

## Chapter 10. Trapped



Dwight listened to the motor as the elevator whirred its way up to the library. When it thudded to a stop, he took a deep breath and placed the palm of his hand on the elevator door. He had to keep reminding himself that he was no longer a ghost. Then he slowly pushed the door open, afraid of what he might find.

The library looked empty, so Dwight stepped sideways out of the elevator. He quietly shut the elevator door behind him, but the moment it closed, the door disappeared from sight.

Without warning, Dwight

heard a bang, followed by some grunts and scraping noises. Quickly, Dwight slid behind a nearby bookcase. His heart was pounding. He peered across the top of one row of books and saw the firefighters near the front door, struggling to move Robert Wisely's desk inside. He was terrified that the men would see him.

"Where does Daggett want this?" one of the men asked as they set the desk down.

"Don't worry," another replied. "He'll be letting us know."

Dwight's head was telling him a thousand things. He needed Max and Luz and Miss Moon. He needed a blue stone. He needed to go back home. Most of all, he needed never to go time traveling again.

Just then, Mr. Daggett appeared at the front door.

“Put the desk along that wall over there,” he said, pointing to an area near the secret elevator. “And be careful with it now.”

Dwight ducked. As he did, he noticed that his hands were shaking.

He heard the men heave the desk into the air. He realized that they would pass the row where he was hiding. Still crouching, he duckwalked to the end of the row. As soon as they were gone, Dwight told himself, he would take a blue stone from the desk and drop it, leaving 1924 forever. He needed to get back to his friends.

But then he began to worry again. What if the blue stone didn't work? What if the stone had to travel through the Memory Machine before it would work? What if he needed help from Max and Luz? How would they ever find him? Worst of all, what if he was trapped in 1924 forever? Where would he live? How would he eat?

At that moment, when everything seemed hopeless, something happened, something only he would notice. In the blink of his eye, he was certain that time had stopped again. Suddenly, he felt calmer. His worries melted into timelessness. Luz, he figured, must have pushed the button in the library basement. He knew exactly what he would do. He would take a blue stone and try to save himself. If that didn't work, he knew Luz and Max would figure out a way to rescue him.

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The firefighters pushed the desk against the wall with a thud.

“That's it, then,” one of the men said.

From his hiding place, Dwight couldn't see anything.

"When will we hear from Mr. Wisely?" another man asked.

"As soon as he gets back," Mr. Daggett advised. "He's out of town at this very moment."

"I expect, sir, that you are a man of your word," a firefighter continued.

"That I am," Mr. Daggett said. "You can depend upon my word."

Then Dwight heard the front door open and close. Everything was quiet. He waited a few more moments, holding his breath to make sure everyone was gone.

The moment he stood up, he felt a hot hand grasp the back of his neck.

"And what little fish have I caught swimming here in the li-berry?"

Mr. Daggett collared him.

Dwight twisted his head around and stared up at the man. "Li-berry?" Dwight repeated. Mr. Daggett had pronounced the word as if it were a fruit. "What are you talking about?"

Mr. Daggett didn't seem to hear. "A little runaway fish from the orphanage, I have no doubt," he added.

"I don't live there," Dwight said. "I'm just visiting. I live—" He stopped. He didn't know how to finish the sentence.

"You live in Mr. Wisely's orphanage," Mr. Daggett said angrily.

"But I don't!" Dwight argued.

“Then where are your folks?” Mr. Daggett asked. “Maybe they can tell me what you are doing in the li-berry at one o’clock in the A.M. on a night like this?”

“But I live with my grandma,” Dwight explained.

“And where would that be?” Mr. Daggett asked.

“Near Mr. Wisely’s house. I’ll show—.” Then Dwight remembered that Mr. Daggett lived in his house back in 1924. Again he stopped.

Mr. Daggett laughed and released his hold on Dwight’s neck. “You won’t show me nothing of the kind,” he said. “I can smell an orphan a mile away. But from the looks of you, I could have smelt you twenty miles away.” He grabbed Dwight’s left ear and twisted it. “We’ll be going along back to the orphanage so you can get a little shut-eye tonight.”

“No!” Dwight protested. Then he blurted, “Your wife started the fire.”

Mr. Daggett stopped dead in his tracks and looked down at him. “Now how would you know that?”

“Because I saw her do it,” Dwight said.

“I don’t believe you saw any such thing,” Mr. Daggett said. He looked off into the distance, then his eyes widened. “I believe that maybe you yourself started it. If that be the case, then there’s some checking that needs to be done about that! I’ll be talking to the sheriff about you, I will.”

“Wait a minute!” Dwight yelled, as Mr. Daggett pulled him by the ear toward the front door. He twisted his head and tried to point at the desk. “I need--I need something.”

“You won’t be needing anything where you’re going,” Mr. Daggett said. “Mr. Wisely’s orphanage takes care of everything.”

“No, but I need something in there,” Dwight argued. Mr. Daggett kept pulling him along. “I need my friends!”

Mr. Daggett stopped, suddenly interested. “What friends are these? Other runaways?”

“Yes,” Dwight said. He wondered if Luz and Max—or even Miss Moon--could be watching him invisibly in the library. “Only they’re hiding from you now.”

Mr. Daggett eyed him suspiciously, then he looked around the library. “I don’t think they’ll be going nowhere,” he said. “Not till I get back. Now, get!”

“Blue, I need blue,” Dwight announced suddenly, in case his friends were able to hear him. “But don’t drop a red, whatever you do. That was trouble. Red is bad. And I don’t know about the green, but blue is good, and I need blue. Are you listening?”

“Maybe you’re just plain loco,” Mr. Daggett said. He opened the door and pushed Dwight outside. Then he locked the library door. “You’re little friends won’t be leaving the li-berry now.”

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As Mr. Daggett marched him down the dark streets toward the orphanage, Dwight saw the Luna Elementary School up ahead. He knew that it was one of the oldest schools in Phoenix so he wasn’t surprised to see it in 1924. But he hadn’t realized that it had been near the orphanage.

“Can’t you stop doing that?” Dwight complained. His ear stung as Mr. Daggett pulled him along. “You’re hurting me.”

“It won’t be painin’ you much longer. You’ll be inside in a moment.

Then you'll see what happens to runaways."

"Inside where?" Dwight asked.

Mr. Daggett laughed. "Aren't you a piece of work?" he said. "This here building is the orphanage, but you already know that, seeing as how you know my wife. You won't be playing any tricks on me or anyone else, when the sheriff gets through with you. They'll put you in jail for starting that fire—and then they'll throw away the key."

"Just a minute--this is the orphanage?" Dwight asked, as they walked toward the front door. The reality was just beginning to dawn on him: his school had been Robert Wisely's orphanage.

As they entered, Dwight expected to see the school office, but it wasn't there. Walls that he knew from school were missing; other walls appeared where he had never known them. A dim, dark gray hallway—not the one with the colorful mural of children in the deserted to the interior of the building. The floor, the walls, the ceiling lights—everything looked so different.

Mr. Daggett stopped in front of the first door on the left. It was a small office with a windowed door. There was no such door at the Luna Elementary School.

"Got another one," Mr. Daggett told the man inside. Then he released Dwight's ear and pointed to a chair in the corner of the office. "Sit yourself there while we decide what we'll be doing with you."

The other man was wearing an ill-fitting dark suit with pinstripes. Instead of a shirt, the man wore a red undershirt stained with sweat around the collar. Dwight sniffed a few times. This new man smelled terrible.

He and Mr. Daggett stepped into the hallway and shut the door behind them. Dwight could see them through the window and hear the low murmur of their voices, but their words were muffled. He

craned his neck and searched for an escape, but there were no windows and no other doors. He was trapped.

A few minutes later, he saw Mr. Daggett walk away. Dwight heard footsteps fading down the hall. A distant door opened, then closed. Then, with a snort, the smelly man walked back into the room.

“You won’t be going to the dormitory tonight,” the man said. “You’ll be under lock and key for a spell, I reckon.”

“But I didn’t run away,” Dwight tried to explain. “I don’t even live in here.”

“That’s what they all say,” the man said. “But I don’t see as how you can look me in the eyes and tell me that.” He stared at Dwight. “I know you. I see you most every day. Now, don’t I? And don’t start lying to me, hear? I don’t like boys that lie.”

“But I’m not lying. You never saw *me* before!” Dwight said.

“Now ain’t you a contrary one!” the man said.

“I’m not anything,” Dwight said. “I just want to get out of here.”

“Well, then, you just do what I say and Mr. Wisely will find a nice home for you.” The man squinted his eyes at Dwight. “But running away ain’t the way to get out of here, I’ll tell you that. Now, come with me.”

He took Dwight by the arm and led him down the hall. They passed Mrs. Delgado’s classroom, except that in 1924 it was a meeting room. On the right was the nurse’s office, only now it was a storeroom. Looming ahead of them was Mrs. Norolla’s library, except that the sign on the door now read: Visiting Room.

The smelly man reached down and pulled a large key ring from his belt. He unlocked the Visiting Room door, then reached in and turned on a light switch. Then he escorted Dwight inside.

The room didn't look anything like Mrs. Norolla's library. Now it had a homey look, filled with over-stuffed sofas and chairs, their arms covered with lace doilies. In the back, where Mrs. Norolla's office had been, Dwight saw the same small room with the same windowed door, but a sign on the door read: Music Room. Inside, an upright piano stood against one wall.

"Have you had your music lessons?" the man asked.

"What?" Dwight said.

"Do you know Mr. B. Toven?"

"Who?" Dwight asked.

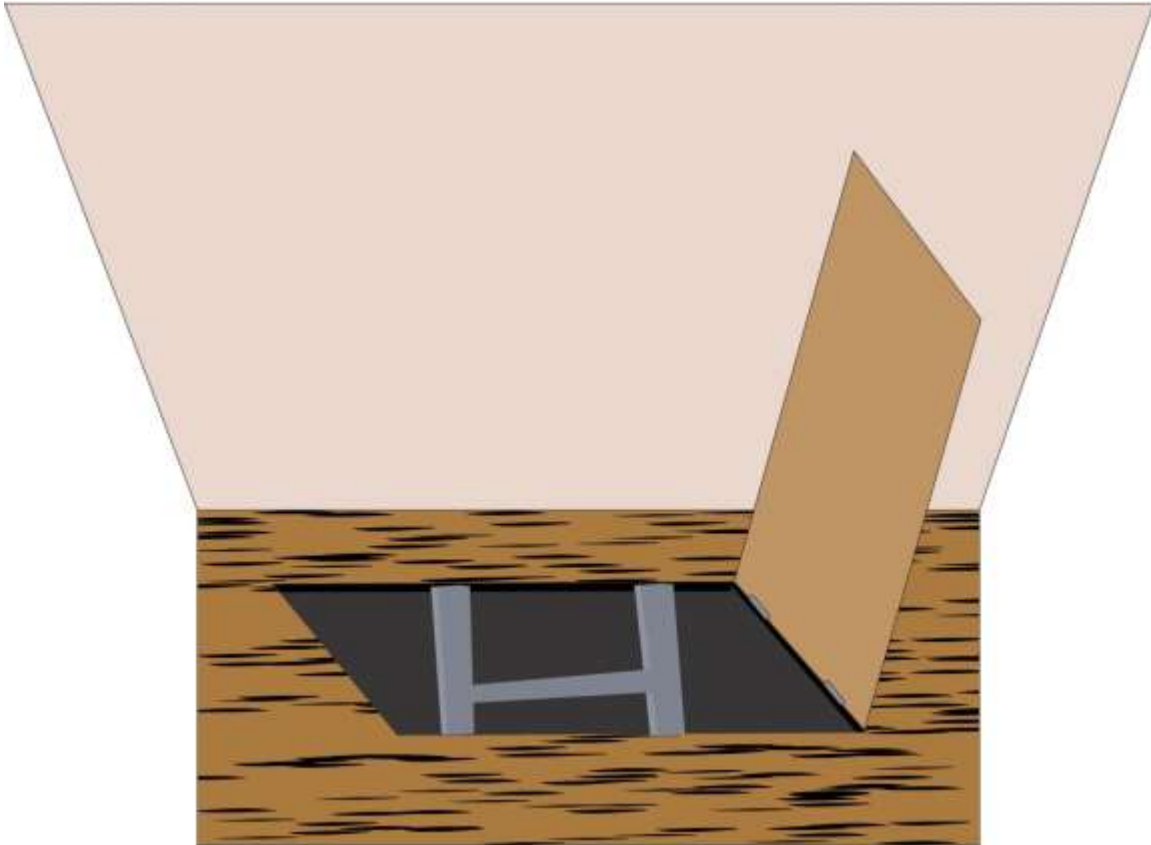
The man released Dwight for a moment, then pounded four keys on the piano. **De De De Duh!** The tune sounded familiar. As the smelly man hit the last note, Dwight heard a clicking sound.

"That's Mr. B. Toven's Fifth," the man said. "Mr. Wisely says that it's written in the Key of Doom."

Without warning, the man pushed the piano aside. Under it, hidden from sight, was a trap door. He grabbed Dwight's arm again, then reached down and lifted the door.

All Dwight could see was the top rung of a ladder. Underneath, everything was dark.





“That’s where you’ll be spending the night,” he told Dwight.

“Where?” Dwight asked, not understanding.

“Down there,” the smelly man said. “In the dark.”

Dwight gulped. “No, I won’t!” he protested. “I don’t like places like that. Hey, I need a blue stone right now. Help me!!”

“Mr. Daggett said you were a crazy one. But I’m not afraid of you,” the man said. He hoisted Dwight up by the collar and placed him on the ladder. Dwight grabbed onto the side rails, afraid that he might fall. “Now get down there.”

“But I can’t see,” Dwight argued. “Blue! Blue!”

“If you can’t see, you can’t run,” the man replied.

“But I won’t, I promise. I won’t ever do it again,” Dwight pleaded. “Luz! Max! Miss Moon!”

“It’s just one night in the hoosegow,” the man said. Then he leaned over and played the same four notes on the piano. As the fourth note sounded, Dwight felt his feet fall through the rungs of the ladder and his hands slide down the side rails. By the time he realized what had happened, he was surrounded by darkness at the bottom of the ladder. He looked up and saw the smelly man standing over the opening.

“Nighty night,” he said. “Don’t let the bedbugs bite!” Then he shut the trap door, and the light disappeared. In a moment, Dwight heard the click of a lock, then the rumble of the piano as the smelly man pushed it back on top of the trap door.

Dwight’s heart was racing. He gripped the ladder tightly, afraid to move his hands for fear that he would never find it again. He would never be able to escape.

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“Pssst!”

Dwight jumped and whipped his head around. Someone was with him in the darkness.

“Pssst!”

Dwight’s mouth could barely move now. “Wh—who’s there?”

A match flared nearby, and a small candle flickered on a ledge carved out of rock. The face of a girl appeared in the glow. Her eyes were sunken. Her broad cheeks looked ashen.

“Me,” the girl said. “How far’d you get?”

“Huh?”

“Running away,” she said. “Did you get far?”

“Not far enough,” Dwight said. “Is that why you’re down here? You ran away, too?”

“Nah, I just stopped digging,” she replied, then added in a singsong voice, “Bucket and pail, shovel and pick, all that digging makes you sick.”

“Digging? Digging for what?” Dwight asked. “Was it jewels?” Dwight wondered out loud. “Or gold?”

Again, the flickering face said in a singsong voice: “Tunnels to China, tunnels to Rome. Tunnels to everywhere except to my home.” The face looked at Dwight. “I dug the tunnels. Leastways, some of them, before I stopped.”

“What are they for?” Dwight asked. “And where do they go?”

The candlelight flickered and seemed to dim.

“It’s my last candle,” the girl said. They both gazed at the inch-long stump of wax resting on a metal plate. “Then it’ll be darkness.” The child looked at Dwight. “Don’t know where the tunnels go, but they go and go and go. Don’t know what they’re for neither. No one ever told us, except that they would take us to the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine. I never believed them. Why would they let us find the way to a gold mine? They had other plans afoot. Don’t know what they were.”

“Can we get out of here?” Dwight asked. He picked up the candleholder and held it up, trying to see what their prison looked like. He saw writing carved on one wall:



“Edward and Richard?” Dwight asked.

“Brothers,” the face said.

Dwight remembered the names of Mrs. Norolla’s sons. A chill ran through him as he set the candleholder back down. “Do you know who their mother is?”

“Everybody here knows Mrs. Daggett; she’s the crazy lady. She came down here tonight, but I was hiding.”

“What did she want?” Dwight asked.

“Looking for them,” the girl said. “She was calling their names and crying, but they’ve been long gone.”

“Yeah, but if she’s their mother, what were they even doing here? Wouldn’t they live with her?”

“They were digging and digging. Like me.”

“But why? Did they try to run away, too?” Dwight asked.

“No, not them,” the girl said. “They were good boys, but with no room in their house, leastways not with Mr. Daggett.”

“Then where are they now?” Dwight said. “Upstairs in the dormitory?”

“Not anymore.”

“They’re staying with someone else?” Dwight continued.

“Not anymore.”

“Then what?” Dwight asked.

The girl said the words slowly, “They’re...not...any...more.”

The words confused Dwight.

“You mean...?” he started to ask.

“Look.” The girl took the candle and walked along the stone wall until it illuminated an area of bricks that formed the shape of the door.

“They’re inside the bricks.”

“What?” Dwight asked.

“They went in this tunnel to work one day, and then someone built this. I never saw them again.”

“Who? Who did it?” Dwight asked.

“Mr. Daggett, I s’pose. Him or the reeky man.”

“Do you think there was another way out?” Dwight asked. “Or are they--?”

The girl shrugged. "Don't know for sure, but I think it was a dead end...for two brothers."

That was all Dwight needed to hear. "Come on, we have to get out of here," he urged. "I don't understand why you're still here."

"Hard to explain, but this is my home, leastways that's what my mother told me. She told me a lot before she died. She came down with the flu back in 1918. She told me about where I came from. She told me we have been here forever and never."

"What are you talking about?" Dwight asked. "Who has been here forever? You haven't been here forever. You're just a kid like me."

"My mother told me about the Hohokam. She said that my family came from them. They lived here, they grew things here, they had canals full of water here." The child looked at the walls surrounding them. "These tunnels were canals, a long time ago, but they got covered over and now they are underground with digging children working for the bad men."

Dwight was impatient. "Yeah, so?"

"Those men have plans afoot, I told you, but I don't know what they are."

"Yeah, but who cares? Don't you want to leave and get away from here?" Dwight asked.

"Oh, I do go out for a spell sometimes, to find me some food, but it's safer down here, if you know how to hide. And this is my home. That's what my mother told me. I don't have no other home and no kin, leastways that I know of. Why would I want to leave what I know best. Those men forgot about me. They think I've gone. But I've just been hiding from them."

“Well, you can stay, but can’t you show me how to get out?” Dwight asked. “I need to leave this place real bad.”

“They’ll catch you, you know. They catch ever’body.”

“Maybe, but I can’t stay.” Dwight stopped and thought a moment. “What’s your name anyway?”

“Nilchi,” the girl said.

“What?”

“Nilchi,” she repeated.

“What kind of name is that? Nilchi?”

“A nice name,” she said. “It means ‘air’ and ‘wind.’ My mother told me that I’m a riddle. What’s all around you but no one can catch? Nil-chi!” She smiled. “Now what’s your name?”

“Dwight,” he said. “Underwood.”

“Under wood? What is under wood?” Nelchi asked. “Earth is under wood.”

“No, Dwight is Underwood,” he said.

“And where does Underwood want to go?” Nilchi asked.

“Back where I came from,” Dwight said. “Just down the street. Only--”

“Only what?” she asked.

“This is the weird part,” Dwight explained. “Only not in 1924.”

“What do you mean?” Nilchi asked.

“Okay,” Dwight said. “If I tell you a secret, will you promise not to tell anyone?”

She nodded.

“It’s just that I’m not really from 1924,” Dwight said. “I came from another time, in the future. I know that sounds kind of strange. I’m not supposed to be here. I accidentally got trapped here. Now, just listen to me and don’t start screaming or anything. It’s kind of complicated. You see, I dropped a red stone when I shouldn’t have. I don’t really understand it myself. I don’t know about the tunnels, but there are weird things going on here. Did you know that there’s a machine in the basement of the library that can let you travel to another time? And did you know that when you want to go back to your own time all you have to do is drop a blue stone...but if you forget your blue stone, then you are in trouble. That’s what happened to me. I forgot my blue stone. And now my friends are back in my real time and I’m stuck here and I want to get back to them, and the only way I can do that is to get a blue stone from the library. The thing is, Mr. Wisely keeps some precious stones in his fancy desk and now it’s in the library. If I can get a blue stone from the desk, I can go back to where I belong and forget that all this ever happened. I need to get to the library.”

“What is your real time?” Nilchi asked.

“Where I came from it was September 2003.”

“Two thousand and three?” she repeated.

Dwight nodded.

“I’m confused,” she said.

“Well, that makes two of us,” Dwight said. “So can you help me get to the library?”



“That’s easy,” Nilchi said. “You can take this tunnel.” She pointed to one opening.

Dwight walked over to the entrance and peered inside. He could only see a few feet in front of his face, before it faded to total darkness. “I can’t see.”

“Here,” Nilchi said. “Take my candle. But you’d best be fast and you’d best be careful. When the candle’s gone, so are you.”

“You’re sure this goes to the library?” Dwight asked.

“Or thereabouts,” she replied. “Do you want me to take you?”

“Yeah, if you want,” Dwight said. He handed Nilchi the candle.

“Don’t worry,” she said. “Even if the candle burns out, I can find our way in the darkness.”

“I don’t like the dark,” Dwight said.

“I will get you there safely,” she replied.

Together they headed into the dark tunnel.

“I just want to be back with my friends,” he added. “Then I’ll never go anywhere again, I promise.”

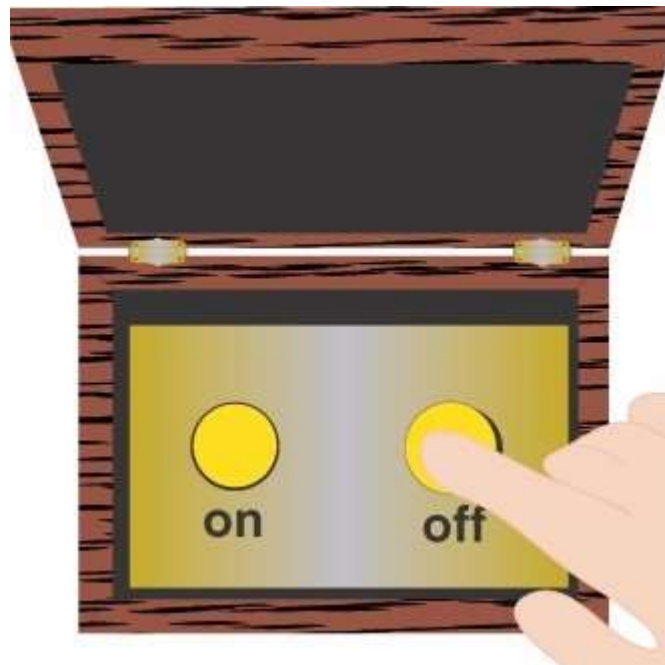
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Seventy-nine years later, but not too many minutes before Dwight had entered the tunnel with Nilchi, Luz arrived back in her own time.

As soon as she landed in the Memory Machine, she jumped out and raced into the Employees Only room. She glanced at the buttons on the Time Box: the **ON** button was pressed.

Luz didn't understand how that could happen, but she knew that it meant trouble—big trouble—for her. If she didn't stop time at once, she would miss her appointment with Dr. Chiang again, and her aunt would be furious.

Without hesitating, she pushed the **OFF** button and immediately felt relieved. The clock on the wall read 4:09. Whenever time started again, she would only have 6 minutes to run home and meet her aunt. But at this moment, Luz couldn't imagine ever going home again.



Just then, Max walked in.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hey,” Luz replied. “I turned time off again.”

“I know,” he said, grinning. “I can talk. What do you think happened?”

Luz glanced around the room. “I don’t know. Do you think it was an accident?”

“Or maybe the buttons are on some kind of timer?” Max proposed.

“I think Miss Moon would have told us that.” Then Luz noticed Robert Wisely’s desk. It was pushed away from the wall, revealing the jeweled door that Dwight had described.

“That Dwight,” Luz said. “He’s so messy.”

Max approached the desk. The top was down, revealing all the jars of stones.

“Look how many there are,” Max said.

“I think we should take as many as we can,” Luz said. “There’s nothing worse than not having enough blue stones.”

“But what about the red ones? Or the green ones?” Max asked.

“Maybe we should take some of those, too, since we don’t know what they do,” Luz agreed. “Maybe they do something really good.”

They filled their pockets with stones of each color.

“I have an idea,” Max said. “I want to take a trip.”

“You mean, in the Memory Machine?”

Max nodded.

Luz eyed Max suspiciously. “But shouldn’t we go back and get Dwight now? He’s waiting for us.”

“You can go. I just want to go somewhere myself, now that time is stopped again.”

Luz was surprised. “Where?”

“New York.”

“But why?”

“Because I want to visit a happy time,” Max replied. “That’s what Miss Moon does.”

“What happy time?” Luz asked. “Was it a long time ago?”

“Not really. I want to watch a baseball game.”

“A real game? Or on TV?”

“A real game,” he said. “At Yankee Stadium. The Yankees and the Red Sox.”

“I know that game,” Luz said. “It’s the game on your video. Right?”

“Yeah. How’d you know?”

“Because Dwight told me about it,” Luz explained. “And I saw you watching it when I went into your house on the time trip we took to last Tuesday.”

Then Max said, “Do you want to come with me?”

Luz looked at him.

“But I have to help Dwight.”

“Well, you don’t have to do it right now. You could come with me. We won’t be gone long.”

“How are we going to get to New York?”

“I have that figured out. We’ll pick a day and then we’ll go to the airport and fly there.”

“You don’t think we could fall out of the plane, do you?”

“No.”

“Do you think Dwight will get mad?” Luz asked.

“Didn’t he keep us waiting when we went back to 1924 and he stayed in the library looking at the desk?” Max said. “We can always come back and set the Memory Machine to an earlier time, so he doesn’t have to wait so long. I’m sure he’s fine. And anyway, he’s with Miss Moon. She’ll take care of him.”

Luz considered Max’s suggestion. She wondered what a happy time in Max’s life would be like. She also wondered if she would find out some of his secrets.

“Okay,” she agreed. “I’ll go.”

“Good,” Max said. “Then I’ll go set the dial. Only—”

“Only what?”

“Only you can’t look at the dial. This is going to be a surprise for you, too.”

“But you promise it’ll be a happy time?”

Max nodded.

“Okay,” Luz said. “Fine.”

Max hurried to the Memory Machine and stooped down to set the dials. Then he called Luz over to the machine.

“No cheating,” he said. “Don’t look down. Just put your foot on the button and press. I’ll meet you outside in a moment.”

Luz stepped into the machine and looked straight ahead at the large stone opposite her. As she pressed her foot on the golden button and the machine began to hum and fill with green fog, she saw something move behind the stone. As another second passed, as she was disappearing back in time, Luz realized that she had seen the shadow of a person hiding behind the stone. She tried to open her mouth and tell Max what she had seen, but she was well on her way to the past.

“Max!!!” she was screaming, but the word wasn’t coming from her mouth. She was hearing it only in her head, as she landed on the lawn of the library.