfast ice cream” I laughed and we headed down the drive way.

Just the way the town was laid out even though when you drove in, you passed the genral store then the school before our house the genral store was only about ten minutes from our the end of the drive way.

The whole way we talked about how scared we were last night when the sheriff walked in, how crazy it was that we found the file, how Anniya made an imprint of the key , and weirdly enough, how we all loved French fries,( but I mean who doesn’t?)

as we walked up the steps of the store I notices that the windows weren’t broken anymore and that the back wall had a fresh coat of paint,

I saw my dad unpacking boxes behind the counter “ saf you came! And you must be the Pavlov's kids!” my dad reached out to shake there hands.

Anniya, in her ever charismatic bubbliness stuck her hand out with a big smile “ I'm Anniya”

David, however shoved his hands in his hoodie pockets “ and that’s David” Anniya pointed at him.

she tried to pull his arm and mouthed “be polite” he nervously stuck out his hand while still looking at the floor.

“ alrighty then” my dad sounded more chipper than he had in weeks “ what can I help you kids with”

I think in this moment Anniya realized my dad would not appreciate it if they bought breakfast ice cream and simply said “ we noticed the windows weren’t broken and we were on our way to hike Taylor gorge, so we thought we’d come inside and see the store”

“ oh I used to love to hike there when I was a kid, have fun guys”. He seemed to still be busy setting up the store, so we figured we leave him be.

We said goodbye and walked down the street “ seriously Anniya! Taylors gorge! I've never hiked there, he’s going to ask me about it!”

“ here’s what you’ll say, beautiful trees, great tasting stream water, Anniya almost fell in the river David forgot his trail mix, just elaborate on that, you’ll be fine” said Anniya,

both me and Davids mouths opened and closed like goldfish “ what- I-what?" I said, honestly amazed and a little scared at how good of a liar she was

“wow, ok I now believe nothing you’ve ever told me” David said we all laughed and kept walking to the burnt building, I still hadn’t told them about the fact that I wasn’t so sure with our new found information, but it was a fun place to hang out regardless of that.

When we got there, everything was the same, the same trees the same rocks the same burnt rubble,

but it felt- different because we knew, we knew what happened we knew this places ghosts and secrets and lies, we knew why, we knew when, we knew how.

I wanted to yell out to the forest , we did it we beat you!

But I couldn’t because we didn’t really, we knew, but what was knowing? We couldn’t do anything this was the part I knew I had to say, if they were like me they would understand, it didn’t diminish our accomplishments it just made them different- right? I tried to convince my self but if I couldn’t believe it, why would they.

“we know what happened here, we just can’t do anything, I don’t know if you guys have been thinking about that, but it’s all I've been able to think about since last night, I mean this morning, I mean, well I don’t really know what I mean” except it wasn’t me who said what I've been wanting to say, it was David

“ I've been thinking the same thing, its kind of a miserable feeling isn’t it ? Not really knowing, even though you know? I said

“ you’ve just summarized my whole thought process of the last few hours” Anniya said

“ so we’re all in agreement, we still want to know more?”

“ what would knowing more help, we need to be able to act” said David

“ well we can’t really act on it, everyone involved in a big way like the cops are probably dead by now, there would be no-one to be charged, we still don’t know the name of the man who burned down the school, I say we keep digging” they both nodded in agreement “so why don’t we look around here I'm sure my ancestors would have left clues to there treasure, it’s not a lot but finding the treasure or at least evidence of it is something.”

“ okay”

they both said perfectly synchronized.

and so we started looking, any tiny symbol and a tree or rock that any logical person could have dismissed was fair game.

we investigated. we spent hours, looking high and low, until I saw, it, I don’t really know what it was but there was a brick in the rubble with microscopic carving, I could have been a student's graffiti, but it drew me in.

I picked up the brick and turned it over and over in my hand feeling its weight, trying to see any other differences, but it was getting harder to see, the fog from the lake was rolling in thick and fast,

I looked up not even sure if I'd be able to see David and Anniya , and I couldn’t instead I saw---her.

Chapter 10

She stared at me through the fog, she didn’t look fully whole, almost see through like a mirage, she was beautiful, with silky blue gray hair blowing in the wind; she had kind eyes and a warm smile,

but something felt, wrong; her skirt was in taters with what seemed like dirt or soot, her hair blew around her head now with the ends seeming to burn even though there was no wind and certainly no fire,

she stared into my eyes as if trying to see my soul as she raised her arm to me the wind around her grew fiercer and the fog grew thicker,

so thick I couldn’t see the trees I knew were only feet away as she grew closer, the fog grew so thick I began to cough, the inside of my nostrils were burning, I collapsed to the ground and as I looked up; she was gone as soon as she had come,

but the ground felt so hot, it wasn’t the dewy grass anymore, it felt like tiles, I reached out and put my hand on a wall, there shouldn’t be walls in a forest! The wall was most likely gray or blue, but the light made it red and orange dancing like flames. I looked around, it wasn't like flames, it was flames!

I was in a building and it was on fire; the fog was smoke and it was flooding my lungs “Anniya” I sputtered and coughed as I tried to yell, “ David” sound wouldn’t come out.

I had to save myself, I started army crawling towards the nearest door. “ stay low under the smoke”

that was what my dad had always told me.

oh how I want to run to the door, it was only a hundred feet away now, I could just make out the calm blue light of outside through the window,

50 feet then 25, then I through myself at the door with all the strength I had left and flopped onto the cool grass outside, only half conscious, someone grabbed my arm and started dragging me away from the building.

“ mom” was the only thing I could croak out

“ no stupid, it’s me Anniya”

she propped me up against a tree and handed me her water bottle “thanks” I was able to squeak out

“ no wonder they say you shouldn’t smoke, you sound like a dying frog”

I giggled at Anniya, it burned my throat but it felt good to laugh, I wondered why David wasn’t laughing “ wait where's David!” I yelled

“ do I real seem like the type to forget my own twin? He went to get help”

“right, help, by the way- do you know what the heck that just was!!” I suddenly realized that I just went from a cool forest to a burning building

“ honestly I have no clue, we weren’t trapped in the building like you, but all we saw was a building on fire, a few people running out of it and then you, flopping out of the door like a dying fish”

“ you use being mean as a coping mechanism, don’t you”

“well duh”

“ that was one of the most terrifying experience of my life, I wish I had a coping mechanism”

“ya this is scary, I don’t think we’re not in black pine anymore.” Anniya said “this is somewhere else; I think maybe we got gassed out and kidnapped.” she muttered something too quite for me to hear, laughed to herself and kept talking “ maybe-no that makes no sense, I don’t know what's happening”

“your wrong” came Davids voice from the trees “we actually are still in black pine”

“ how, this doesn’t look right, also why were we suddenly in a burning building?” I asked

instead of answering he pointed to the line of people filling out of the burning building, they were young maybe our age, maybe a bit younger and wearing strange clothing,

it looked like a lot of poufy dresses and polka dots, I started to walk over to see if they needed help but fell to the ground, still weak from smoke inhalation,

David sat down next to me and pointed at the sign above the door of the building “ black pine high school” It read

“ but this isn’t our school!” I managed to cough out,

“ I know, but look at what their wearing” David pointed back to the line of children,

my brain felt foggy as if it had been filled with smoke as well as my lungs, “ wait a second, it’s not-were not” Anniya was sputtering as much as I was

“ in the ‘50s” David finished her sentence.

“how are we in the 1950’s, that’s not possible!” Anniya yelled

“ it must be like in the wizard of oz, Dorthey got knocked out and went to a fictional world, maybe we’re just all in a coma together”

“ can you be in a group coma?” I asked,

maybe it was a silly question but I wasn’t a doctor “ I don’t think so” said David

“ although it’s more probable then we time traveled” Anniya said the glanced at the school and quickly changed her mind “ nope, actually I'm pretty sure we did time travel the man running away from the building that’s currently on fire, that looks a lot like the police sketch we found in that file of the man running away from the burning building, so um I'm just gonna- ya- I'm” she was still talking while running towards him.

She broke into a sprint but he had too much of a head start, he ran into the trees and left her running around the perimeter of the forest trying to see him. after a few minutes she turned around, defeated “he’s gone”

I noticed the edges of her eyes beginning to glisten “ Damit” she kicked at the dirt on the ground “ he got away, we could have caught him, he killed a teenager!” she curled up In a ball on the ground,

me and David both glanced at each other “ hey there's nothing you could have done, we’re not police we couldn’t have put him in jail or given her justice” I said.

“well that doesn’t help her, she's still dead” Anniya glared at me.

“ I mean we don’t actually know she dead, we messed with the timeline, she could be okay”

David tried to comfort his sister but Anniya silently pointed to the firefighters, they were carrying out a stretcher that was covered in a sheet, even though we all knew what was about to happen I felt numb and cold inside, I knew there was nothing I could have done, but it was still tragic, I could tell David wasn’t handling it well, he shook his head as if trying to shake out a bad thought “ how are we going to get back” he said.

he was trying not to think about it. I wanted to leave too so I thought as hard as I could “ well I mean we came here when we found out about the murder, so total random thought that’s Kinda crazy but this situation’s crazy maybe we have to solve the murder?” I suggested.

“but didn’t we already solve it?” Anniya said.

“ not really, we don’t know the guys name, we need to prove who did it and we don’t really know where the treasure is, besides we need to get the girl who died justice” said David.

I shrugged “ but yes for a crazy upside down we just time traveled world, I think solving the murder is a logical way out”.

“ ok so what do we do, what's the plan of action?” I asked

“ why don’t we go into town, we need a place to sleep don’t we plus, by tomorrow I'm sure rumors will be flying” said David.

His logic seemed relatively flawed “ ok but won’t people notice new people?”

“ no the town used to be much bigger like maybe, 1 or 2 thousand and it was a pretty common rest stop, I think I even saw a few boarding houses” said David.

Anniya got up and brushed her self off and we headed to town, it was a much shorter walk then from the burnt building to the edge of town, there seemed to be much less forest now and the shops and houses seemed to extend into the trees. As I we were starting to walk down main street me and Anniya started to get strange looks “ wow people used to dress really different back then- I mean now.” Anniya said looking a shop window at some brightly colored dresses “ I think that might be why people are staring at us, were wearing ripped jeans and t-shirts and I have purple hair chalk in” I said.

“ we should get some clothes, does anyone have any money from the 1950s, we can’t give them something any later then that or else they’ll think its counterfeit” David asked.

I looked through my phone case which had some bills messily shoved in and David had his wallet “ wow never would have guesses it but I have a 20 dollar bill from ‘52” David pulled out the bill “we’re never going to get 2 dresses for that” Anniya said “ and besides, I'm not wearing a dress” she crossed her arms.

I looked into the window “ actually this one only costs 5 bucks, I wish clothes cost that much now, I mean in the future” I laughed at my self.

“ I'm still net wearing a dress” Anniya said grumpily.

“ that lady over there is wearing pants” David pointed to a woman wearing a sleeveless button down and what seemed to be slacks straight out of a pantsuit, Anniya seemed pleased at the revelation that she would not be forced to wear a dress and so we walked into the store in our ripped jeans, when the woman at the desk bluntly asked ‘what on earth we were wearing!’ I meekly replied “ we fell down a ravine and our clothes got really ripped, and we needed new clothes anyway so we figured today was the day to get new dresses”

she raised an eyebrow but shrugged and pointed us to the section with our sizes. Anniya grabbed some pants and a button down and I grabbed a dress, but as we walked to the register she was looking weirdly at Davids hoodie so we grabbed him what looked to be a dress shirt and headed to the cashier, from what I seen outside on the street we would blend in pretty well; so I asked where the nearest restroom was and we changed.

As I walked down the street it felt like I was playing dress up as I doll, although we didn’t get any more weird looks, so that was good “ we still need a place to sleep, how much money do we have left?” Anniya asked “ about 8 dollars” David said.

“ I don’t know much about the ‘50s but I'm pretty sure that food and a room is going to cost more then some clothes” I said while looking in store windows to see prices.

as I looked I read the signs ‘ Marly's dinner’ ‘grocery’ ‘Dupont's general store and sweet treats’ I laughed at how long the name used to be “ we *have* to go inside” I said and practically dragged David and Anniya up the steps and into the store. the store looked so different.

along the back wall there was a soda counter with a few people sitting at it and a juke box, the shelves were lined with brands I didn’t recognize, everything seemed to be canned or in little boxes with happy cartoon families on them. I wish my dad would make the new store look like this, it was so cute!

I heard the bell on the door ring behind me, a teenage girl wearing a pink dress that was covered in ash, walked in hunched over and crying with a boy around her age hugging her shoulders, trying to comfort her; she looked so, so upset so, I summoned all of every time travel book or riddle I'd ever read and decided it would be fine to talk to her “ are you okay?” I asked her.

she looked up at me, she seemed very confused “the school, Millie- weren't you at school today” did she think I was someone named Millie?

“ no I wasn’t feeling well so I came to grab some” I scanned the shelf next to me “ cough drops!” I grabbed a box of lozenges of the self.

“ oh so you haven’t heard” the boy with the ash covered girl said.

“ no we haven’t” Anniya stepped out from behind a shelf.

the boy looked at her and then looked at me “ she’s my younger sister” I blurted out not thinking about how we looked nothing a like.

“ okay, well the high school burned down and our friend Millie- she well, um she” he started stuttering and tried to hide the fact he was starting to cry.

“ she passed” the ash covered girl said, then started crying even harder.

me and Anniya both faked surprise but I could tell they weren’t buying it, luckily I'd taken improv classes “oh no Millie was so, so nice, that so awful” I said just calmly enough to fake shock but sad enough to make it seem like I'd at least met Millie a few times.

the girl hugged me and Anniya a little to tightly and Anniya shot me a ‘what do we do?! ’ look. I shrugged and leaned slightly into the hug, with Anniya following my lead. The new girl smelled like smoke, her air was covered in white ash and her face sparkled with tears as she looked up at us “ who was your teacher” she asked while wiping her eyes with a handkerchief.

I gave Anniya a nervous look and heard Davids nervous squeak from the next aisle I didn’t know which names would be common enough it was worth a guess in the 1950s.

The ash covered girl seemed to be getting suspicious that I hadn’t answered so I stalled “ what class?”

she paused for a moment “ home room” she said slightly more demandingly the before.

during the 3 second pause, I heard the best thing possible from the soda counter “ Mr. Georges class room completely burned to the ground” I have no idea who said it but it was the best thing that could have happened.

whoever was sitting at that soda counter I probably owe my life to “ oh, I'm in Mr. Georges home room” and thankfully she was in Mr. Johnsons class and had never been in Mr. Georges class, as we talked she seemed to calm down and I realized that I didn’t even know her name so I asked her and she told me it was ruby.

As we sat down at the soda counter she said he boy with her name was Thomas and he was in her class, she seemed to calm down and said that we felt really trust worthy; (boy was she wrong) throughout the conversation I constantly had to stop my self from making any references to my phone or musicians.

It was only after we’d talked for 5 or 6 minutes I realized that David was still hiding behind a shelf and I couldn’t figure out why he hadn’t introduced himself, so I stood up and excused myself. I stepped behind the shelf where David was hiding. “ so hiding is kind of the thing we do most now, its been the common theme of the past month of my life” he laughed at my joke.

“i just don’t know about talking to a random teen from the 1950s what if I mess up, plus you said Anniya was your sister, now she can’t be my sister.”

“ we could all be siblings!”

“ yes but once they see the two of us together they’re going to know that me and Anniya are siblings and your not related to us at all.” I very quickly realized he was dead on.

“ so what's your plan are you just going to stay hidden for the next- um- how ever long this takes” “ um ya kind of, I'm pretty good at staying hidden. Also back to the original issue where are we going to stay the night?”

I wondered about that as I walked back to the soda counter, we needed to get to a safe place soon so I figured I would throw out an idea, it was risky but it was worth it “ hey have either of you ever stayed in a hotel?” I asked ruby and Thomas.

But ruby said that she had so I asked an even riskier question “ do you know how much it cost, just to try and take our minds off this tragedy” I'm assuming it was very rude to talk about money but she said there a cheap one in town that cost about 4 dollars, I smiled at Anniya, we would have enough money for two nights, this was perfect our whole plan was falling into place, which was impressive since we didn’t really have a plan.

We sat and talked for a while, still comforting ruby from her friends death, we could tell she was still in shock so after a while we left her a Thomas to there own devices; grabbed David and walked down the front steps as we walked down the dust road I was still processing where I was, I was in the 1950s I saw such unusual stores and people wearing such different clothes, I saw a record store and a 5 and dime store it was so insane I wanted to yell with happiness and cry from fear at the same time but I kept it inside until we got to the cheep hotel, and amazingly they let some 14 year old's check into a hotel paying only in quarters.

we only had 8 dollars but that got us a room for two nights. We had only a backpack between the 3 of us and we trudged up the stairs to our room, it was surprisingly nice, I mean obviously if it had been 2019 it would have been terribly out dated but now it looked pretty nice and there were technically two rooms one had a couch and the other had two beds.

I offered to take the couch and then we tried to formulate a plan “ what are we going to do for food” David asked Anniya dug through her back pack.

“ I have a water bottle half a pack of electrolyte powder, 3 protein bars; oh chocolate flavor that ones good and 2 peanut butter cups.”

“ that could last us two days if we only eat dinner” I tried to be uplifting.

“ so were each going to have half a protein bar and an eighth of a peanut butter cup for dinner and nothing else” David crossed his arms.

“A) don’t be such a downer and B) we could look for spare change, there's always spare change between couch cushions.”

we all ran around the room looking under beds between couch cushions Anniya scoured the hallway and we came up with a dollar and 75 cents “ok now that were not going to starve what's our plan” David said sarcastically.

“ and adding to that how long is this going to take because after 2 days were homeless” Anniya added.

“ do we need a plan?” I asked they both looked surprised at me “ why are you staring at me” I said.

“this from the girl that planned a break-in down to like 5 minute intervals”

“ I'm just saying we can’t plan for this, were out of our element and what are we even looking for?”

all I got from the two of them was a simultaneous uhhhh and then brutally awkward silence. We all fidgeted, waiting for one of us to have an even remotely intelligent thought. “where's the restroom?” David asked.

“ I think its down the hall” I pointed to the hall.

he stood up and walked out me and Anniya just sat there in silence we were both thinking hard about a reasonable next step fortunately we (apparently) had David on our side “ hey guys” he ran back into the room and slammed the door behind him “ I found him”