

Chapter 12. The Middle of a Mystery

“Come on!” Dwight yelled to Nilchi. “Let’s get out of here!”



He pushed open the door and ran toward the elevator. When he reached the hallway, he stopped and turned to make sure that Nilchi was following him. As he did, he saw the body of Mrs. Norolla lying on the floor, her bony hands still inside the Memory Machine. For a moment, her black dress made Dwight think that Miss Moon was lying there instead. He stared harder at the face to make sure that it was Mrs. Norolla. Then, to his surprise, her body suddenly disappeared, as if it

had never been there at all.

“Come on!” Dwight told Nilchi, who had stopped beside him. “We’ve got to get out of here!”

They ran the rest of the way to the elevator. Dwight pulled open the door, and the children hurried inside. Dwight’s heart was racing, as he pushed the UP button. When the elevator began to move, he released the button and leaned against the wall.

“Did you see what happened?” he asked, trying to catch his breath.

“Yes,” Nilchi said nervously. “That machine made Mr. Daggett disappear—and Mrs. Daggett’s hands, too!”

“No,” Dwight corrected, “it took him on a trip in time. There are dials on the floor that you set and a shiny golden button that starts the machine. But you have to be all the way inside the machine I guess, or there’s a big problem.”

Then Nilchi said, "But what is this machine?"

"An elevator," Dwight said.

"Does it make people disappear, too?" she asked.

"No. It takes you upstairs to the library," Dwight explained.
"That's where we're going."

In a moment, the elevator stopped, but Dwight didn't move.

"I'm afraid to open the door," he whispered. "What if someone's out there? I don't want to go back to the orphanage again."

"I will help you," Nilchi said.

"I just want to open the desk and take a blue stone and go back to the time I came from," Dwight continued.

"What time did you tell me that was?" she asked.

"September 9, 2003. About 4:15 in the afternoon, except that time isn't working right now. Sorry, too complicated to explain." Then he looked at Nilchi. "What about you? Where will you go?"

She smiled. "Anywhere I want, anywhere is home, don't make no difference, 'cause I can roam."

"So you won't go back to the tunnels?"

"Don't know," she said. "It's okay there, long as I can get me some vittles."

"What's that?" Dwight asked.

“Vittles is grub!” Nilchi said. “Don’t you know nothing? Do you have vittles where you come from?”

“Yeah, sure,” Dwight said.

“Who cooks for you?” Nilchi asked.

“I do, for me and my grandma. And I buy the groceries, too.”

“I don’t have no one to cook for nor no grub to cook nor no place to cook it. Just what I can find. What kind of grub do you cook?”

“Barbeque chicken,” Dwight said. “That’s my favorite.” Then he thought. “You’d like the food we have. There’s so much good candy, too, like Skittles and KitKats and—”

“You eat cats?” Nilchi asked.

Dwight laughed. “No,” he said. “That’s candy.”

“One day I’ll have all the vittles I want, and I won’t be stuck in no tunnel neither.”

“You need a home,” he said. “With all the vittles you can eat.”

“I will find one,” Nilchi said.

Dwight sighed. “I wish there was a way you could come with me.” Then he added quickly, “But there’s not. It’s not the time you’re from.”

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Seventy-nine years later, give or take some moments, Luz appeared in the Memory Machine after her trip back from New York.

Max was standing nearby waiting for her.

He took one look at her face and said, “Now *you* look sad.”

“There are too many mysteries,” she said. “I’ve been thinking about all of them.”

“You mean Robert Wisely?” he asked.

“Yes—and no, more mysteries than that, mysteries you can’t talk about.” She stared at Max. “Mysteries about you. Mysteries about me. More like secrets, I guess.”

“What’s so secret about you?” Max asked.

“Anything about my father,” Luz said.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I’ve never met him. I don’t even know who he is. I’ve never seen a picture of him. My mother never talks about him, even when I ask.”

“That’s terrible,” Max said. “Do you think he’s alive?”

“I don’t know. I stopped asking about him. Why?”

“Because I just wondered...that ghost we saw in your house. Do you think—?”

“Do I think that guy’s my father? Get real!” Luz said, feeling annoyed. “He’s way too old! I don’t know who he is. But see--that’s another mystery. Are we ever going to find out the answers?”

Max shrugged. “Sometimes you can’t find out everything all at once,” he said. “You want to get to the end of a mystery when it’s all

figured out, but then you discover that you're stuck in the middle and there's nothing you can do about it."

"That's how I feel about you," Luz said. "There are mysteries and secrets about you that you don't want to talk about even when time is stopped. We are definitely stuck in the middle of your mysteries."

"And yours," he said, smiling. His eyes seemed to sparkle. "I don't like to talk about some things no matter what time it is or isn't." "But how come you don't talk?" Luz asked. "You were talking at the baseball game back in 2001. Is it because your father gave you a baseball cap on September 9th?"

Max just looked at her.

"Okay, don't tell me," Luz said. "But what about your mother? She was crying last Tuesday night when I went into your house."

"She cries a lot. Because of my father," Max said. "Because he disappeared."

"She kisses his picture on her nightstand," Luz said. Max was silent. "But what I want—"

Just then the Memory Machine began to hum and fill with green mist.

"Who's this?" Max asked.

"It can't be Dwight," Luz said. "Can it?"

As they watched in surprise, a person began to take shape in the glass tube. They moved toward the machine, hoping that somehow Dwight would appear.

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Seventy-nine years earlier, Dwight pushed against the elevator door and stuck his head out to scan the library. When he saw someone standing on the far side of the room, he instinctively ducked back inside the elevator. As he did, he caught a glimpse of Robert Wisely's desk, only a few feet from the elevator door. It was so close, but the roll top was shut, and he was afraid the person would see him before he could open it and take a blue stone.

The elevator door shut silently.

"Someone's out there," he whispered to Nilchi.

"Where?"

"Near the front door," he said.

"Where's the desk?" she asked.

"Right by the elevator, but I might get caught. I just need one blue stone, and then I can go home."

Nilchi almost laughed. "One blue stone will take me home," she said in a low singsong voice. "You sound like me now." She stopped. "I will help you get home."

Then, without warning, she pushed open the door and began to run. Dwight was caught off guard. He wasn't ready for her to leave yet. He wanted to say more.

"Hey!" he heard someone yell.

Dwight peered around the door and saw the smelly man running toward Nilchi. He knew he had to get a blue stone, but he suddenly realized that, if the elevator door shut and something went wrong, they would be trapped upstairs. He pulled off one of his sneakers and placed it so that the elevator door wouldn't shut

completely. Then he moved to the desk and pushed the button. The roll top dropped down, revealing the jars of stones.

Startled by the noise, the smelly man looked in Dwight's direction. "Hey, how'd you get out of the cellar?"

Quickly, Dwight reached into the closest jar and took a handful of blue stones.

"Get away from there!" the smelly man yelled.

Dwight ignored him and jammed all but one of the blue stones into his pocket. He saved one, holding it in his hand.

"Go home!" Nilchi yelled.

Dwight was ready to drop the blue stone, but he saw that the smelly man had caught Nilchi by the arm.

"Go home!" she called. "He can't hurt me!"

But Dwight wasn't so sure.

"Hey!" Dwight yelled. "Look what I have!" He held up the blue stone. "I took it from the desk! Mr. Wisely wouldn't like that, would he?"

The smelly man hesitated.

"Let her go, and I'll give you this," Dwight said. Then he started to run toward the front door.

The smelly man released Nilchi and headed toward Dwight, trying to block his escape.

"Get away, Nilchi!" Dwight yelled. "Get away! Go back downstairs."

But Nilchi had another idea. She ran to the desk and started to grab stones of each color as the smelly man closed in on Dwight. At the front door, Dwight fumbled with the doorknob, and the smelly man grabbed his right arm.

The smelly man gripped his arm tightly and said, "I knowed something was amiss. But I'll be getting you and your friend back to the cellar so you can rot a little bit more. No one'll ever know what comes of you."

Dwight saw Nilchi by the desk.

"I'm okay," he called to her. "I can go home now. Get out of here! Press the DOWN button!"

She waved and slid into the elevator. The door closed and disappeared. Satisfied that she was safe, Dwight told the smelly man, "You can't do anything to me! I'm outta here!"

But before Dwight could drop the blue stone, the smelly man tried to snatch it from his hand.

"You ain't going nowhere," the smelly man said.

The smelly man's long fingers tried to pry Dwight's fist apart. Dwight strained to keep the stone protected. Then he had an idea.

"You want it?" Dwight asked.

He opened his hand and let the smelly man take the blue stone. At the same time, Dwight reached into his front pocket.

Then he pulled out another stone.

"Sur—" he began to say as he quickly dropped it on the floor, "—priiiiiise!".

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In a moment, as the green mist disappeared, Dwight found himself back in the library basement standing in the Memory Machine. His arm was sore where the smelly man had grabbed him.

He stepped out of the machine, aware that he had left one sneaker behind in 1924. The room seemed to be empty, and he wondered where Max and Luz were. He hoped they hadn't gone back to search for him and missed him.

"Hello?" he called.

The door to the Employees Only room was ajar. He walked over to it and looked in. Max and Luz were sitting at the round table, their backs to him. Only the light above the table was lit, and the edges of the room were bathed in dark shadows. *They must not have heard me in the Memory Machine*, Dwight thought. He thought about surprising them for a moment, then decided against it.

"Hey, you two!" Dwight called to them. "I just got back--all by myself! I didn't need your help!"

Max and Luz sat still, without turning around.

"You won't believe what happened," he said, stepping toward them. "I found out so much about what happened." Max and Luz didn't move. "What's the matter? Don't you want to know?"

Luz seemed to move slightly, but she said nothing.

"Hey, what's going on? Are you guys okay?" Dwight asked. By then, Dwight had reached the backs of their chairs. "Turn around!" he said. "Why won't you talk to me? Are you guys joking around?"

He darted forward, craning his head to look at their faces. Their eyes were open, staring straight ahead. He waved his hand in front of

them, but they didn't react. "Luz! Max!" he called. At the mention of their names, they blinked and began to stir.

Then Luz noticed Dwight.

"Hey! You're back!" she said, happy to see him.

"How'd you get here?" Max asked, rubbing his eyes.

"That's a *loooooong* story," Dwight said. "But what happened to you guys? You were acting really weird."

"What do you mean?" Max asked.

"You were frozen or something. You weren't moving or talking. Did something happen?"

Luz and Max were quiet a moment, as they sorted through their memories.

"I don't remember sitting here," Max said.

"Neither do I," Luz agreed. "The last thing I remember is that we were standing in the other room talking."

"Right," Max said. "We were talking about coming to get you, Dwight."

"And then the Memory Machine turned on," Luz continued. "It was filling up with the green cloud, and I started to see a person."

"Yeah, there was someone," Max agreed.

"Who was it?" Dwight asked. "I know it wasn't me because you were in this room when I came back."

Luz looked at Max. "That's strange. I don't remember...do you?"

Max shook his head. "All I remember is that I woke up when Dwight said my name."

"Woke up?" Dwight repeated. "You weren't sleeping. Your eyes were wide open."

"It felt like it," Max said.

"Hey, you don't think you were under the spell of something?" Dwight asked. "Or someone?"

Max and Luz looked around the room, as if they expected someone to jump out from the shadows.

"I don't know," Luz said.

"You don't think Mrs. Norolla did something to us, do you?" Max asked.

"How could she do that?" Dwight asked.

"I don't know, but she was following us," Max explained.

"What do you mean?" Dwight asked.

"When we got back from 1924, we decided to take a trip to New York," Luz explained.

"Hey! Why didn't you come back and rescue me?" Dwight asked. "You took a trip to New York?"

Max nodded. "I needed to go to New York."

"It was personal," Luz explained. "We were going to come back to help you."

“Anyway,” Max continued, “Mrs. Norolla followed us on the trip—at least to the airport.”

“The airport?” Dwight asked. “Man! You took a plane?”

Max nodded.

“Did you stick your head out the window?” Dwight continued.

Max and Luz looked at each other and smiled.

“No!” Luz said. “But we knew you would if you had been with us.”

“So what happened?” Dwight asked.

“We told her that we knew she was La Llorona. We told her we knew about the skeleton hands.”

“What’d she do? What’d she do?” Dwight asked.

“She started crying,” Luz said. “She told us that she wants us to help her find her children.”

“Well, I know where they are,” Dwight said proudly.

“You do?” Luz asked.

“Where?” Max said.

“Under Mr. Wisely’s orphanage, in one of the tunnels,” Dwight said.

“How do you know?” Max asked.

“Man! I know everything—well, a lot more than I did. You won’t believe what happened to me after you left 1924. First, whatever you do, be careful with those red stones. I wanted to come with you when

you guys took off. I didn't want to stay there. So I threw a red stone on the ground, and I stopped being a ghost. I became part of 1924!"

"Are you sure?" Luz asked.

"Yes, I'm sure. They could see me! They thought I was a runaway orphan. Mr. Daggett caught me in the library and took me to the orphanage. And do you know where the orphanage was? It used to be our school! And do you know they had a secret room under the orphanage where they locked up kids? And the way to get to the secret room was through a trapdoor in the music room which is the same room that's Mrs. Norolla's office now?"

"Her office?" Max questioned.

Dwight nodded. "There was a trapdoor under the piano, and it went down to the tunnels. That's where they kept bad kids in the orphanage. That's where they tried to keep me. And that's where they kept Edward and Richard. Mr. Daggett sent them to work in the tunnels, and then he built a brick wall over the entrance to their tunnel so they couldn't get back out."

"You mean they...?" Luz's voice trailed off.

Dwight shrugged slowly. "I don't know," he said.

"So they're under our school?" Max asked. "Under Mrs. Norolla's office?"

"Except that they may not be there," Dwight said.

"Why not?" Max asked.

"Hey, it was a long time ago," Dwight said. "And who knows how long that tunnel was? They could have gone somewhere else. Those tunnels are a maze."

“How are we going to get down there to find out?” Luz asked.

“Who said we are?” Max replied.

“But Mrs. Norolla wants us to help her,” Luz said.

“Are you crazy?” Dwight asked. “Don’t you remember what you told us about La Llorona? She tries to trick kids.”

“Do you think there’s a trapdoor there now?” Max asked.

“No,” Luz said. “If there was a trapdoor there now, why would Mrs. Norolla want us to help her? She could do it herself.”

“Maybe she wants to put us down there,” Dwight countered. “Only I got out.”

“That’s right,” Max said. “How’d you do that?”

“I met someone a girl named Nilchi, who lived down there and she helped me get back to the library. She was an orphan and—”

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Just then, a beam of light swept across Dwight’s face.

He blinked his eyes and batted at it, as if it were a giant insect.

“What was that?” he asked.

Max pointed toward the back wall. Next to Robert Wisely’s desk, beyond the jeweled door, a small spot of light swayed back and forth inside the dark tunnel.

“What is it?” Luz asked.

“Flashlight,” Max told them.

They watched the light beam grow closer. Then Mrs. Norolla stepped out of the tunnel, holding a small blue flashlight.

“What are you doing here?” Dwight asked, as soon as he saw her face.

She stepped toward them, and the children saw that she had been crying.

“I can’t find them,” she said. “I know they’re here somewhere, but I can’t find them.”

She turned off the flashlight and placed it on the round table. It was shaped like a spaceship. Dwight stared at it.

“Where’d you get that?” he asked.

“I...I....” She hesitated, then burst into tears. “*Your* house,” she said finally. “My *old* house.”

“What were you doing in *my* house?” Dwight demanded.

She sobbed loudly for a moment and wiped her eyes with her handkerchief. “That’s how I got here. I’m so sorry. I did an awful thing. I don’t know what came over me.”

“What did you do?” Luz asked her.

“You know I followed you, but I didn’t tell you everything. After school, I decided to visit Dwight’s house. I knew I could get into the tunnels from his house,” Mrs. Norolla said. “I told the woman who answered the door that I was looking for lost library books. I was, I truly was. Lost books must be found, or librarians everywhere

wouldn't be worth their salt and pepper. That part wasn't a lie at all. It was just the other part."

"What part?" Dwight asked.

"Oh, the part about the boy who lived in the house before you and how he had some unreturned books. That wasn't true at all. Or the part about the boy calling me to say that he had hidden them in the garage." She hung her head down. "I'm such a numbskull and bones."

"You shouldn't have been in my house," Dwight said. "I saw what you did the night of the fire. I saw how your hands turned to bone. And I know what happened to your husband, too."

"What do you mean?" Luz asked.

"Mr. Daggett used the Memory Machine that night, only Mrs. Norolla tried to stop him, and her hands became skeleton hands. But Mr. Daggett made a big mistake, because he went forward in time looking for Mr. Wisely."

Luz's mouth dropped open. "That's why he turned into stone," she said.

"I saw what became of him this afternoon," Mrs. Norolla admitted. "The woman let me into the garage, and then she left me alone. You can imagine my surprise when I turned on the light and saw my husband lying on the floor with his head broken off. He was a terrible man, but who would have done that to him? It scared me half to death and taxes!"

"That's what happens when you go forward in time," Max told her.

"You still haven't told us why you were in my house," Dwight said.

“Of course,” Mrs. Norolla said, “I knew there was an entrance to the tunnels in the garage. It’s in the middle of the floor, but it’s covered with wood now. All I had to do was take a hammer and start pounding. I made a hole in the floor and found the entrance. Then I began looking for my children and found myself in the library basement, just like I did the night of the fire. I saw my sister for the first time in years. She was standing frozen behind the door, almost like my husband. So I hid myself, and then the three of you walked in. I was there when you turned off time. I was there when you went back in time to 1924. I was there when the two of you came back and went to 2001. That’s when I followed you. I had already wandered through the tunnels and I knew I needed your help.”

“You just want to trick us,” Dwight said.

“No, I don’t,” Mrs. Norolla said. Then she began to cry again. “I’m going to leave, I’m going to leave.”

“Well, you can’t leave if time is stopped,” Max said. “There’s no place to go.” He pointed at the small clock on the wall above the box that controlled time. “See, it’s 4:09, and it’s not moving until someone turns it on.”

“Then turn it on,” Mrs. Norolla said.

“We can’t do that until we’re all ready to leave,” Luz explained. “We can’t do that now, because then I’d have to leave. I have to go to the dentist at 4:15, and I can’t be late.”

“And don’t forget,” Dwight said, “we haven’t decided what to do about Miss Moon.”

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Just then, the Memory Machine began to hum.

“Hey, who’s that?” Dwight asked.

They walked to the door to get a better look. A person was beginning to appear in the machine inside the green mist.

They watched and waited, and then something happened. The next thing Dwight knew he was standing inches away from the Memory Machine.

“Underwood?”

It was Nilchi, standing in front of him.

“Underwood?” she repeated.

His mind was foggy, and he didn’t understand what had happened.

“What?”

“I kept calling you, Underwood” she said. “Must have been a dozen times. You were standing there with your eyes open, but you weren’t seeing me.”

“I don’t know what happened. I—” Dwight paused, as he realized the full meaning of Nilchi’s presence. “Oh, Nilchi, what’d you do? I told you that you couldn’t come here.”

“I was itching to see some new places,” she said.

“But you can’t go forward in time—unless—”

“Less what?”

“—well, you turn to stone,” Dwight said.

“Don’t feel like I’m turning to nothing,” Nilchi replied.

“But it doesn’t happen right away.”

“Then I’ll just go back where I came from.”

“But that won’t stop it,” Dwight said. “I think it’s too late.”

“Ain’t nothing too late if you don’t want it to be,” she said. “Who are these children?”

Dwight turned his head and saw Luz and Max standing near him as well, frozen in place.

“Oh, no! Max!” he called. “Luz!”

They began to move. As they did, Dwight became aware of something else: time was ticking again. He could feel the seconds pass.

“What happened to us?” Luz asked, when she saw Dwight. Then she noticed Nilchi. “Hey, who are you?”

“Nilchi,” she said. “What’s your name?”

“I’m Luz Lucero.”

“Nilchi’s from 1924 and—,” Dwight tried to explain.

“She’s *what?*” Luz asked.

Just then, Max who had been standing quietly, saw his baseball cap on top of a nearby file cabinet. He grabbed it and pulled it down low over his forehead.

“Who is he?” Nilchi asked.

Max stood silently beside Luz, adjusting his hat

“That’s Max,” Dwight told her.

As Luz watched Max, she suddenly realized that time was running.

“Oh, my gosh,” she said. “What happened? Max can’t talk again? Time’s turned on?” She looked at Dwight. “Did you do that?” “I didn’t touch it,” Dwight said, as Luz raced into the Employees Only room.

“Come here!” she called. “You won’t believe this!”

Dwight found her standing by the counter that had held the time switch. The box was open, and the switch was shattered into pieces.

“Someone turned it on,” Luz said, “and then they broke it so no one could stop time again.”

“But who would do that?” Dwight asked. “Who could get in here?” He turned and scanned the room. “Where’s Mrs. Norolla anyway? I bet she did this!”

Then Luz glanced at the clock on the wall; it read 4:20. “Oh, no. It was 4:09 before—how could we lose 11 minutes? I’m so late! Tía Rosa’s going to be so mad! She has to take me to the dentist!”

“Forget that,” Dwight said. “Where’s Mrs. Norolla?” He ran into the room with the Memory Machine and looked behind each of the large stones that lined the wall. “Where did *she* go?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” Luz said, as she headed for the elevator. “We’ll figure it out. But if I can’t stop time, I have to leave. I’m going to be in so much trouble!”

“But you can’t,” Dwight said, limping after her in his one shoe. “Max can’t talk, Nilchi’s here, and I—I—”

“I have to!” Luz opened the elevator door. “I’ll come back after my appointment and meet you outside in about an hour,” she called. “But you and Max, if you can, you should make sure Miss Moon is okay—and you need to give her a blue stone, just in case.” The elevator door was closing. “And tell her I will visit her tomorrow!”

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“Who are you looking for?” Nilchi asked as soon as Luz was gone. “And what did they do?”

“We’re looking for Mrs. Norolla—well, Mrs. Daggett. She’s the same person, but with a new name.”

“What did she do?” Nilchi asked.

“Oh, Nilchi,” Dwight said. “I know it sounds strange, but we have a switch that can turn time off and on. Somebody broke it, right before you woke me up.”

“I didn’t know you could do anything to time,” Nilchi said.

“Man, you can do all kinds of things down in this basement!” Dwight said. “Did you see anything when you came in?” he asked her. “Was there anyone else here?”

Nilchi shook her head. “Just the three of you.”

“You didn’t see Mrs. Daggett?”

“No.”

Dwight thought a moment. “How did you get here anyway?” he asked.

“I moved the numbers in the machine and pushed that twinkly button and showed up outside the library. I found out fast enough that no one could see me and I could walk through things like they wasn’t there. It was mighty strange! I could step right through the front door of this place and jump down the hole for the elevator, except it felt like a blizzard every time I went through something.”

“Yeah,” Dwight said. “You’re supposed to spin or else you get brain freeze.”

“Strange enough,” Nilchi said, “soon as I got down here in the basement, you could see me and talk to me like I was really here.” Dwight sighed. “This basement is a strange place. If you go forward in time, this is the only place people can see you. We could only see Miss Moon here. We couldn’t see her when she was upstairs. The only way anyone can see you is by dropping a red stone. That’ll make you alive in 2003. That’s how Mr. Daggett caught me. I dropped a red stone back in 1924. That’s why I needed the blue stone to get back.”

“Like one of these?” Nilchi asked. She pulled a handful of stones from her pocket.

Dwight nodded. “But don’t do that! Then people will want to know who you are.”

“Never minded people knowing who I was,” Nilchi said.

“Yeah, but they’ll think you should be in school!”

“Might like school.”

“But you need a birth certificate,” Dwight argued.

You worry too much,” Nilchi said. “Don’t you know nothing? Can always go home again if I don’t like what’s happening. Got blue stones and red stones.”

Dwight sighed and turned to Max. “We need to see Miss Moon.”

Max stood silently.

“Who is that?” Nilchi asked.

“Mr. Wisely’s wife. She ran the library, and she’s in trouble now because she traveled forward in time. We’ve got to help her,” Dwight explained. “Do you want to come with us?”

“Think I’ll stay here. This place is most unusual.”

“Okay,” Dwight said. “Just don’t go anywhere in the Memory Machine. And don’t drop any stones, unless it’s a blue one. Okay? You really should go back to 1924, you know.”

She nodded. “Okay, Underwood.”

Dwight walked to the memory Machine and set the dials. “It might be hard to find her, but if we go back to the night of the fire after you and Luz left, she should be there. You ready, Max? Follow me.”

He stepped inside the machine.

Then Max tapped on the glass tube. He was holding a blue stone.

“Don’t worry,” Dwight said. “I have one. I’m never going to travel without one again.”

Then he pressed the button and disappeared.

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When Dwight and Max landed on the front lawn of the library, Dwight wondered if Miss Moon might be waiting for them on the library steps, but they were empty.

“She’s not here, Max,” Dwight’s voice said. “But I think I know where she might be.”

In a few minutes, they found Miss Moon in the grotto outside the smoldering ruins of the Wisely Mansion. She was sitting upright on the rocky bench, wearing her hat with the veil lifted. Her eyes were open, and her skin was very white.

“Miss Moon?” Dwight’s voice said. “Are you okay?”

Miss Moon blinked slowly.

“My throat...so dry,” her voice crackled.

“Can’t we help you?”

“No,” her voice whispered hoarsely.

“But we brought you a blue stone,” Dwight’s voice told her.

“Too late,” her voice said.

“No, it’s not,” Dwight’s voice argued.

“Take the key,” her voice said.

“What key?” his voice asked.

“Library key,” her voice said. “Beside me.”

He saw a skeleton key next to her on the bench.

“Watch the library,” her voice said.

He picked up the key and put it in his pocket.

“We met your sister,” his voice told her. “She wants help trying to find her children. She—”

Miss Moon blinked.

“Watch my sister,” her voice said, growing hoarser.

She looked at Max. “Take off my hat.”

Max removed her hat and placed it on the rock bench.

“Watch my sister,” her voice whispered again.

Then she closed her eyes.

Dwight and Max looked at each other, unsure what to do.

“Go,” her voice said in the barest whisper.

“We’ll be back tomorrow with Luz,” Dwight’s voice told her. “And Max has a blue stone for you in case you want to come back.”

Her hands were clasped, resting on her knees. Max reached toward them with the blue stone. Miss Moon didn’t move. He tried to place the stone between her fingers, but they would not budge. Max tried again and again. Each time her fingers would not move. Finally, he glanced up at her face and saw that the skin on her face was hard and the look in her eyes was lost.

Max looked at Dwight and shook his head once.

“What do you mean?” Dwight’s voice said. “Give me that stone!”

Dwight took the blue stone and tried to place it in her hands himself until he realized that they had turned to stone.

“She’ll be okay,” Dwight’s voice said, trying to sound brave. “Won’t she? I know she will. I’ll just leave it here.” He balanced the stone on top of her clasped hands. “We’ll be back tomorrow,” his voice told her.

Then he stood up and turned away from Max. “I have to go now. I can’t stay here.”

With that, Dwight dropped his blue stone and disappeared.

Max moved Miss Moon’s hat to the side and sat beside her. He leaned his head against her shoulder and sat perfectly still. Then with no one around and no one to know, he allowed himself to speak.

“Goodbye, Miss Moon,” his voice said. “But not goodbye.”

With his head still resting on her shoulder, he threw his blue stone as far as he could. When it hit, he disappeared and returned to the library basement.

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An hour later, Luz ran through the vacant lot and crossed the street on her way to the Luna Drive Library. Max and Dwight were waiting for her on the front steps.

“I was getting worried,” Dwight told her. “I thought you forgot to come back.”

“My appointment took so long,” she said. “And my mouth’s still numb. But I had to come back. I was thinking about everything the whole time Dr. Chiang was filling my cavity. Where’s your friend, Nilchi?”

“She was gone when we came back,” Dwight said. “I told her to go back to 1924.”

“Did you find Mrs. Norolla?”

“No,” Dwight said.

“Do you really think she put a spell on us?” Luz asked.

“I don’t know,” Dwight said. “We went back to see Miss Moon and she asked us to watch her.”

Suddenly, Max shook his head.

“What?” Dwight asked.

Max continued shaking his head.

“What? Miss Moon didn’t ask us to watch Mrs. Norolla?” Dwight asked.

Max nodded.

“Just a minute. Watch her like she’s worried about *her*?” Luz asked. “Or watch her like she’s worried about *us*?”

Again Max nodded.

“She just said that we should watch her sister,” Dwight told her.

“Another mystery!” Luz exclaimed. “We’re in the middle of another mystery. Right, Max?”

He nodded.

“How is Miss Moon?” Luz asked.

Dwight looked away.

“Is she okay?”

“Not really,” Dwight said.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I mean: not really,” he snapped.

“Dwight!” Luz pleaded. “You’ve got to tell me!”

“She t—” he said, his voice catching. “She turned.”

“Oh, no!” Luz sat on the front steps next to Max. She squeezed her eyes closed, trying to hold back her tears.

“Are you sure, though?” she asked quietly. “Are you—?”

“Yes,” Dwight said. “And she gave us this.” He showed her the key. “It’s for the library door. We’re in charge now.”

They all sat silently for a few minutes. Luz watched a roadrunner scurry across the front yard of the library. She noticed two planes flying low as they approached the airport. She saw cars driving down Luna Drive and a boy riding his bicycle. Time was passing, and the world around her was filled with mysteries: ghosts and missing people and strange stones and magic doors and machines that could change time. Just a few days before, everything had been so ordinary. Now it was all so different, and no one knew except her and Dwight and Max.

“Time’s ticking,” she said finally, “and there are so many things we don’t understand.” She turned to Max. “Are you going to talk now? I went back to New York with you. Doesn’t that change anything?”

She watched Max’s eyes dart back and forth, as if he were searching for something inside his head. Then he reached up and grasped the brim of his baseball cap. He looked up at it and began to tug the brim, as if he were going to cover his eyes again. Instead he pulled his hat off.



“Way to go!” Dwight said.

Max looked down shyly, but he was smiling. He was holding the hat in his hands, unsure of what to do next.

“Don’t put it back on,” Luz said. Then she noticed something inside the hat. “What’s that?” she asked.

Puzzled, Max took the hat from her and reached inside. Then he pulled out a piece of paper.

“What is it?” Dwight asked, straining to see.

“It looks like a note,” Luz said.

Max unfolded it and held it up so that they could read it together:

*Strange things are happening here.
Time has started, and I have to leave.
There may be danger. Just remember
that curiosity killed the cat and the
canary. I will tell you more the next
time I see you.*

Mrs. Norolla

“*Danger?*” Dwight asked.

“No more danger than we’ve already been though,” Luz said.

“But what are we going to do?” Dwight asked.

Luz thought a moment. “We’re going to come back to the library tomorrow by four o’clock, and we’re going to keep working until we know everything. We’re the Mystery Club. That’s what we’re supposed to do. That’s what Miss Moon would want us to do.”

Max nodded in agreement.

“Okay,” Dwight said. “Then maybe we can figure out a way to help Miss Moon. There must be a way to fix things.”

“I know,” Luz said, standing up. “It’s getting late. We should go home.” She glanced down at Dwight’s feet. “What are you going to tell your grandmother when you come home with only one shoe?”

“I don’t know,” Dwight said, as they headed down the front walk, “but I’ll think of something.”

Then Luz saw a red stone on the sidewalk.

“Hey,” she said, “is that one of the red stones from the desk?”

“Looks like it,” Dwight said.

“Well, what’s it doing out here?” Luz asked. “Hey, Wait a minute. Are you sure Nilchi went back to 1924?”

“I figured that she did,” Dwight told her.

“Well, maybe she didn’t.”

“Oh, no! She’s full of tricks!” Then Dwight burst into a big grin. “If that’s right, maybe the Mystery Club has a brand new member!”

“If we can find her,” Luz added.

As they reached the end of the walk, Max and Dwight continued across the street, but Luz turned around and stopped to study the front of the Luna Drive Library. It didn’t seem quite the same without Miss Moon inside, but it was still the strangest and most wonderful place she had ever known. Now it was theirs to care for.

For a moment, Luz thought she saw the silhouette of a person standing behind the window nearest the front door. She blinked and looked again, knowing full well that it must be her imagination. No one could be inside the library, she assured herself. The library was locked, and they had the key. Luz wouldn't mind if the imaginary person was Miss Moon, but she knew that wasn't possible.

Then the strangest thought popped into Luz's mind. *What if there really is a person at that window?* she heard herself think. *Who could it be?* She knew it wouldn't be Mrs. Norolla, who had left, or even Nilchi. She had to be running around Phoenix on September 10, 2003, trying to see what life was like. No, the person would be someone else.

And in the precise passing of a split millisecond, Luz realized who it would be. *What if it's Robert Wisely?* her mind wondered. *What if he's watching us?*

"Hey!" she called to Dwight and Max. They were walking through the vacant lot, far ahead of her. "Wait for me!"

When she caught up to them, she would tell them what she had seen. Then they would talk it over and make plans. Then they would come back tomorrow and work on the mysteries of Luna Drive.