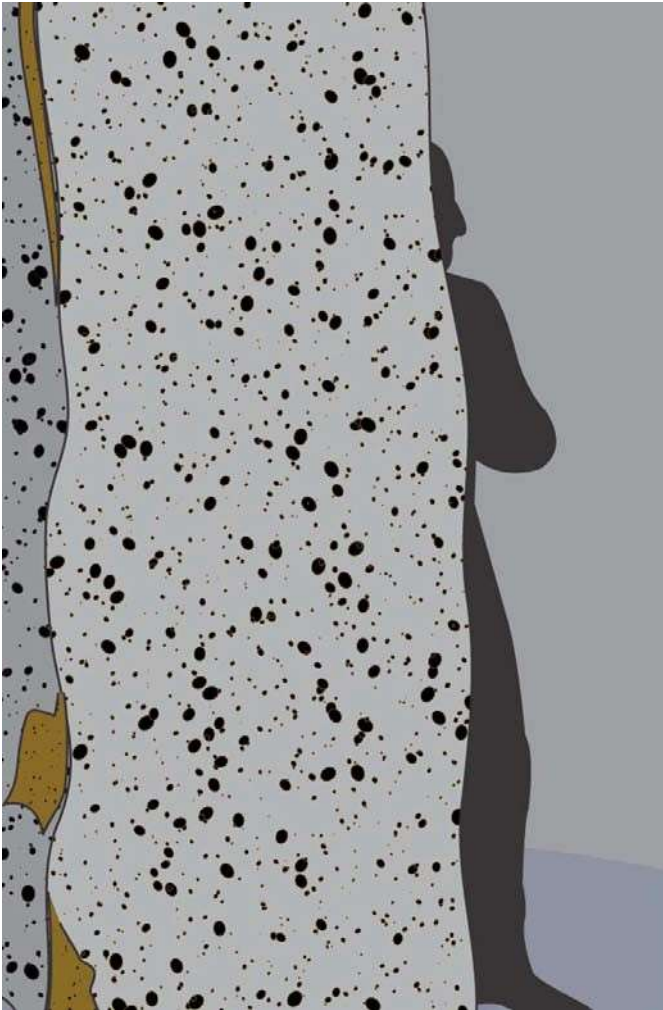


Chapter 11. September 9th



As soon as she landed on the ground outside the library, Luz reached into her pocket for a blue stone. She would go back to Max and warn him that someone was hiding in the basement. But before she could drop the stone, Max appeared on the lawn beside her.

“Did you see the person?” Luz’s voice asked right away.

“What person?” Max’s voice replied.

“Someone was hiding behind one of the big stones in the basement,” her voice told him. “I saw

the shadow when I was leaving in the Memory Machine, but it was too late to stop.”

“I didn’t see anyone,” Max told her.

“Well, I definitely saw someone’s shadow. It might be the person who turned on time.”

“Maybe,” Max’s voice said, as he started to walk away. “Come on, we’ve got to go to the airport.”

“Wait a minute! Don’t you want to go back to the basement and see who it is?” Luz’s voice asked.

“There’s no time,” his voice said. “The plane leaves at six-thirty.”

Luz hesitated. “But we could come right back. I—“

“Why don’t you go back then?” Max’s voice interrupted. “I’m going to New York.”

Luz scanned the sky as it lightened in the east. “What time is it anyway? The sun isn’t even up yet.”

“I set the Memory Machine for 5 A.M.,” Max said.

“Now can you tell me what day it is?”

“September 9th, the day of the baseball game,” Max’s voice said.

“It’s going to take a long time to fly there. We’ll probably miss the game.” Luz’s voice said.

“I have it all figured out,” Max’s voice replied. “The game doesn’t start till this afternoon. Anyway, all I care about is being there by the seventh inning.”

Luz was puzzled. “Why?”

“That’s when I was really happy,” Max’s voice said. “Come on, either you’re coming or you’re not.”

Luz sighed. “Okay, I’ll come with you, but if someone starts messing with time again, I’m going right back to the library basement.”

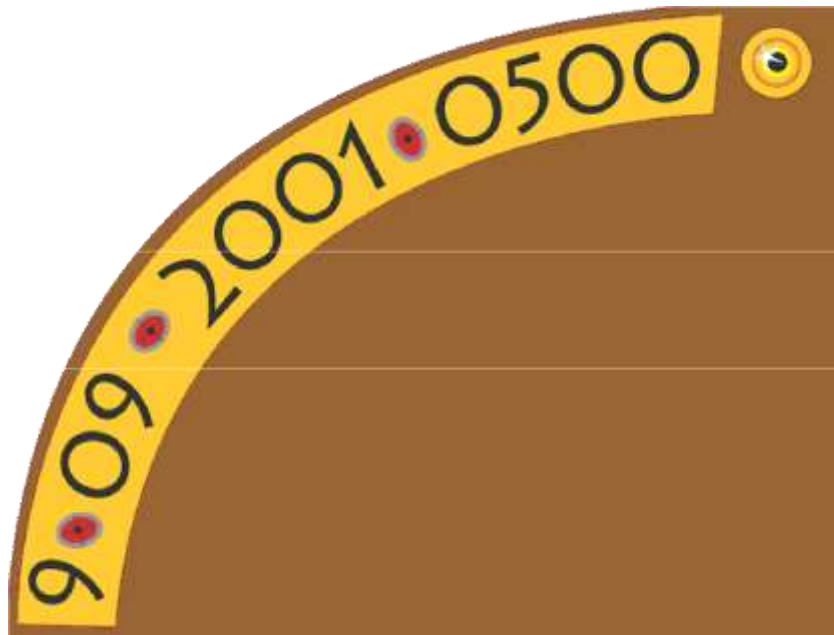
“Fine,” Max’s voice agreed, “but hurry up. We’ve got to get up to the Circle K so we can catch the bus.”

Then he raced ahead, his arms stretched wide. Luz ran after him, trying hard to feel as happy as Max.

=====

As they hurried toward the Circle K, Max and Luz were being followed by a shadow, the same shadow that Luz had seen behind the stone in the library basement. No sooner had Max pushed the button on the Memory Machine than the shadow had emerged, looked around the basement to make sure that the children were gone, and then walked over to the Memory Machine to inspect the dials.

The dials read:



Then the shadow stepped inside the machine and, recalling what the children had done, pushed the golden button. The machine hummed and filled with a green mist. By the time the shadow had arrived on

September 9th, 2001, Max and Luz were already running down the street toward the Circle K.

The shadow lurked in the distance, following them.

=====

Max and Luz reached the bus stop beside the Circle K. Three people waited there in the light of the early morning.

“There’s a bus that goes to the airport?” Luz’s voice asked.

“Not the bus that stops here,” Max told her. “We have to take Bus 16 and then change to Bus 13 at Buckeye Road. That one goes to the airport. I figured it out online before.”

“You really had this whole thing planned, didn’t you?” Luz’s voice asked.

Max nodded. “I’ve been thinking about it ever since I found out about Miss Moon and the Memory Machine. When she told us about going back to visit happy times, I decided that was something I wanted to do. The only problem is that the one I want to visit is a long way from here.”

Luz thought for a moment. “What year is this anyway?”

Max watched their bus approach the stop. “2001,” his voice told her.

“And it’s September 9th?” she asked. “2001? Hey, that’s two days before....” She stopped.

“9/11,” Max’s voice added slowly.

The bus pulled to a stop in front of them.

“Look,” Max’s voice announced, “we can cut right in front of everybody.”

He didn’t even wait for the door to open. He just walked right through the three people standing there and then through the bus door itself.

“Wait for me!” Luz’s voice called.

They took the first two empty seats in the row behind the driver. Then the other people stepped on board. One of them, an older woman with a cane, sat right on Luz.

Luz whipped her head around and looked at Max. “I’m moving,” her voice said. “I am not somebody’s seat cushion—even if she doesn’t know I’m here.” As the bus began to pull away, Luz stood up and started to walk back to find an empty seat.

That’s when she saw Mrs. Norolla. The librarian was just taking her seat at the back of the bus. Quickly Luz ducked her head, turned around, and sat back down on the woman with the cane. She hoped that Mrs. Norolla hadn’t noticed her.

“I thought you were moving,” Max’s voice said.

“Shhh!” Luz’s voice whispered. “Mrs. Norolla’s on the bus.”

Max tried to turn around, but Luz elbowed him. “Sit still,” her voice cautioned.

“Why would she be on this bus at five o’clock in the morning?” Max asked. “Where would she be going?”

“Exactly,” Luz’s voice said. “Maybe she’s not going anywhere. Maybe she’s following us.”

“Just a minute,” Max’s voice said. “You mean, you don’t think she’s a regular person on this bus? You think she’s traveling in the Memory

Machine like us?”

Luz looked Max in the eyes. “Did you see her waiting at the bus stop? I sure didn’t, and I didn’t see her walk by us going down the aisle to get to the back.”

“There’s only one way to find out,” Max said.

“Don’t you go back there!” Luz’s voice warned.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Max’s voice told her. “We can tell what’s happening when we change buses. We’ll see if she follows us.”

In ten minutes, when the bus stopped at the corner of Buckeye Road, Max and Luz hesitated a second, then they stood up, ran across the aisle and jumped through the side of the bus. A strong chill traveled down their spines, as if a chunk of ice had been glued between their shoulder blades.

As the bus drove away, they watched the people inside pass by. A few were reading the newspaper; many were sleeping. In the back row, Mrs. Norolla stared straight ahead as if she had never seen them.

“See, nothing to worry about,” Max’s voice said.

“Okay,” Luz’s voice said. “She must have been taking the bus that morning.”

“Come on,” Max’s voice urged. “We have to cross the street to get to Bus 13. Then we’ve got a plane to catch!”

As they stood at the corner, Max and Luz looked diagonally across the street at the next bus stop. Cars were whizzing down Buckeye Road.

“It’s funny,” Luz’s voice said. “I know we’re invisible and I know we could just walk across the street right now, no matter how many cars

are driving by, but I can't do it. I mean, I know the cars would just go through us, but I keep thinking that something could go wrong."

"I know," Max's voice replied. "Traveling in the Memory Machine takes a lot of getting used to."

"What do you think it'll be like to fly in an airplane?" Luz asked. "Do you think we could fall out?"

"I don't think so," Max said. "But it's good that Dwight's not with us, because I know he'd try to stick his head out of the window when we're flying at 35,000 feet."

They waited for the light to change, then they crossed the street. In a few moments, they were standing side by side on the south side of Buckeye Road, looking west, waiting for Bus 13.

"I hope it comes soon," Luz's voice said. "I hate waiting for buses."

She glanced down at the sidewalk. She could see the base of the pole that held the streetlight behind her feet. She lifted up one foot and moved it backwards through the pole with great ease. Then she put it back on the sidewalk and did the same with her other foot. Her whole foot tingled each time it went into the pole.



Suddenly, she felt a hand on her shoulder. She thought it was Max and lifted her head to look. At the same time, she heard Max's voice say, "What are you doing?"

That's when she saw the hand wearing the white glove resting on her shoulder. Another gloved hand held Max's shoulder. Max and Luz twisted their heads around to see what was happening.

Mrs. Norolla was standing behind them.

Their hearts pounded. They stared at her, too stunned to say anything. They wondered what she was going to do to them.

Then Mrs. Norolla tried to move her mouth and speak, but no words came out. She gripped their shoulders tighter. Again, she tried to talk with her mouth. Her eyes opened wide, as she strained to make her voice heard. Suddenly, she looked so funny trying to say something out loud that Luz almost laughed.

Just then, Max wiggled free from her hand. "What do you want?" his voice demanded. Luz had never heard him sound this way before.

Mrs. Norolla's mouth flapped again, but couldn't make a sound.

"You have to *think* what you want to say," Luz's voice instructed her. She pointed to her own closed mouth. "See, I'm not moving my mouth. You don't talk the regular way when you're traveling in the Memory Machine." She pointed to her head. "Think your words inside your head and then we'll hear them."

"Oh!" Mrs. Norolla's voice suddenly said. "I see. How peculiar this is! I had no idea what I was doing. I certainly got myself into a pickle and onion this time."

"What are you doing here?" Max's voice asked sternly. "And why are you following us?"

Mrs. Norolla stared at Max.

"Were you in the library basement?" Luz's voice asked more gently. "Were you hiding behind the stone?"

"You're not supposed to be there, you know," Max's voice informed her.

No sooner had their harsh thoughts been heard than Mrs. Norolla burst into tears.

"I am the worst person in the world!" her voice wailed. "You both hate me! I know it!"

"We know all about you," Max's voice told her bluntly. "We know you set the fire in the Wisely mansion back in 1924."

Mrs. Norolla gasped. "How do you know that?"

“The Memory Machine took us there,” Luz voice said. “We saw everything.”

Then Max looked at Mrs. Norolla and said, “We know that you’re La Llorona.”

Mrs. Norolla howled. “I’m not even a person anymore!” Tears streamed down her cheeks.

“That’s right,” Max’s voice told her. “You’re a ghost, and a bad one at that!”

“But I’m not, I’m not a complete ghost. I couldn’t be your librarian if I was a ghost, could I? I’m part person and part ghost. I’m terribly cursed, and I’m stuck in-between!” As she sobbed, she removed a white lace handkerchief from the purse that she carried over her wrist. Then she dabbed her eyes and patted her cheeks dry. “I don’t expect you to like me, but don’t be afraid of me! I’m not bad, no matter what you’ve heard!”

“What about your gloves then?” Max’s voice said. “We know what you’re hiding under them.”

Mrs. Norolla sniffed. “It’s not what you think. I had such lovely hands once. What have you heard? That I use these, these bony hands to grab unsuspecting children down by the irrigation canal? That couldn’t be further from the truth.” She blew her nose as politely as she could. “I will tell you everything. Then you’ll see what the truth is and perhaps you’ll agree to help me, if I don’t make a dog’s dinner and a movie out of all this!”

“A dog’s what?” Max’s voice asked.

“Just a minute,” Luz said. “Isn’t this our bus?”

A Valley Metro bus was approaching.

“Yes,” Max said, as the bus screeched to a stop. “Number 13.”

“Are you coming with us?” Luz’s voice asked.

“If you don’t mind,” Mrs. Norolla said.

Max jumped through the doorway and headed for the back. Then Luz stepped onto the bus, followed by Mrs. Norolla. They walked down the aisle toward Max who had the rear seat to himself.

Luz sat next to him, while Mrs. Norolla took the seat beside Luz. She adjusted her dress so that it wouldn’t wrinkle. Then she turned to Luz and Max.

“Now I will explain. Yes, I am La Llorona,” her voice said sadly. She looked away out the window as the bus began to travel toward the airport. “I am La Llorona because of my children.”

“What happened to them?” Luz’s voice asked, though she wasn’t sure that she wanted to hear the answer.

“I don’t know what happened to them,” Mrs. Norolla said.

“I thought you were going to tell us the truth,” Max’s voice challenged. “We know what happened to them. You sent them to live with a cousin in Tucson, and then you went to Phoenix and worked for Mr. Wisely.”

“That’s when you met Mr. Daggett,” Luz’s voice added.

“How do you know all this?” Mrs. Norolla said.

“Your sister,” Max’s voice said. “Miss Anna Moon. She told us all about you.”

“Oh, fiddlesticks and stones! Did she now!” Mrs. Norolla’s voice snapped. “Is that what she told you? That I left my children with my cousin and never saw them again? She didn’t tell you anything else?”

Luz and Max glanced at each other.

“That is what she told us,” Luz’s voice confirmed.

“Then you don’t know very much, and you certainly don’t know everything. After my first husband died, when I found myself in financial trouble back in Tombstone, my sister could have lent me a hand and a foot. But not my sister! She wouldn’t answer any of my letters, except one. She told me to go to Phoenix and look for work. And she told me to leave my sons with our cousin in Tucson. These were her ideas, not mine. I was such a fool to follow her advice, but that’s the kind of person I was then. So I left my sons with my cousin who was more than happy to look after them and I made my way to Phoenix and found what I thought was good fortune. I went to work washing for Mr. Wisely, and then I met Mr. Daggett. They both seemed so nice. And when Mr. Daggett proposed to me on a beautiful starlit night in the grotto outside Mr. Wisely’s house, I thought my prayers had been answered.

“Of course, it wasn’t that way at all. I made many mistakes. I won’t pretend that I didn’t. I was very foolish and very selfish. I can admit that now. But the worst mistake I made was not telling Mr. Daggett about my first husband and my children. I was a coward. I didn’t think he’d want to know that I had been married to a bank robber. And I knew that he didn’t like children very much, judging from the things that he said about the youngsters at the orphanage. And my little boys were quite happy with my cousin in Tucson. I didn’t want to risk losing everything.”

Max was shocked. “So you were going to get married without telling him that you had two kids?” his voice asked.

Mrs. Norolla nodded weakly. “I told you that it was a terrible mistake. But so was what my sister did. Did she tell you about her wedding present? She knew that I hadn’t told Mr. Daggett about my sons, so she decided to punish me. Without my knowledge, she arranged to have my sons sent to me—on my wedding day! They arrived at Union Station on the train. Then, moments after our ceremony, someone at the station sent word to Mr. Daggett that my children had

arrived. He was shocked and quite displeased. It fell to him to tell Mr. Wisely about my children.

“Now Mr. Wisely wasn’t the most generous man when it came to others. We lived in the stable block which wasn’t exactly a suitable place for children. That’s what Mr. Wisely told Mr. Daggett, and he passed the information along to me. I should have argued, but it wasn’t my place then to argue with my husband or with my employer. I had already lied. What good would it have done to argue? Of course, I would do things quite differently now, but because it was then, I did exactly what they said. They told me that my sons would have to stay at Mr. Wisely’s orphanage until he could find us a larger place to live. So with blind faith I sent my sons to the orphanage, and I never saw them again.”

“How could that happen?” Luz’s voice asked. “How could you not see them again?”

“Didn’t you go visit them?” Max’s voice asked.

Tears welled up in Mrs. Norolla’s eyes. “I’m not saying that it wasn’t my fault. Oh, it was all my fault. All I had to do was say no and take my boys and leave, but I believed what Mr. Wisely and Mr. Daggett told me. I didn’t know that they were lying to me about everything. And I did try to go visit, after I finished my washing each evening. But that putrid man in the orphanage wouldn’t let me see them. He always told me that my sons were busy or sleeping or working. Sometimes they told me they had been bad and were being punished. But I was meek then. I changed a great deal after I....” Mrs. Norolla’s voice paused, then continued softly, “...after I died and became La Llorona. I never knew they were lying until the night of February 14, 1924. I finally got the courage to do some exploring and that’s when I found out the truth.”

“What truth?” Luz’s voice asked.

“The truth about where they were keeping my sons. I tricked that putrid man into showing me. They had been locked in the basement of the orphanage, but they were gone by the time I got there. There

was funny business going on down there. Mr. Wisely was up to no good what with his orphanage and museum and those tunnels of his.”

“What about the tunnels?” Max’s voice asked.

“I could never figure them out. But he was up to no good, and so was Mr. Daggett. And perhaps my sister, for all I know.”

“Miss Moon?” Luz asked, shocked by the possibility.

Mrs. Norolla nodded. “She’s not the goody two-shoes and socks that she appears to be.”

Max saw the terminals of the airport in the distance. “We’re almost there,” he said.

“Which terminal?” Luz’s voice asked.

“The first one,” his voice replied. Then he looked back at Mrs. Norolla. “You didn’t tell us everything,” his voice reminded her. “What happened to your hands, and how did you die? And how long will you be like this, you know, in-between?”

“In due time, I will tell you everything you want to know,” Mrs. Norolla’s voice said. “All you need to know now is that I am cursed. I was cursed the moment that I died. And I will stay this way until I find my children, until I find *los huesos de mis hijitos*.”

“Why were you following us?” Max’s voice demanded.

“All I want is for you to help me find my children so that my curse can be broken,” Mrs. Norolla said. “Is that so much to ask?”

Just then, the bus pulled to a stop in front of the terminal.

“But we’re going to New York now,” Luz told her. She wasn’t sure what to believe. Miss Moon had seemed so wonderful, but Mrs. Norolla had begun to make Luz doubt everything. “Maybe when we get back we can help you.”

“We’ll think about it,” Max’s voice told her.

“Do you know how to get back to the Memory Machine?” Luz’s voice asked.

“No,” Mrs. Norolla said.

“It’s easy,” Luz said. She reached into her pocket and took a blue stone. “Take this and drop it whenever you’re ready to leave. As soon as it hits the ground, you’re on your way back. It only takes a second or two.”

“I’ll leave you then,” Mrs. Norolla said. She looked at the blue stone in her hand. She poked at it with her finger. Then she turned her hand over and watched it drop to the floor of the bus. As soon as it hit, she disappeared.

Max and Luz looked at each other.

“Do you think we should trust her?” Luz asked.

Max cocked his head and gave Luz a hard look. “Are you kidding? Even if she is telling the truth, why can’t she find her own kids? She’s the one who lost them, not us. Why does she need us to help her? I don’t understand.”

“Neither do I,” Luz’s voice replied. “It’s very confusing. I just know what Tía Rosa says: La Llorona can be very tricky.”

“Then we should be careful,” Max said before he hopped off the bus.

=====

As soon as Max stepped inside the airport terminal, he became a whirlwind. Luz had never seen Max this excited before. He ran through the ticketing area, weaving in and out of the ticket counters,

passing through passengers, agents, and suitcases. He stopped long enough to check the gate number on the monitor, then headed for the nearby escalator. He couldn't stand still. On the ride up the escalator, he walked through a dozen people, then raced toward the gate. It was only when he saw the security checkpoint that he slowed down and waited for Luz.

"I feel like I'm cheating," Max's voice said, suddenly subdued, "if I go through security without really being checked. It feels really strange to do this."

"I know, like crossing the street," Luz's voice agreed.

"It's funny. Traveling in the Memory Machine is really fun and easy, until you start thinking about it and then it makes you wonder," his voice said.

Silently, they walked through the scanner. By the time they reached the gate, their plane was already boarding.

"I hope it's not crowded," Luz's voice said. "I don't want to have to sit on someone."

They watched for awhile, then slipped through the last remaining passengers walking down the jetway.

"It doesn't look too crowded," Luz said, as they stood at the head of the aisle, facing the rear of the plane.

"Yeah, but first class is full," Max's voice complained.

"Come on," Luz said, "I see lots of seats further back."

Max raced ahead until he reached a row of empty seats.

"I call this side," Max said and threw himself onto three empty seats. "Then I'll sit here," Luz said, taking an aisle seat in the empty row

beside Max. Luz sat up and looked around the plane. “How long is this flight anyway? I’ve only flown to California before.”

“We should be in New York around 2:30.”

“I hope it’s got a good movie,” Luz said. Then, when she reached for her seat belt, her hands passed through the strap. She laughed.

“Max, we can’t even wear our seat belts.”

“Or push the buttons to recline our seats,” his voice added. He poked his finger through the button on the armrest.

“Or eat,” Luz’s voice said.

“I know,” Max’s voice agreed. “I haven’t felt hungry since this afternoon before we started traveling.”

“I wonder. Do you think if I had a candy bar in my pocket I could eat it when I was traveling in the Memory Machine?” Luz’s voice asked.

“Yeah, or what if you were carrying a bottle of water? Could you drink it? We should try that some time.”

“But then what if you had to go to the bathroom?” Luz asked. “I don’t think I’d want to know how that would work.”

“You’re right,” Max’s voice said.

“There are so many things that we don’t know about all this. We could spend our whole lives figuring all this out.”

“I know,” Max’s voice said. “Wouldn’t it be fun to travel like this forever—as long as time was turned off? I think my Mom would miss me too much if I disappeared while time was on. As long as time is off, she never knows.”

When the plane took off, Luz was amazed how she felt. Usually, she flying made her nervous, but not this time. She could tell that the flight would be perfect and safe.

As the plane leveled off, Luz turned to Max and her voice asked, "What's so special about the seventh inning that we have to fly to New York?"

Max smiled. "It's not the game exactly. It's what was going on. My Dad wasn't living at home then, and I hadn't seen him in awhile. But on the way to the game he told me that he got a new job and that he and my Mom were going to get back together. That made me really happy. I had been hoping that might happen."

"Yeah, but what about the seventh inning?"

"You'll see when we get there," he said and smiled.

=====

When they arrived in New York, Luz followed Max through the airport to the baggage claim area then through sliding doors to the road outside. There she saw a taxi stand with a long line.

"We're taking a taxi into Manhattan," Max's voice announced said.

He walked to the front of the line. Then he listened carefully as the dispatcher asked the person for his destination. One person was going to Queens, another to the Bronx. Finally, a woman said she was going to Grand Central Station.

"This is our cab," Max's voice told Luz.

They hopped inside the cab as it took off for Grand Central Station.

"Where's the station?" Luz asked.

“Grand Central? It’s in the middle of Manhattan. From there we can hop on the Number 4 subway and ride to Yankee Stadium. It’s at 161st Street. That’s the easiest way.”

Everything Luz saw that afternoon was strange and wonderful. She had taken her first cross-country plane ride, and now she was seeing New York City for the first time. Rows of tall buildings blocked most of the sky, armies of people walked down the sidewalks, and hundreds of yellow taxis drove through the streets. She liked the subway most of all, its cars filled with the most interesting looking people.

“Come on,” Max called as he ran from the subway all the way up the stairs to the front of Yankee Stadium. He held his arms out and passed them through everyone he could as if he were a supersonic airplane trying to break the speed of sound.

Luz ran after him, sliding through people, through the turnstile, into the stadium. She stopped a moment, aware that was standing in a baseball stadium for the first time. Then she took off, as Max ran through the guards and into the stands behind home plate.

“Look,” he said, pointing up in the stands past first base. “There I am, there I am with my Dad! Come on!”

Again he led Luz up the steps through a long, wide hallway filled with concession stands, up a ramp, down another hallway of stands, and finally down a steep flight of steps.

“That’s me, two years ago!” Max’s voice announced happily. “That’s 2001 Max.”

Then Luz watched as Max walked toward the seats where 2001 Max and his father were sitting. Max strode down the bleachers and stopped in front of 2001 Max. Then he sat right on top of him, passing through the body of his younger self, until they were blended. Now both Maxes were sitting beside their father.

It was odd and almost uncomfortable, Luz thought, watching today's Max merge with 2001 Max as if they were one person, living the same life all over again. Luz wanted to look away but she couldn't. 2001 Max was watching the game, but not today's Max. He had turned his head and was looking at his father's face, as if he hadn't seen it in years.

Then the crowd began to cheer. Luz glanced at the scoreboard. It was the middle of the seventh inning, and the Yankees were leading Boston 3-1. Suddenly, everyone was standing up, and Luz lost sight of both Maxes and their father. In a moment, she saw them walking up the steps toward the concessions area.

"You want something to eat?" his father was asking.

"I'm not hungry," 2001 Max said.

"What are you doing?" Luz's voice asked today's Max, as he followed them. "You're talking. I've never seen you talk when time was on."

"Come on," Max's voice said. "It's the seventh-inning stretch. You'll see what's happening now."

She tagged along. When they entered the concessions area, Max's father headed for a souvenir stand.

"You want a Yankees hat?" he asked. "Something to make today special?"

2001 Max picked up a Yankees cap from the counter. His father took it from him and put it on his head, pulling it down with a snap.

"Looks good," his father said. "You want it?"

"Sure," 2001 Max said.

Luz turned toward today's Max and said, "So that's how you got your hat."

As Max's father paid for the hat, Luz heard him say, "You can wear this the next time we come to a game. Maybe we can get your mother to come, too." His father smiled. "Maybe she'll decide she likes baseball after all."

Then both Maxes and their father headed back to their seats. Luz stood at the top of the steps and tried to watch the rest of the game. Two batters were on base, and someone named Martinez hit a home run. The crowd went wild. The scoreboard flashed: 3 HOMERS, 2 DAYS! WAY TO GO TINO! By the end of the game, the Yankees had won 7-2.

As the crowd filed out, Luz saw 2001 Max and his father walk by, but today's Max wasn't behind them. As the crowd began to thin, Luz saw Max still sitting in the stands, his back to her. She walked down the steps to him, passing through people on her way. When she reached Max, she saw that he was crying.

"What's wrong?" her voice asked.

He shrugged.

"Wasn't this a happy day?" her voice questioned.

He nodded. "Yes, but—."

"But what?"

"He disappeared on Tuesday," his voice said.

"What?"

"This Tuesday, two days from now. It was 9/11. My father disappeared on 9/11," Max's voice said softly.

"Disappeared?" Luz's voice echoed. "You mean he--." She stopped. "Oh, that's awful. I'm sorry, I didn't know."

“I know,” Max’s voice said.

“But I don’t understand. Why did you want to come here?” Luz asked.

“Because today was the last happy time I had. At least I thought it was happy.”

“Well, it was happy then,” Luz’s voice said, “ but you didn’t know what was going to happen. Now it’s hard because you do.”

Max tried to joke. “Maybe I should have been like Miss Moon and gone to see Teddy Roosevelt instead.”

Luz smiled. “You can always be happy about today if you just remember it and not what happened later.”

Max nodded. “Yes, September 9th was a happy day. It was two days before I knew bad things could happen. Do you think other people have that kind of day? You know, the last happy day before your life changes forever?”

Luz thought a moment. “Probably. Maybe Mrs. Norolla was like that.”

They were quiet for a time, both thinking about different things.

Then Luz’s voice asked, “Do you want to go back now? We’ve still got to take Dwight a blue stone, you know.”

“Yes,” Max’s voice said. He pulled a blue stone from his pocket. Then he took one more look around the stadium. It was almost empty now.

As Luz watched Max, she realized that her own eyes were watery now. She blinked. She wasn’t about to start crying in front of Max.

“Why don’t you go first?” her voice told him.

“Okay,” his voice said. Without waiting another second, he dropped his blue stone and was gone.

Now Luz hesitated. She looked at the seats where Max and his father had been sitting earlier. It made her feel sad, not only about Max, but about herself and her own father, a man she had never met or seen, a man her mother had never spoken about. She had only asked about him a few times, when she was much younger. Each time her mother had told her that there was nothing to talk about. But when Luz saw Max with his father, she knew she was old enough to know anything. She decided then and there that she was going to ask her mother all about her father whenever time started again and she went home.

She dropped her blue stone and disappeared, as she followed Max back to the library basement in 2003.

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Seventy-nine years earlier, Dwight was still trying to make his way to the library basement. Nilchi, his new friend, had led him through tunnel after tunnel.

“Be careful,” Nilchi said as one tunnel ended and they turned right into another. “There’s a big hole here.” She stopped and held the candle in front of her.

Ahead, Dwight could see the opening of a deep hole on the side of the tunnel.

“What is this?” Dwight asked.

“No one said, no one knew, just keep digging till you’re through,” Nilchi replied. “Look,” she said. She took a stick of wood lying on the floor of the tunnel. She held it to the candle flame until the wood

began to burn. Then she dropped the stick into the hole. Dwight watched as the burning stick illuminated the shadowy area.

“It’s a big underground room. Bigger than I ever seen,” Nilchi said. “Big enough for a mountain. Don’t want to fall in there.”

“What was it for?” Dwight asked.

Nilchi shook her head. “Lots of dust, lots of earth, how much would some water be worth?”

“Did you dig this part?” Dwight asked.

“I dug where they told me till I escaped,” Nilchi said. “But Richard and Edward, they dug here.”

“But I thought they got blocked behind the bricks,” Dwight said.

“They were digging here, till they got too hungry. Don’t want beans, don’t want meat, just some bread thrown at my feet. They promised them there’d be food at the end of the tunnel. They promised them. But there weren’t no food there, and bricks at the other end.”

“Who promised them?”

“Dig Daggett Dug, Dug Daggett Dig,” Nilchi said.

“Mr. Daggett?”

Nilchi nodded, then added, “And the most evil man of never and never.”

“Who?” Dwight asked. “The smelly man?”

“No, the wise man. Not too smart, not too dumb, better take off before they come.”

“You mean, Mr. Wisely?” Dwight asked.

“And the Mrs.”

“Mrs. Wisely?” Dwight asked. “You don’t mean Mrs. Wisely, do you?”

Before Nilchi could answer, the candle flickered for the last time, and the flame died.

“Oh, no,” Dwight said, realizing that they would never be able to get out of the darkness.

“Don’t pay this no never mind,” Nilchi said. “Take your left hand, put it on the wall, that’s the way that you won’t fall. Now walk slow and sure, keep your feet flat on the floor. Just listen to me, follow what I say, and you will live to see another day. Dig Daggett Dug. Dug Daggett Dig. You don’t need light, you just need me.”

They walked through tunnels for what would have seemed like hours, if time had been ticking. Dwight wondered if they would ever reach the library. He kept picturing the large underground room that Nilchi had shown him. He hoped that there wasn’t another one they could fall into. He had so much news to tell Max and Luz. They would be surprised that their school had been the orphanage and that he knew about another trapdoor in Mrs. Norolla’s office. They would want to know about the tunnels and Nilchi and everything she had told him.

Suddenly Nilchi said, “Stop!”

Dwight did exactly that.

“Ten thousand steps, ten thousand more, now two hundred, then the door,” she told him.

“I don’t understand,” Dwight said. “I can’t see anything! We’re never going to get out of here.”

“Listen to my words and do what I say, take ten more steps and you’ll see the way. When you step five, the wall ends, then five more straight ahead. The lights will be lit.”

Dwight took five steps. His left hand brushed the wall. On the fifth step, the wall ended. Without anything to hold on to, he took another step straight ahead. He leaned forward and took another and another until he reached the next wall. As he did, he saw the barest hint of light ahead. Then he saw Nilchi in front of him standing in the dim light.

“Come on,” he said. “I want to get to the library!”

“Shhh!” Nilchi cautioned. “Tunnels with lights have bad people.”

Quietly, they walked ahead until they reached an intersecting tunnel. Nilchi made a right turn, down a tunnel with light bulbs hanging from the ceiling. Suddenly, Dwight realized where he was. He was in the tunnel he had strayed from, the tunnel that had taken Max and Luz to the library basement.

“Faster!” Dwight whispered urgently. “I want to get there!”

Ahead, he saw the round, jeweled door, standing wide open. Nilchi held up her hand to caution him. They approached the opening, then stopped and listened. They heard voices, dim and distant voices, coming from the room with the Memory Machine.

Carefully, Nilchi, then Dwight stepped through the opening into the Employees Only room. They tiptoed toward the door that separated them from the Memory Machine. It was open a crack, and the two children peered into the room. All they could see from their angle was the empty Memory Machine.

Suddenly, the voices were louder.

Dwight heard Mr. Daggett talking. “Why did you follow me here?” he was saying.

Then Dwight heard Mrs. Norolla's voice. "To see what you were up to," his wife replied. "I had no idea that you went sneaking about in these trapdoors and tunnels, going places that I never saw before."

"I came here to fetch Mr. Wisely," Mr. Daggett said. "Someone has to tell him what happened to his house."

"Then where is he? You told me he was traveling out of town," Mrs. Norolla said.

"That'd be right," her husband replied. "Only not the kind of travels you are picturing. He's here and there, but mostly here. And this contraption is what I'll use to reach him."

Just then, Mr. Daggett jumped into the Memory Machine.

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Norolla asked. She stepped beside the machine. "I don't understand."

"You're not supposed to understand," her husband said. "But you may get an idea as soon as I press this little gold button on the floor. I see by the looks of these here dials," he said, glancing at the floor of the Memory Machine, "that Mr. Wisely went quite afar, and in a direction what I've never traveled."

"Does your nonsense mean that he went to California?" Mrs. Norolla asked.

Mr. Daggett laughed. "Oh, no, he traveled all the way from Phoenix to Phoenix and soon he'll be back again. Or should I say that he traveled forward from Phoenix to Phoenix and soon will travel backward again." He chuckled at his joke.

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Norolla repeated.

"The plain and simple truth is that I'm heading to 1932 to get Mr. Wisely," Mr. Daggett told her.

Then he leaned forward and pressed his foot against the gold button. The machine began to hum.

“No, don’t!” Mrs. Norolla cried. “Come out of there!”

Dwight and Nilchi watched as the glass tube of the Memory Machine begin to fill with the green cloud. Then Mrs. Norolla reached inside the opening, trying to pull her husband out. Suddenly, as the green mist surrounded her hands and as Mr. Daggett disappeared in time, she shrieked in agony.

Dwight couldn’t help but close his eyes. When he opened them a few moments later, he saw Mrs. Norolla lying in a heap on the floor beside the machine. Trying to understand what had happened, he blinked and looked again. Her arms were stretched out in front of her, her hands still inside the machine. Dwight squinted his eyes for a closer look and shuddered. From her wrists to the tips of her fingers, her hands had turned to bone.