# Prologue

(Nicola)

Everyone tells me I'm lucky, that I'm special; but it's kind of hard to see that from my perspective. I’m not quite sure why they even say it anymore especially after my brother left. Grandpa died lately so at least I've got company, you wouldn't believe how many people turned up to his funeral! He is brilliant my grandpa, he knows how to make you laugh, he knows all the bad jokes off by heart (even a long 10 thousand word one), he seems to know everything and with his charisma it’s not too hard to be friendly towards him. I didn't think he had any enemies! I suppose that's where I was wrong.

The whole thing was a huge cliché. The ceremony was just like in the movies as we stood around his coffin, the rain pouring down through the surrounding murky clouds. We were chameleonic against the scenery in our grey clothing with our black umbrellas. The raging wind was struggling with our umbrellas trying to tear them away from us but we just held on tight. Nobody seemed to care about the weather, we weren’t about to postpone grandpa’s burial unless hell itself opened. Everybody was in tears. Half of the village was at the funeral, to pay their respects to him for one thing or another. Aunt Madge was sobbing on Uncle Logan’s shoulder violently. He was wearing a posh black suit like all the other men and I was surprised to note that he didn’t care that she was covering it in tears, snot and running make up. He cared about that kind of simple formality normally, but his usual expression of distaste as if he’d smelt something rotten was replaced by a heartbreaking look of sadness. I reminded myself that he was human, just because he didn’t show it all the time didn’t mean that underneath his snobbish attitude he had no heart.

As the elegant coffin was dropped down into the hole I realised I was crying. I hadn’t even noticed until I accidentally tasted the saltiness trickling down my cheeks. Smiling weakly I looked up at my mother but she was too busy crying tears of her own to glance at me. My mum got tearful very easily after dad died and I had a nasty feeling this event was going to make things worse. I miss him as much as she does, maybe even more but I am the one who has to be strong. It wasn’t fair. I stopped smiling and decided it was time to leave. Everybody else was heading towards the gates of the graveyard except mum. I chose to “accidentally on purpose” get caught up in the crowd - anything to get away from her. She wasn’t herself when she was like this and in the end her hurt was always taken out on me. Under the gloomy sky I followed my relatives then carefully dropped out of the mob. I veered off to the left and entered a clearing. It was covered in graves as if they were polka dots. The one I stood in front of was my father’s.

He‘d been shot. In the heart. I remember it as if it were yesterday. He’d been walking home from work and fell suddenly blood pouring from his chest. He was so close to home it was cruel. I could see it from the window. Mum was too shocked to react. It took her a few seconds before she half heartedly put her hands over my eyes. But it was too late. I’d seen. The accuracy was what truly frightened me, it was spot on. The dark figure running away in the park by the trees was a professional, it was obvious. I don’t understand who’d ever want to kill my dad.

I remember picking out all the small details that day, hoping for something to come along to prove that he was still alive. Like the weather for instance, it was mockingly sunny. He couldn’t have died on a sunny day, nobody died when the sun was shining! They were stupid excuses but were all I had. For a while I was in denial. At his funeral I’d been hoping, praying desperately that he’d sit up and climb out of his grave. He’d smile and say to me: “It’s okay, I’m fine. The bullet missed.” Then he’d pat his chest. But then I’d look over to grandpa and he’d be crying more than everyone else put together. It was all so unreal. I’d gone over the daydream over and over again in my head but after several weeks I had to cope with the fact that it would never be true. I don’t think mum can face the truth, she’s afraid it will tear her apart. It does of course, but you have to move on. I’ll never forget my father and the pain is still there but it will numb over time.

I was so busy remembering, contemplating that I didn’t hear the stranger step up to me. Everyone else had left a long time ago now. I didn’t know how long I’d been standing there. Then all of a sudden this voice rang out from behind me.

“Who did you lose?” he asked.

I jumped back, startled. I could tell it was meant to be a sympathetic question but in the man’s deep voice it seemed harsher and I felt myself stepping away automatically. Something wasn’t right.

“I’ll tell you mine if you tell me yours.” I replied cautiously glancing at his black umbrella, it was almost identical to mine.

It shadowed his face far too well for comfort.

“Oh nobody yet.” he remarked casually.

That was when he drew out the gun.

That was when I died.

To this very day I don’t like remembering but I have no choice. Everybody tells me up here that I’m lucky, that I’m special more than others; I’m so very...*influential.* It may not seem like much of a gift but it’s important now more than anything else and I’m going to use it.

# Chapter 1:

# “[We all take different paths in life, but no matter where we go, we take a little of each other everywhere.](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/we_all_take_different_paths_in_life-but_no_matter/9467.html)”

It took me a while to get used to all of this, it was a bit of shock, but it helped that I had family who’d already gone onto the other side ready to greet me. It’s all a bit of a blur really but I expected no less. Dad was the first person I saw. He’d been most vivid in my mind when it happened, I never thought I’d live to see the day when – well – I didn’t did I? He stood there smiling, his ghostly silhouette barely standing out against the white clouds that surrounded us. He was nobody yet everything to me.

He and grandpa helped me through my new existence teaching me how to enjoy what privileges I had. The first thing they taught me was swooping. They taught me how to soar above the heads of the living and look down upon their activities and as I became more advanced at this they showed me occasionally how to interfere. They weren’t meant to. They said the Higher Powers didn’t like interference but my dad had always been rebellious and he’d got it from grandpa so sometimes they’d wink at me and show me a few tricks. It was brilliant. I remember those teachings as if it were yesterday.

“That’s enough for today.” Grandpa would say.

“Oh come on dad! Live a little, she doesn’t even know what interference is, how could she cause any harm if we taught her a bit of it?” dad would argue.

Throughout their whole conversation I’d stand there eagerly listening in anticipation. Eventually grandpa would give in and next thing I’d know dad would start telling me what interference was. It certainly wasn’t the wishy washy stick your nose in faff you got in the dimension of the living, here in the spirit realm you got shown the proper stuff.

“Darling interference is when you get too involved. Since you are now dead, fully part of the spirit realm, you are not allowed to do anything in other dimensions. Sure you can visit them and watch them but it is forbidden to change anything. For example: you go to the dimension of the living, you step on a butterfly then the Higher Powers come swooping down on you for changing history.

“Higher Powers? Who are they?” I would ask but I never got an answer to that question.

Dad would always brush it aside or feign deafness.

“Never mind them, the important bit is the history. Think about that butterfly, you don’t know what it could be capable of. It could be a rare species that produces a cure for all known disease; it could be the first butterfly ever discovered by man, that butterfly has a future. It all gets so complicated just with one tiny butterfly; imagine what could happen with a person if you dabbled too much in their life. The Higher Powers will always come and will have to join forces with the Lower Powers to erase your error. It’s not an easy task for them – you have no idea how much they hate their hell controlling cousins. All of a sudden you’re back at the moment where you first got the idea to interfere and the Higher Powers cut in before you can make a difference. Their vengeance is angry and swift. Avoid it at all times. There’s only one exception to the rule: if the interference was meant to be then the Higher Powers don’t try to change it. They can see the future, they don’t particularly want to get in touch with their cousins, why bother? Anyways that’s what interference is and you must always be aware of the consequences.”

After this speech there was a long silence. A grim one filled with remembrance I could tell from the look on grandpa’s face, he hadn’t even been there that long. Then dad would’ve piped up.

“Let’s get started!” he’s smile, then he’d list through the rules of it all. “There are five rules to this, easy to remember and simple. Number one: don’t get caught. Number two: never change too much, interfering is all or nothing so do neither. Number three: always do what we say to avoid violating any of these rules. Number four: CONSTANT VIGILANCE! Number 5: enjoy yourself while you can.”

And then the lesson would begin.

Once I asked more persistently about the Higher Powers, eager for answers and actually managed to get a few for a change but I could tell that dad didn’t like to talk about them. He said they made the rules, so naturally I was unsurprised by his immense dislike of them.

Sometimes I wondered how my brother Chris would react if only he knew what I was up to now. I smiled at the thought of him then moved on. Dwelling on my brother for too long made me feel depressed. He ran away a year ago, we’d searched for him everywhere but had given up. He’d been nowhere to be found. I remember the shock I felt at his sudden abandonment. He’d been 17. He’d been getting more and more surly over the last few years and it had been scaring me. He used to tell me everything, he would always confide in me because he loved me and I loved him. But it had been happening less over the years and then one day he was gone. I remember the anger I felt then – the same anger that consumes me fleetingly nowadays. I think our stay with Aunt Madge and Uncle Logan made matters worse for his attitude. He’d never particularly liked them. They’d been right snobs to him whenever he was around. I don’t even know why they did it. Dad had just told us that everybody got it from them at some point in their lives. He said he’d got it and it had made things a lot worse. His sister was a lot older than him and had grown up faster as a result. She went in and out of puberty very quickly and calmly for the typical teenager, but all the same continued to give her brother the typical teenager treatments when he was nearing the age saying things such as: “It’s probably because he’s a teenager-“ or always jumping to conclusions simply because of his age then rolling her eyes. It was clearly a habit her husband adopted and I could tell it thoroughly irritated Chris. I wished he was here with me in heaven so he too could join the fun lessons of soaring.

My excitement was greatly lowered, however by my grandpa’s strange attitude. One minute he’d be overjoyed and thrilled as if he was having the time of his – err...death (I seriously need to stop using life metaphors!). Then the next day he’d be sullen and worried creeping into the corners of the clouds to hide from me as if afraid I’d ask him questions. I would’ve given anything to know what he was expecting me to ask. I couldn’t pluck up the courage though. The day I stumbled upon his secret was a complete accident.

We were chatting together. Dad was away, grandpa said he had business with the beyond. I barely knew what the Higher Powers were at the time let alone the beyond. I’d expected all my questions to be answered when I died, but everything just grew more confusing. The chat began to turn into an angst teenage rant and by the end of my little speech I was panting. But to my great annoyance grandpa was smiling.

“It’s about time you let that out, I was afraid you were going to explode!”

“W - what!?” I screeched.

“Ah you sounded so much like your father.” he replied infuriatingly. “Why me? It’s not fair! And even you refuse to answer my questions!”

“Where’s this going?” I muttered impatiently.

“We all went through the damn we’re dead rant.” he explained.

“I don’t even know WHO killed me and that murderer could still be out there! I’m stuck here dead whilst he’s hurting more people and you won’t even try to take me seriously!” I yelled. “I don’t even know who the man was!”

That seemed to startle grandpa and suddenly he looked a lot more weary than normal, more fragile. I knew he couldn’t possibly die, not now; I didn’t want him to die again but he did not look well.

“It’s time I told you. If you want to help anyone out there in the real world you need to know what you’re facing.”

I looked at him feeling concerned, completely forgetting about my problems.

“That man...the one with the umbrella, what did he look like?”

“What does that have to do with anything?” I asked.

“Everything.”

“Erm...well he was dark...and...I couldn’t really see. The umbrella shadowed him too well to tell.” I replied awkwardly.

Grandpa sighed at this news.

“You were murdered by Mr Prime. He never misses a clear kill, as I was unfortunate to find out.”

“Mr who now?” I spluttered. “He sounds like someone out of a comic!”

“I know, but he is not to be laughed at. It all began back when I were a lad. I was an orphan and had no home to go to, after my family perished in a fire at their housewarming party. Nobody was left alive except me, I was lucky. Most orphans wouldn’t have been treated too well back then but I got taken in by the church. Now I wish I was one of those other orphans. There I met and befriended another boy who they’d taken in; John Prime. As we grew up we became more important in the Church but there was one particular job they always handed us – exorcism.”

I let out a small squeal of horror.

“Did it work?” I questioned.

“Oh yes. We were both obsessed with the supernatural and when anyone ever complained of a ghost we were the first people they’d call. We did well too and destroyed many innocent ghosts.” He continued bitterly. “But one day something went badly wrong. We were called down to Mr Mullen’s house, he’d been complaining about a poltergeist for several weeks now and we’d decided it was high time we gave him a visit. We got out the equipment we’d invented ourselves and set about the house searching for the interfering spirit. It was not long until we found it and it was not happy. It put up a fight but we were more powerful with our physical bodies and strength. It was too strong for our machine however and it backfired on us. The ghost escaped, the machine was wrecked, broken beyond repair. The indignation and horror on its face was plain to see. I vowed to never work for the church again, the ghost had looked terrified and I pitied it and its fellow kind for what I’d been doing to them. To this day I’m still not sure where the ghost went, there was no possible way for it to leave and go to its afterlife, not after our attempted exorcism. I realised how stupid I’d been getting rid of the innocent souls and decided it was time to leave. John was not too keen on my idea though. As I packed my things my relationship with Prime began to shatter, he refused to leave his only home to which he never been more loyal to and so I left him there. What I didn’t realise at the time was that the backfiring of our machine had another impact, one so great that we never saw it coming – it was only when John turned up several years later with an umbrella and a rifle that I knew something was wrong. He told me, his voice shaking in anger, that I’d been so stupid, I’d left him and destroyed so many innocents, he said I didn’t deserve to live and neither did my family. He promised me he’d pick us all off one by one and I was going to watch. But somehow it didn’t sound like John talking. I know something a lot worse went on that night than I realised, but John was not himself.”

There was a long silence once grandpa finish his story. I could not think of anything to say, I was completely speechless. He looked away from me clearly ashamed.

“I was the reason you died.” he said quietly.

That was when dad got back.

“I’m back!” dad said materialising in front of me happily.

I so want to learn how to do that I thought to myself. But not even his cheerful presence punctured the atmosphere of gloom that hung heavy in the air. Dad looked from me to grandpa noting our expressions and body language.

“Heaven is a haven, we should not argue amongst ourselves.” he then announced sternly.

Grandpa said nothing.

“If this is a haven then why is he here?” I said angrily. Grandpa was refusing to look at me. Sensing the edge in my voice dad looked surprised. I turned to grandpa forcing him to look me in the eyes. “You haven’t told him have you? You haven’t told your own son the TRUTH!” I bellowed in disgust. At that point grandpa de-materialised. I stared at the space where he’d been standing. “Coward!” I whispered.

You know all that rubbish I told you at the start of this about grandpa being awesome? He is horrible my grandpa, he knows how to make you laugh, he knows all the bad jokes off by heart (even a long 10 thousand word one), he seems to know everything and with his charisma it’s not too hard to be friendly towards him. Yet I’ve never hated him more before. Now I know he has enemies, now I know his true nature I take back all of compliments I ever gave him! He’s a selfish idiot and now *I* have to right his wrongs. How dare he! Well I’m not going to run off. It’s about time I did something useful. I promptly dematerialise from the spirit world and dad is left staring into space, utterly confused.

**(Andrew)**

**The words my granddaughter had violently yelled at me had cut me deeper than I could possibly reveal. I couldn’t stay in the same place, the guilt was too great, it was crushing me to a pulp. It had been particularly bad when she said: “If this is a haven then why is he here?” I’ve been asking myself the same questions for the last 2 months. I thought she might understand me, maybe even sympathise with me if I was lucky, but she didn’t even try.**

**It’s time I went to visit the Higher Powers. I needed to make sure they were correct in their placing of me. There was no way I belonged in heaven. I condemned my entire family to a horrible fate, being shot down by a madman. They must have been wrong, I should be amongst the other dark spirits below in hell. As I materialised I called out her name.**

**“Chena!”**

**“No need to shout old man, I’m perfectly capable of hearing your turmoil of thoughts from a far distance as it is.” said a high, calming voice.**

**Along with it a slender woman materialised in the whiteness, almost blending in completely due to her white robes. She was the most beautiful lady I’d ever seen. Her skin was pearl white, her eyes were sky blue and her smile was unforgettable.**

**“Oh you flatter me!” she laughed.**

**Then I remembered how Chena had looked last time I saw her, she had been part of the council of gods. I was expecting to be judged by hounds of hell, like Cerberus and so it had been. She had seemed the most vicious with her sharp teeth and growling.**

**“Last time I saw you –“ I began.**

**“- I wasn’t human. I know. I am whatever you wish to see.” she explained patiently.**

**I smiled, that made sense, if anything I desperately needed to be comforted, she was the spitting image of my wife as a young lady when I first met her.**

**“But that’s not truly what’s on your mind now is it?” she pointed out. “And we all stand by our decision although it was a tricky one. The grief and remorse you are feeling now is proof of why you’re here, you’re human, you regretted it and most importantly you stopped.”**

**“Yes but -“ I continue trying to make her understand my situation.**

**“I need no explanation. Your thoughts were screaming in pain, how could I not hear her words? As for what to do, she will believe and stand by you in time. But for now you ought to be careful, she’s a feisty one. In fact she’s leaving right now.”**

**“What!” I gasped.**

**“You know what. Her thoughts were just as loud and as painful as yours, she’s going to interfere.”**

**“Doesn’t that mean you have to stop her?”**

**“It depends how far she goes, but she will be imprisoned before it makes a difference and you will have to choose your side.”**

**“What will she do!?” I exclaim in panic.**

**“Whatever she feels necessary. There’s only so much I can tell you of the future Andrew, you should know that by now.”**

**“But what does it all mean?”**

**“Only Joseph can tell you that and he’s busy in the beyond. Someday you will visit there too Andrew.”**

**But I already had too much on my mind to worry about Joseph’s information. I have to stop her, I don’t care whether she’ll listen to me or not if she tries to get in the way of Prime she’ll never come out of it. I was as bad as him once, I should know what he’s like. If anything I should be going down there trying to sort things out, trying to interfere, trying to be influential. She shouldn’t have to do all the work but I’m too petrified of what seeing him again could do to me.**

**“You should tell your son and that’s an order! His curiosity is getting thoroughly irritating. It’s giving me a headache.” Chena moaned. “Good luck.”**

**Good luck? For what? I would’ve asked her but she’d already disappeared. I myself dematerialised. I had a lot to think about.**

(Nicola)

Fuming I soared out into the old dimension, the dimension of the living. I don’t think I’d ever been this angry before, my swooping became more daring as I vigorously swerved around the world. The cities and countries below me were multi-coloured blurs as I raced towards my hometown. I couldn’t be bothered to take in the sights, my travel was the only method of venting open to me, and it was like angry speeding except a lot less dangerous. I for one could go through walls unharmed, the drivers wouldn’t be so lucky.

In what seemed like a matter of minutes I was there, back at my old home. That brought back some memories. I think my oldest memory ever was when my parents and some friends were sitting around the dinner table. I was on the floor watching and giggling as they smiled and chortled together over tea. As I grew older the memory became fainter and harder to remember properly. But now I’m dead remembering is easy, it’s as if I’m frozen in time. Everything is still there but much more vivid.

I push away the sentimentality of the place and try to enter it. Floating sideways through the red brick wall I chuckle, the weird sensation tickles. Next thing I know I’m on the other side of the wall and it is like I never died. I walk slowly across the red fluffy carpet longing to feel the fluffiness under my feet. My lack of touch is one of the few things that prove I no longer belong in this world. Sometimes I wish I do, I wish so badly that it hurts, but it’s impossible. Once you use up your life there are no second chances.

I start scouring my old home, searching for mum. I take a good long look at our old grandfather clock. It’s awesomely huge and is in the background of many more of my childhood memories. Well, I suppose all I have is childhood memories, I only died at the age of 13, I didn’t really get a chance to grow up. Not properly. I drag myself away from my past and try to focus on the present. Soon I’ve searched all of the rooms. Mum should be home, she was due back from work ages ago. Panicking I float out into the street circling around keeping a look out for her but I couldn’t see her anywhere, this was not good. Then I remembered something grandpa (the scumbag) had taught me. His words echoed in my head.

*“Concentrate! That’s it. Now this is a very useful technique for finding people, I use it to look upon my loved ones who are no longer with me. Just picture the person you want to find, that’s it. Sit still in the air and imagine their face, their voice, their touch. Do you see them? If you keep that image in your head you should be able to sense them. All it requires is a decent memory. Keep it up, perfect! Now if you do it hard enough you should be able to astral project yourself. Since you’re a ghost you have the power to transport yourself though rather than create a duplicate.”*

So I sat still in deep concentration picturing how her shiny blonde hair catches the light, how the curves ripple like a water fountain, how her eyes are two deep pools of water– I open my eyes. I’m now sitting in mid air in a dark alleyway. For a minute I think this can’t be right, what would my mother be doing down here? Then I hear footsteps behind me. They’re growing faster and faster. I turn and see her frightened, pale face running straight towards me. She can’t see me. But I can see her, and I can see the black shadow approaching behind her. She sprints round the corner. She’s doing better than I ever did, she actually thought to run. It actually looks like she might be getting away! Mr Prime walks forwards and his face is lit up by the dim streetlights as he too comes out of the alleyway. It would seem fairly normal if it wasn’t for the large purple bruise colouring most of his eye and part of his cheek. He was swaying slightly but was still on his feet. I felt immensely proud of mum. There was something inhuman about his eyes, I tried to get a closer look but then he stretched out an arm. Shocked, I jumped back. His fingers grasped the empty air I’d been in only a few seconds previous. He sniffed the air, shrugged, cocked his gun and moved to the corner my mum had been running down ready to follow. I had to do something! That was the whole point of me coming down here in the first place! Looking around I had an idea. There was a box on the opposite side of the alleyway, part of a sale in the shop next to it. It was filled with umbrellas. Dad had taught me that ghosts did still have some presence in the dimension of the living due to their previous attachments before death to it. Sometimes we could even make things move, if we blew hard enough on them. I focussed my mind on all of my previous attachments to this dimension, closed my eyes and pointed my hand at the umbrellas. I opened my eyes just in time to see a blue fire coming out of my hand, I was hurling ectoplasm at it. The box fell over. Mr Prime stopped and then stared at the umbrellas. Then he starting running down the other street. I let out a sigh, she was safe now. She had to be. Now I just have to make sure it stays that way, said a nagging voice inside my head teasingly.

I start soaring down the street sensing mum’s terror. She’s so scared, she doesn’t know whether she’s lost him, or stopped him, or anything. Not knowing is possibly the worse fear I know of. I remember it when I died, I didn’t know anything about the mysterious man other than the fact that I recognised him. At least now she was running home. I followed her with ease, she was slowing down now he was clearly no longer following her, but still had a sense of urgency about her. Eventually I’d come full circle, we were back home. Mum fumbled around with the house keys and I floated through the door, I’d have to find some way to warn her of the danger she was in. We’d moved house since dad’s death so at least Mr Prime didn’t know where we lived but I’m pretty sure he could find out easily enough. But when the door opened I realised my first concern should be how to tell her without without her collapsing, or thinking she was hallucinating. My mum could panic easily and when she was already this jumpy it didn’t take much. She staggered inside gasping. She was shaking as badly as my broken alarm clock, refusing to stop. She promptly closed and locked the door behind her, but I was sure Mr Prime would find other ways of getting to her, he’d had practise and mum had to leave the house at some point to go to work. She lurched towards the sofa and fell back onto it. Picking up the TV remote she pressed the power button, flipping through channels I could tell she wasn’t really listening to it. She just needed the comfort of a familiar sound, something to convince her everything was ok and normal. I’ve never seen her so scared before, apart from that one time, the night when Chris left. The night he disappeared for good. But I have to tell her, I have to tell her now or I may not have another chance. Focussing hard I stare at a pencil.

**(Andrew)**

**George still isn’t talking to me. He reacted similarly to Nicola when I told him, only with less shouting. I don’t blame him, I still haven’t forgiven myself. I only hope that Nicola will be able to survive in another dimension that is no longer her own. Now I say that I realise how stupid it sounds. He’s just as worried about her as I am now; I can see it in his eyes when he lets me look into them. That’s fairly rare as well. As soon as I told him the news about her that Chena had told me his response was the same as mine only stronger. He actually tried to go after her unlike me. I’m just sitting around dawdling feeling extremely guilty trying to pluck up some courage. He still hasn’t come back.**

**BANG!**

**George was back, though not in the fashion I’d expected. He was flanked by five serpents, ready to trip him up or wrap round him if he tried anything. Five of the ten Powers were surrounding him – this was not good. Relhok, Baro, Luca, Chena and Aspe (short for Aspestos although it couldn’t have been any worse a word to describe her) stood proudly. At least they were all Higher Powers in charge of heaven, Lower Powers were bad news and I had to pity them after all they’d gone through with the Maker, especially Relhok yet it held up the best. I never told George or Nicola about the Maker’s story; it was too grim a thing to tell to those two who seemed so innocent. I looked back at George. All the same, what had he done?**

**“LET GO OF ME! I HAVE TO -” he yelled.**

**“You are not going anywhere!” hissed Baro, one of the more powerful serpents in the group.**

**“We know what you’re thinking ssso don’t even try it.” said Luca in a menacing tone.**

**“We’ve told you already, you’re not allowed to leave!” reinforced Relhok.**

**“Erm...excuse me but what is going on?” I questioned politely.**

**I did not want to irritate the Higher Powers when they were in this mood. Still busy restraining George it took them a while to realise I was even there, let alone asked a question. I waited for five minutes until they noticed me. Reading my thoughts one of the more graceful snakes came forward. I could tell from its posture that it was Chena.**

**“He can’t leave. We can’t let you into the other dimensssion. What wasss done wasss done and we have to make sssure that you ssstay out of her way. You’d caussse more damage than help now. Nicola hasss made her decisssion.” she said.**

**Then she leant forward towards me. Puzzled I didn’t think to jump away. I knew the other Higher Powers would be able to know what she was telling me from my thoughts but George wouldn’t. What did she need to tell me? She let out a strange strangled laugh.**

**“You’re clever. But sssoon you will need to make a decisssion of your own. For your sssake I hope you make the right choice. Anywaysss, I mussst go, your ssson isss putting up a good fight.”**

**It was true, he was struggling as much as he could almost throwing off his captors.**

**“Damn thessse ssslippery formsss!” I could’ve sworn I heard one of the serpents say.**

**Chena slithered over to her companions.**

**“Hold him ssstill!" commanded Chena in an irritated voice. “Oh never mind.”**

**Then she darted into the mess. I couldn’t tell what she did but I heard a small yelp from George. I didn’t bother to ask what they’d done to him. They were the Higher Powers they weren’t allowed to hurt anyone under their control. Next thing I knew the serpents slithered back and were now in the forms of people once more. But a person was how I imagined them instead of George. Now I was concerned. What had they done to him?**

**“He’s just subdued, with a mild bite. The venom finally shut him up.” snarled Baro triumphantly.**

**“Thank you for visualising us as people of your kind.” said Luca gratefully. “You wouldn’t believe how much easier it is to do things in this form!”**

**The fifth and final Power still said nothing. She seemed to only be there for the muscle of the group. As if sensing my worry Relhok spoke.**

**“He’ll be fine, the venom just prevents him from waking until necessary.”**

**Then they dematerialised as a group. I ran over to George. Great. Now I was stuck with myself and my confusing thoughts for god knows how long!**

(Nicola)

You’re in serious danger says the writing on the wall. I grimace at my mum’s expression. She’s obviously thinking this can’t be happening. I’m the only person who can help you. Please trust me. Please don’t be scared. You know who I am. Mr Prime killed me and dad, please don’t let him get you too. I can help. You just need to concentrate. Think of your daughter Nicola Coyle. Think of her with all your might and then turn around. Please, I can help. I promise I won’t hurt you. Mum’s look of horror slowly turns into remembrance. Her eyes cloud over as she pictures me and then she turns. She sees me. For a tiny second she sees me. Then as her eyes widen in shock she falls backwards onto the floor with a little sigh. I sigh myself. I suppose I should’ve predicted this, she’s been attacked by a crazy guy and then she sees her dead daughter, it’s not exactly normal is it? Last time she fainted it took her a long time to come round again. She didn’t do it often, only when she was truly petrified. She did it the night we realised he was gone. I wonder whether I should wait and try again or search for someone who might not collapse in my family. I hear a knock on the door. Flying out of the wall I gasp. My brother is standing outside the door.

“Chris?” I whisper.

I remember the anger I felt then - the anger I feel now, he didn’t even warn me that he was leaving.

“CHRIS!” I yelled.

I wished he could see me, I wished he could look at me. Why is he coming back home now? He isn’t wanted here. Not any more. But I know inside that’s not true. I’m just angry. We all missed him so much. But I’ll never admit that to him. Then a puzzled look appeared on his face. I looked behind me. Nobody was there; it was almost as if he heard me. But that was impossible, there was only one way you could see a ghost and that was if you were thinking about it. Thinking about it so hard it’s almost painful. I stare at him. He knocks on the door again. I try to grab his attention by waving my transparent hand in his face. In my dimension we’re solid, but here since we don’t belong we have only a half-existence. He jumps. Then turns slowly to his left. He can see me! He can see me! I feel all my pent up rage washing away as I begin to yell.

“HOW DARE YOU! HOW DARE YOU COME BACK HERE! NOW YOU’LL BE EVEN MORE OF A TARGET AND IT’S ALL YOUR FAULT! ” I screamed.

Tears were pouring down my face.

“You didn’t even tell me you were leaving.” I muttered. “You didn’t tell me a single thing! Do you know what it’s like being alone? Do you know what it’s like when all you have left is mum? DO YOU KNOW HOW THAT FEELS? I missed you, I missed you so badly it hurt. Every time I thought of you it hurt. Please tell me you’re coming home. Please tell me you can see me.”

He was now slowly backing away. My yelling was obviously scaring him.

“Can you even hear me?” I sobbed miserably.

“I – I can hear you.” He said as he needed some convincing himself that I was even there.

I look up. He can hear me.

“You don’t know what it’s like being forgotten. First mum and then you. You were never there. Why did you leave?”

“I needed time to think.” he said soothingly, approaching me cautiously.

“Oh don’t worry I can’t hurt you.” I say bitterly. “This is a half existence. It’s pretty pathetic really.”

“Why are you here?” asked Chris.

“To save my family. Why are you here?”

“To salvage mine.” he replied.

“Where were you? All that time? As if our family hadn’t already suffered enough losses.”

“I got a job. Saved up enough to get an apartment in a flat what with the amount of my money I had beforehand. I was stupid, I was tired of being treated like I was a child, you know I always argued with dad. I argued about silly little things most of the time, but my hatred grew. It tore mum apart but I was getting tired of everything, getting tired of home.”

“You got tired of me.” I said.

It was a question not a statement. Chris looked away. I’ll take that as a yes. I was the only person who was willing to listen to him, and he wouldn’t even talk to me.

“Did you even realise that dad died? That I died? That grandpa died?”

“Of course I did.” he snapped. “I kept tabs on things; I had friends willing to poke around for information. I wasn’t completely out of touch, when I wasn’t invited to the funerals I snuck in instead. How come I can see you?”

“How come you were thinking about me?” I returned.

He looked surprised. He hadn’t been expecting me to say that.

“Can you read minds or something?” he asked.

My face remained blank and stern as I waited for his answer.

“I – I visited your grave today. I was...erm...wondering how if you’d lived and I’d never left, maybe it’d be different. Maybe I’d have been able to help you, protect you.”

My expression softened at this news.

“You’re the one who needs protecting at the moment.” I informed him briskly.

“Well in that case can you get me inside?” he questioned.

Flying through the wall I barely needed to focus as I aimed my hand at the lock. I was in my home and Chris was with me, I couldn’t imagine anything more to do with this dimension. As the door swung open he walked inside.

“Where’s mum?” he asked.

“Oh she’s by the sofa, probably still unconscious.” I said casually.

“Unconscious!?” he exclaimed in a panicked voice.

“I tried to warn her that her life was in serious danger and she freaked out. She’s good at freaking out. It probably didn’t help that she couldn’t tell who was writing the message...” I trailed off anxiously.

He ran over to the side of the sofa and started stroking her hair. As he did so she opened her eyes.

“First Nicola and then you Chris. Maybe I really am seeing ghosts. Maybe I’ve finally lost it. It’s not been easy you know.” she murmured faintly.

“I think she’s going to be alright.” grinned Chris. “Come on mum, up you get this is no dream.”

As he helped her to her feet he gave her a big hug. I had a sudden desire to do the same thing, I wanted to be able to feel he warmth and comfort my mum could give me. I felt homesick.

“Erm...Nicky you’re glowing.” he whispered at me looking nervous.

“What!?” I said as I looked down at myself.

Chris was right. I was glowing. My ectoplasm was sparkling in the dim light. For a second I saw a glimpse of recognition in my mother’s eyes. It was getting brighter and brighter. Soon Chris was shielding his eyes.

“Nicky?” she called out. “Is that you?”

I began to nod frantically. I felt so desperate, so desperate to be loved again desperate to be wanted and alive but a loud ring on the doorbell interrupted my thoughts.

“I’ll get it.” said Chris moving towards the door.

“No. What if it’s him? I don’t want to lose you again.” I warned.

Suddenly I was spiralling down. I was deflating, my glow was gone in an instant. It couldn’t be him, I’d lost him, what if though, what if? He could send us all back to the spirit realm. That’s when it hit me.

The spirit realm.

That’s where I belong.

I don’t get any choice in it or any say in the matter.

The spirit realm is my home.

Whether I like it or not.

The idea, the hypothesis is crushing me, because I know that it’s true. I can never be flesh and blood, never again and the depression has never hit me this hard before. I’m doomed for eternity, I can never be with my relatives alive and happy. Never again. My alienation has never felt so harsh before.

“Nicola?” said a confused voice.

That brought me back down to earth. I went to check who was at the door and let out a sigh of relief as I found myself staring down upon a postman holding a large parcel. I hovered back through the wall and told them. In the time I’d been outside Chris must’ve explained a lot because mum no longer jumped when she saw me. Either that or she couldn’t see me.

Mum cautiously crept towards the door and opened it. Even when she saw the postman she did not relax. In fact she stiffened. Unfortunately we all knew her paranoia was within good reason, for all we knew a bomb could be inside the package. That gave me an idea. Scrunching up my form like a piece of rubbish I zoomed, rather wobbly as it was much harder to see this way, into the box.

It didn’t consist of anything harmful, not that I could see at least. In fact it appeared to be a set of clothes. As I glided out I flattened my form back into its normal shape. This time I felt a lot more comfortable and aerodynamic even if, as far as the air was concerned, I didn’t exist. I nodded at mum saying: “It’s just a set of clothes.”

Whether she heard me or not she accepted the package with a frosty glare aimed in the innocent postman’s direction. Slamming the door in the baffled man’s face she ran back over to Chris.

“Nicola says it’s okay. Now young lady explain yourself. I have a feeling you have a lot to tell us.” she said forcefully.

I wondered what had happened to the “oh so innocent” mum I’d known who’d fainted only several minutes before. Now she seemed like a war veteran toughened and ready for whatever life threw at her next. She wanted to charge. I guess she was tired of being the damsel in distress.

“I’m probably not allowed to tell you too much about the afterlife, it’s an adventure you have to make on your own.” I guessed.

As I said the words I knew they were true, if I told them too much I could be apprehended by the Higher Powers for severe interference. That was the last thing I wanted, especially since I’d worked so hard to get where I was now. Then again – where were they? I learnt a lot during my time with dead relatives, they should’ve showed up ages ago to stop me from all of this. Unless - unless it was meant to be? Fuelled by the confidence from this assumption I continued to explain my story. Whilst I was telling it, against my will I wondered what grandpa was thinking and doing right now.

**(Andrew)**

**I don’t believe this. How dare she refuse me! I should probably explain myself formally but I don’t have time for formalities, not in my anger. She can read my mind anyways what does she care about a polite explanation?**

**I want my son back.**

**And I want him now.**

**In my frustration at Aspe I watch her changing form as I begin to picture her as a more vicious creature; a human isn’t capable of this sort of torture.**

**“I think you’d be surprised.” she smiled now cloaked in the form of the grim reaper.**

**Somewhere in my subconscious I noted how she fit disturbingly well into the sleek black robes, how she almost looked seductive holding a Scythe and how the complexion of her skin did not change as turned to bone. Then again, I’d always imagined her as something more dangerous than the others, even proud Baro. Aspestos had always scared me a bit, even if her name was laughable.**

**“Just bring him back!”**

**“But he’s gone nowhere.” she chuckled although I probably should’ve described it as more of a cackle; she’s not capable of such things.**

**“You know exactly what I mean!” I yelled.**

**Wincing, I remembered the purple swellings on his –**

**“He brought it upon himself, he was one who pictured us with that venom in the first place!”**

**Never intentionally I thought to myself.**

**“Either way he should’ve thought about the side effect our powers give our forms. He knows of them does he not?” she asked, it was clearly a rhetorical question but this time there was an edge to her voice, that was the most she’d said to me in our entire chat.**

**Aspe was always the quiet one out of the five, I’ve should’ve expected an outburst this.**

**“One more metaphor about me being evil and you will see how truly bad I can be.” she threatened, her tone suddenly changing to an ominous – no.**

**“That’s better. Now shall we continue and act like good spirits?”**

**She sounded like she was talking to a child.**

**“That’s because I feel I am.” she replied to my unsaid enquiry.**

**Rather unwillingly I forced myself to behave.**

**“Glad to hear it!” she exclaimed her voice suddenly sunny again as if her tone had never changed. “Now before we discuss your son can you please get rid of this stupid hood? No matter how – what’s the word – seductive you think I look in this I beg to differ.”**

**Hearing my reluctant thoughts beginning to turn into attack plans she thought better of her request, grumpily she put up with it. I knew she could fend me off easily, but she couldn’t be bothered to put in the effort.**

**“Fine. The antidote is rather unusual I must say,” she continued then raised her eyebrow at my current thoughts: you know there’s an antidote? Why didn’t you tell me in the first place!? “Honestly Andy!” she giggled.**

**I wish she wouldn’t call me that. My name’s An-drew, get it? An-drew.**

**“Did you really expect any more of me?”**

**Slowly I thought the question over. She was right – I didn’t. She liked to play with her food before she ate it. Only the thought that the grim reaper form annoyed her stopped me from imagining her as a cat. Despite my insults to her she still seemed to be beaming from ear to ear. What will it take to shut that smile off? A gigantic power switch?**

**“Oh I doubt it. Anyways if you want to get your hands on that cure then you have to ensure that we won’t need to subdue him.” she said sounding a tiny bit more serious, almost as if she was hinting at something.**

**Aspe was NEVER serious. Not any of the times I met her at least.**

**“If you want to get the antidote you have to have to start growing up.”**

**“It’s kind of hard if you’re dead. What do you want me to do, grow a weed on my grave?” I asked coldly.**

**An irritated look flitted across her face as if to say: if it shuts you up then yes, but was gone as soon as it came.**

**“The time is approaching. I must say I will miss taunting you. We’re done here.” she said in a contemplating voice.**

**Then she turned and dematerialised on the spot. I should’ve never gone to her. Now I just had more to think and worry about. The Higher Powers as usual are being frustratingly cryptic.**

# Chapter 2:

# “The future influences the present just as much as the past.”

(Nicola)

By the time I’d finished I was no longer thinking of grandpa, I was busier worrying about the left over members of my family who I actually cared about and their safety. Mum’s reactions were those of a perfect audience except in this case it only had one member. She gasped, laughed and groaned just at the right time in my story. I was surprised as its length; I had not expected to be ranting on for so long but there were so many small details I’d overlooked; what if they were the key to protecting everyone I loved? Feeling ashamed that I hadn’t paid more attention to my life I almost forgot about Chris. He sat in his own little corner of the room where the unused lamp overlooking him conveniently shadowed his face. I couldn’t see his expression but when he stood I don’t think it would’ve made a difference even if I could’ve seen his face because his expression was as blank as a newly painted wall. He still hadn’t told me what he’d been doing when he was away. I had a feeling there was a whole new side to him that I hadn’t even begun to explore. Moving does that to people, especially if they moved like my brother did. However I was dragged out of my trail of thought by Chris finally saying something, after a bit of pacing of course. A quiet atmosphere always unnerved me, for poor Chris it seemed to be a lot worse.

“We need to do something. We need to warn the others.” he said.

“Well duh!” I replied rolling my eyes.

“We should go to Madge and Loghan first, I reckon they’ll take the longest to convince, might as well get the hard jobs done and out of the way first.” said mum logically.

“Good thinking, where do they live now? Last time I was here they were in the process of moving house.” I enquired.

“Hah! Moving? If you can call it that, they didn’t really move that far.” muttered Chris angrily.

It was always a bad idea to mention our uncle and aunt when around Chris, he got touchy about anything when it came to them. Let’s just say he wasn’t their favourite cousin. But we had no time to be tactful. I avoided his eyes guiltily.

“They still live in London honey.” said mum loudly over more of Chris’s murmurs.

“Idiots! Do they want to be stabbed? –“ he continued.

“AND they now live at number 30.” Mum raised her voice once again trying to cover up Chris’ incessant comments which were growing louder and beginning to match her own dynamics.

“But that’s - ?” I begin but I don’t need to finish my sentence, Chris’ rant carries it on.

“ – only a few houses away from where they used to live. I know, stupid isn’t it?”

“That’s enough Chris. We all know you don’t like those two.” scalded mum with a pained expression on her face.

Chris’ face looked stormy. He opened his mouth but I cut in quickly before he could retaliate.

“Well we can get there fairly fast all the same,”

“-stupid, foul, discriminate –“

“we just need to catch a late train. It’s probably safer from Prime if we’re travelling anyways.” I added trying to get a word in sideways.

“-rotten, evil, abusive –“

“CHRISTOPHER EVANS COYLE! IF YOU DO NOT QUIETEN DOWN I WILL – “

It was clear that mum had finally lost it.

“You’ll what? Kill me? Hit the roof? We both know that I’m just going to come back like Nicola here so go ahead. What’s the point?” he said sounding almost bored instead of slightly suicidal.

His new tone of voice startled me and mum was speechless. I couldn’t tell whether it was out of shock or rage.

“Stop that.” I said quietly. “You don’t want to be in my position. You don’t know what it’s like, not being allowed to interfere unless it’s ‘meant to be’ what does that mean anyways? The only proper time I’ll have with you lot is in heaven. After this I don’t even know if I’ll belong up there anymore. I’ve done some serious interfering. Now come on, we’re going to London.”

They’re both staring at me now. Chris is just gawping, mum has pity showing in her eyes. But they’re not disagreeing.

I don’t like Chris’ new attitude. So far it’s just been nightmarish. He’s even more of a teenager than he was before. When I was talking to him on the doorstep was when he seemed the most himself and that seems like an age ago. I think about his future. Will he ever change back to the boy I used to know? He’s been missing for a year; a lot can change during that time. A lot *has* changed. I remember that saying, something about the future being more important than the past but none of us know where our future lies so how’s that any help? He’s barely said anything since we got in the car and set off for London. I have a nasty feeling he’s having a huge sulk. Taking the car was much easier than going by train, we could talk without being overheard but now I regret it. It means we are all bundled into the car in an awkward silence, there’s nothing left to say. I don’t have to stay inside the car, but I feel it’d be rude to fly outside it.

**(Andrew)**

**I’m onto Baro now. Frantically trying to persuade him to listen to me rather than laugh at my attempts to make him do so. Luca was not much better but at least he listened to me a bit before he got bored. Now Baro was clearly bored and was not bothering to have the decency to even pretend to listen to my worries. He let out a huge fake yawn his mouth stretching open so wide I wondered whether he even had a jaw bone. I tried to imagine him with one and the resulting painful crack proved that my imagination was up to scratch even if my persuasive skills weren’t.**

**“Are you even trying to listen?” I asked giving up.**

**“Not particularly. Why should I need you to tell me what the problem is when I can hear it all in your head?” he replied airily.**

**“Well then will you help me?”**

**“Maybe, maybe not.” he commented casually.**

**You call that an answer? That’s not good enough. I need a definite one and I need it now! I thought violently in his direction. All he did was chuckle at this. Then I remembered one thing that frustrated the Higher Powers more than ever, being in bad form. I scrunched up my face in concentration.**

**“No -“ he yelled sensing what I was about to do but his voice broke mid-sentence.**

**I was staring down on a tiny mouse. It would be easy enough to step on it and I was quite tempted for a few seconds but then I remembered he’d still have his Powers despite his size. A high pitched, squeaky voice shrieked from below: “Fine! I’ll see what I can do to get your precious antidote!”**

**Blackmail is so brilliant. I don’t think I’ve ever felt more satisfied in my entire...erm...death?**

**I dematerialise to my son’s side. He does not look good. He’s pale, too pale. He’s translucent which is never a good sign no matter what dimension or realm you live in, there are also various other disgusting symptoms that linger from the snake bite. I grimace at his condition.**

**“I’m going to get that antidote, I promise.”**

(Nicola)

Mum turned on the radio but she soon discovered that nothing interesting was on as she flipped through the different channels. Finally she settled for radio four giving up on finding something even vaguely interesting. Personally I’ve never understood why people like that channel, it bores me to death. Adults seem to like it but I hate it and last time I checked so did Chris but he’s still remaining quiet. The newsreader’s voice cuts through the quiet atmosphere in a shrill, thoroughly annoying pitch.

“Seven houses in a row were found empty in London today, their usual occupants all ‘ill’ according to their jobs but now they’ve disappeared without a trace. The police have found no bodies yet but they suspect foul play. Now we’re going to go to Sheila live on the scene.”

“Switch channels mum.” I said having no desire to listen to it any longer.

“Fine.” she grumbled and turned the knob.

A strange buzz came on.

“What’s this?” asked Chris in disgust. “Change channel.”

Mum turned the knob but the sound didn’t change. I caught a glimpse of her reflection in the rear view mirror. Her eyes were wide, she was scared and I didn’t blame her, radio two was not made up of static. It goes without saying it was not normal radio station behaviour.

“Hello?” called out a voice.

I recognised it instantly.

“Mum pull over.” I said.

“What?”

Chris realised what was going on.

“Mum pull over!” we chorused.

“Alright alright!” she exclaimed.

“Hello is anyone there?” said the voice.

Chris began to shout. He couldn’t stop himself. He wanted it all to be true, I knew he’d been imagining like I had, maybe he wasn’t dead maybe the bullet missed. He must’ve felt even worse considering the last thing he’d ever done with dad had been argue and then abandon him.

“DAD! We’re here we’re here!” he yelled.

“Chris? Chris! It’s so good to hear your voice.” said the radio. “Are you with Nicola and Maria?”

“Yeah, Nicky and mum are here.” he replied excitedly. “They’re just a bit speechless at the moment. Mum? Oh she’s out cold. Nicky’s fine though.”

“I should think so too!”replied dad.

“Too many: ‘people who are alive who shouldn’t be’ for a day experiences for mum’s system I think. Either that or she’s just tired, it is getting quite late.” Chris summed up cheerfully.

I did not like the way he phrased that. But I pushed it aside for the moment.

“Dad what’s going on? Are you okay? Why are you on the radio?”

“The Higher Powers subdued me.” he explained bitterly. “One of them bit me. Chena had particularly powerful venom unfortunately for me. I’ll be fine, but for now my inner self is wandering around. Thought I might come down here for a chat, they can only detect spirits, not souls. So I guess I got what I wanted anyways.”

“YOUR SOUL IS ON THE LOOSE!?” I shrieked.

“Calm down darling. I’m fine. Your grandpa’s trying to get the antidote for me. He told me the full story about his past and how it affected you and everyone else he’d ever loved. I don’t think I’ll ever forgive him. I tried to come after you. But apparently this is your fight, not mine. I have to go, I think he may have got the antidote –I love you all.” he said.

His voice faded into a crackle, then into a buzz, then into the music of radio two. Chris looked completely crushed that dad was gone but so happy that he was there. I remembered what he’d said.

“Chris? Look at me.”

He turned his piercing blue eyes in my direction.

“Look me in the eyes and listen ok? You said: ‘Too many: ‘people who are alive who shouldn’t be for a day’ experiences’. That’s not true. We’re not alive. We’re dead. Seeing and interacting with us makes us alive to you, that’s not right. We’re not alive. We never will be alive. You have to move on from us.”

“Nicky don’t be stupid you’re here talking to me now you must be alive in some sense–“

“Don’t you get it? I’m dead, the only reason I’m here is to help you out! All this time you’ve been in denial?”

“YOU’RE NOT DEAD. NONE OF YOU ARE.” Chris screamed.

“Then touch me. Prove it.”

Chris reached out, but his hand did not connect with anything. His hand went straight through my stomach. It made me want to throw up but I held everything back, it was not like I had anything to produce other than my stomach if I did puke. Finally he started to cry. He started to let it all out. I was so glad, he was back to normal. He’d been bottling it all up, it hadn’t been good for him. Chris was finally Chris once more.

“I really missed you.” I whispered fondly.

When mum came to we were back on the road again and this time she turned the radio off. I was not surprised. The drive continued in an awkward silence. I wondered when we were going to arrive at their house, we were in London now and the traffic was horrendous as usual. It was beginning to get dark outside. We forced mum to turn the radio on to improve our route but it was making rubbish suggestions on which roads to drive on that were clear, we found ourselves disproving their theories more and more frequently as we turned onto a road of worsened traffic. We were moving so slowly I was surprised mum didn’t fall asleep at the wheel. It seemed much longer than a few hours of a journey by the time we parked.

**(Andrew)**

**“You know what I’m going to say Andrew so why have you called for me?” snapped Chena.**

**Because you and the others are the only people (and I use the term loosely) who know the answers. Plus you’re the only one who listens to me. Not to mention your powers, what could possibly stop you from helping me? I thought as quietly as possible, maybe she wouldn’t hear me. I wanted to be able to express my thoughts in more of a polite manner than that. Then she began talking again before I could even reply. Too late.**

**“Oh that’s hardly an excuse, just because we’re all high and mighty doesn’t mean we haven’t got problems of our own at the moment.”**

**Problems?**

**“That’s none of your business anyways old man so stay out of it.”**

**Chena was normally the calm one out of the five, despite being possibly the most dangerous if provoked, so I was reasonably surprised. I’d been expecting a civilised conversation instead of a threatening one sided rant. Whatever their problem was it must’ve been fairly big to get her going. Irritation flickered across her face as if my curious thoughts were like tentacles stretching out towards her and poking her face. She moved her arm in a whip like movement. If I’d blinked I would’ve missed it. Chena seemed to be holding on delicately to thin air, with her pinky raised and muscles tense as if she was putting a lot of effort into whatever she was doing. I wish I knew – then she pulled her arm back in one swift jump. It was not a human action. It was too bizarre for that. What – her arm jerked back again. I wish I knew – and again. Now I could tell what she was doing.**

**“Yes, your theory was almost correct. It was pretty close to the truth actually but remember I am a Higher Power. I have the strength to stop you thinking if I deem it necessary.” she panted. “Is it necessary?”**

**I tried to think wildly of an answer but suddenly my mind went blank. Everything seemed to disappear from my head as if my brain had been thrown away. What’s a brain? I wonder casually. As a matter of fact what’s going on? This isn’t right, I’m sure it isn’t. But what is right and wrong? This place is so funny, it’s all so fluffy and white, it’s like a dog! Or do I mean sheep? Where am I? Inside a sheep? So many questions...something tells me that’s not...what’s the word? It’s so dark in here. I have a feeling there’s not meant to circle of blackness in my vision, I wonder how I get rid of it. Speaking of me, who am I?**

**Who am I?**

**Am I?**

**I?**

* **Then she let go and all my memories, thoughts and things I ever was came flooding back into my head.**

**I opened my mouth and gasped. Now I could remember how to breathe.**

**“You are nothing without your sanity. You are lucky I saw fit to not let you get to the question mark alone, that’s where most people get permanent brain damage. Do not irritate me again or you may find that you might lose it. I will not be so merciful next time.”**

**So she turned and de-materialised and I could do nothing but gape. Standing on the edge of the spirit realm I looked out into the Beyond gobsmacked. The Higher Powers always preferred to stay either in the Beyond or the edges of the spirit realm but I felt like I belonged nowhere I knew I couldn’t cross into the Beyond not unless I was worthy and that time certainly hadn’t come yet; Chena had turned me down without even stopping to listen.**

(Nicola)

We parked just outside their house, near their busy driveway. Their house was a grand one at that; it was large and beautiful with roses and various other flowers creeping up the walls sneakily forming a collection of what seemed like rainbow wall paint. The windows seemed old fashioned as they were oval shaped like those of a church but they really matched the decorative flint walls. It was not hard to see why they had moved although Chris pretended otherwise. However the driveway was unusually busy. It was filled with not only their car but several others that were surrounding it. Police cars, the blue lights flashing and illuminating the garden. The whole area seemed to be cordoned off. Ignoring this, we walked up to the porch and knocked on the door using the posh brass doorknocker. Almost instantly a policeman opened it his uniform looking slightly ruffled to match his indignant expression.

“I’m sorry madam we’re conducting an interview here and we really can’t afford any –“

“An interview? About what?” Chris interrupted.

“That’s none of your business kid.” the cop replied.

“We’re family we want to know what’s going on.” he continued.

“Oh is that so?” said the policeman sceptically.

“Yes that is so. Where’s Madge?” cut in mum ferociously an angry look blazing on her face that clearly said: you do not question my son.

Before the startled man could answer she stormed inside. Me and Chris followed her cautiously.

“Madge! Are you there? It’s Maria! Christopher is here too, whatever’s happened we’re here to help.” she called out.

A door opened and Aunt Madge came running towards us.

“It’s you? You couldn’t have come at a better time!” she said in relief.

Her forehead was creased with worry instead of the usual frown.

“Tell me what’s going on.” Mum commanded soothingly.

“It’s probably best if Logan tells you. He’s in a better state than I am.” she said.

“She doesn’t look too distraught to me.” I whispered to Chris.

He smiled but that smile promptly disappeared when Madge burst into tears. The water came flooding down her cheeks in torrents; she had clearly been holding it in for a while now. Mum hugged Aunt Madge, gave her a tissue and let her lead the way to the living room. Logan was clearly a lot less upset than his wife as he stood up to greet us. In fact he looked quite angry. The room was covered in policeman, half of them were looking around the room carefully examining it and the other half of the uniformed men were closely observing our exchange. We sat down on a sofa precariously balanced on the edge of it. There was a severe lack of space in the room; that much was obvious but I didn’t have to worry about that. I was too busy wondering what was going on with my Aunt and Uncle. Something was clearly wrong.

“Tell them what’s going on honey.” sobbed Madge.

“Very well. I see you’ve grown up enough to go home lad.” he sighed aiming a stern look at Chris as if daring him to try anything.

Noticing the blazing fire in his eyes I put my translucent hand on his shoulder in an attempt to restrain him if he did lose control.

“You’ve probably heard on the news about those houses that were suddenly empty? Seven of them in a row, their occupants missing.”

Chris and me looked blankly at each other but mum nodded.

“Yes, when we were listening to the radio.” she said in contemplation quickly ending the sentence when she remembered what had happened soon afterwards.

Now I thought about it properly I remembered it too.

“Before we moved we used to live next to the start of that row of houses. The police here -“ he said angrily jabbing his finger in their direction. “- believe we may have had something to do with the disappearances.”

“We had n-nothing to do with anything of that ilk!” moaned Aunt Madge still crying. “That was the main reason why we moved away! Strange things were going on down there and we didn’t f-feel safe.”

“Strange things? What strange things?” asked Chris.

Uncle Logan looked down at him as if just noticing a pesky fly.

“When I said I’d tell you what was going on I wasn’t talking about *you* I was talking about your mother. I’m not trusting a runaway teenager like you to not spread the word of our situation, knowing you you’d always twist the truth to the point of breaking. You don’t have the responsibility for anything at the moment not until you’re out of those teenage years.” he said snootily.

I could practically see steam coming out of Chris’ ears. His face was certainly red enough for his brain to be frying that was one thing I knew for sure. My hand tightened like a clamp on his shoulder but to my great surprise it wasn’t him who seemed to lose it. Mum stood up.

“How dare you talk to my son like that! He may have left me but he’s come back and has proved himself worthy enough to be trusted I think.”

“Maria, if you want to hear what I have to say about our situation I suggest you make that boy go outside this room.” he replied sounding almost amused.

“Gladly.” Chris said storming out.

I followed him floating through the door as he slammed it behind himself.

“I’m going to keep an ear out for what they’re saying and report back to you okay?” I explained cautiously afraid of how Chris was going to react.

“Have fun.” he replied bitterly.

I stuck my head out through the door and watched my relatives talking.

“There was nothing wrong with the neighbourhood, in fact it was the friendliest one we’d ever visited but there were loud noises at night and when you went to seek them out you didn’t come back. Or if you did you came back as a gibbering wreck. Poor Adrian took a long time to recover. It’s only recently these problems sprang up, it was fine before but after a while we felt like we were being watched. As if our neighbourhood was being watched. But whenever we turned around there was nothing there. Occasionally we’d catch glimpses of perhaps a shadow or a sinister figure but whoever it was, was too good at their job to be caught at it. We worried, so we left.”

“A sinister figure?” mum asked. “Did he have an umbrella with him?”

Mum was thinking along the same lines I was.

“I don’t really know; it was impossible to tell. Whenever we turned whatever was stalking us was gone. What makes you think it was a man with an umbrella anyways? It’s a rather ridiculous thought.” he laughed pompously and a few of the surrounding policeman laughed with him.

However the constable didn’t, he looked extremely suspicious instead.

“So what does make you think it was a man with an umbrella?” he asked getting to his feet.

Mum took a deep breath and winced, I could tell what was coming. She didn’t like talking about people, especially family members who’d passed on.

“My husband, daughter and father in law were murdered by a man with an umbrella and a rifle. I was just wondering whether there was any connection.”

“Interesting.” said the constable and he sat back down murmuring instructions to a few detectives on his right most likely asking them to check up on mum’s story and see how reliable it was. “Well men, I think our work here is done, we don’t really have anything to question. Come along.”

Aunt Madge let out a sigh of relief and so did her husband in perfect unison. They didn’t like crowds of nosey people, particularly in their own house.

“The boy can come in now. Although I’d much rather he didn’t.” Logan commanded.

I turned to look down on Chris, ready to fill him in but it didn’t look like he needed it. His ear had been pressed to the door through the whole conversation and his eye had peering through the keyhole. It did not look like a comfortable position, but it had its uses. We made brief eye contact and I could tell that my assumption had been correct.

“Chris!” mum called. “I know you can hear me. Most likely you heard everything!”

There was now a grin on his face. He knew mum didn’t care that he’d spent most of his time eavesdropping, however he knew our Uncle and Aunt would and neither of could wait to see their expressions. I couldn’t wait because I didn’t have to, the look of horror on their faces were priceless. Mum glanced at them and tutted.

“Well what do you expect?” she asked them as Chris opened the door. “Anyways, back to business. We came here for a reason. Now I want you two to promise me to hear us out okay?”

Aunt Madge nodded immediately, she was not as thoroughly rotten as her husband. But Logan took a bit longer to agree. Although he hated to admit he could be anything so frustrating as curious he was whether he liked it or not.

“First of all picture Nicola. Imagine her as well as you can.”

Uncle Logan looked like he was about to ask something and then thought better of it.

“Great! Now turn to your left.” Chris continued.

Aunt Madge let out a high pitched shriek and Uncle Logan started to yell in shock.

“Oh darling you look even more solid than usual!” exclaimed mum in delight.

I could tell that she too was enjoying their distress.

“What is this trickery?” roared Uncle Logan. “This cannot be real she is dead! You are all insane!”

“Oi! I’m real whether you’re willing to believe it or not.” I said indignantly.

“Come on Madge, we’re leaving. There’s nothing but weirdness on this street and in this house.”

“But we only just moved here!” said Madge shouting too. “Besides, this is only half of their story. They wouldn’t come here just to give us the fright of our lives!”

“I beg to differ.” said Logan and then he walked out of the door.

Aunt Madge turned to us.

“I’m right aren’t I?” she asked hesitantly.

“Yes.” I replied. “We need to get after Logan quickly before he does something he really regrets. That sinister figure is after all of us, we need to get out of here.”

I saw Mum grimace as she realised the truth in what I was saying but Chris was biting back a smile. Maybe even a laugh, I knew he’d never liked Uncle Logan but that was no way to behave and I aimed a stern look at him.

“W-what do you mean?” asked Aunt Madge.

“We’ll tell you on the way there.” said mum.

“At least he was right about one thing,” Madge muttered as she left the room to grab her coat, “that teenager can’t be trusted, he’d much sooner run away from us than help if we get into trouble.”

**(Andrew)**

**It had taken a lot to get the cure. But as the red swelling began to down I felt pleased with myself and my progress and admittedly a little smug. I argued the vial of elixir (that I now held proudly over George) off the Higher Powers themselves and that was an impressive feat. I’d confronted each of them in turn starting with Aspe and ending with Chena who’d been a lot harsher than I expected. I’d come out of it all victorious all the same and now I stood with my prize. For a mere low level spirit not even in the beyond yet I knew what I’d done had been reasonably remarkable. As the orange spots faded away and George became opaque once more (I guessed that his translucency meant that part of him wasn’t fully even in the spirit realm anymore) I could tell he’d be coming to any second now. The gooey green fluid that had been trickling down his hands disappeared and his eyes flickered open. For a while we just sat there not bothering to say anything. He stared at me but there was no expression in his eyes. I held out a hand ready to help George up but he just glared at me and brushed it away. I could tell he still needed assistance though from his ragged breathing.**

**“I hate you.” he said righting himself.**

**There was a dangerous edge to his voice but now I felt even more frustrated than before when he was unconscious and ‘subdued’. Ignoring the danger signs I retaliated.**

**“Think what you want but like it or not I am your father and there’s no escaping it.”**

**Hoping that my words had finally made an impact I ended the sentence angrily but it did not seem to make any difference whatsoever. As he turned away from me I realised rather belatedly that it had probably just made things worse. I could no longer see his face. Then he de-materialised. I could hear the Higher Powers laughing cruelly their voices ringing through the emptiness in my heart. They’d known this was going to come, how else would I have gotten the antidote off them if it wasn’t: ‘meant to be’? I hate that phrase. Unfortunately it seems to be everything up here. I thought a rather rude swear word as loudly as I could and listened to the suddenly silenced laughter as I turned on my heel to de-materialise. I didn’t know where I was going to go, just anywhere that wasn’t here. Good luck with that, said a snide voice inside my head. Somewhere that wasn’t with the Powers strutting around the cloudy atmosphere as if they owned it. But they do, insisted the voice again.**

**“Oh shut up.” I told my conscience.**

(Nicola)

Mum had explained everything to Aunt Madge and every now and then she kept glancing at me floating beside her as if to check I was really there. Every time her head turned I saw her wide fearful eyes as we stepped down the dark gloomy patio. She seemed to jump at any noise but was at least not saying anything about Chris for a change. There was a grim silence as we walked down the road. We’d already had a quick conversation about where Uncle Logan would’ve gone but by now he had a clear head start on us. I had nasty feeling we’d be lucky if we caught up with him and by that time Prime might have got him. Aunt Madge had said the same thing pretty much as we started out after him. Why oh why did he have to panic quite so drastically? You think he’d be glad to see me well in some sense. But walking out the door? I made a mental note to myself to make sure the door was locked next time we told a relative about the terrible news that they’d have to live with. But how would we ever manage to keep them safe and altogether? There was safety in numbers but we couldn’t exactly hire a police squad to protect us. I could imagine the scene clearly now.

“My daughter’s ghost told us that we have to be protected from this evil man Mr Prime.” Mum would’ve said.

“M’am are you okay?” the policeman would’ve asked.

“Fine, but gosh it’s been a long day.” she’d reply sitting down tiredly.

“Let me take you home.” he’d say in concern.

“No you don’t understand! I’m not mad!” she’d squeal.

Maybe in the end he might even convince her that my lingering spirit wasn’t real. I couldn’t let that happen. I can’t let that scenario become reality. It was obvious that going to the police was out of the question for this kind of problem. There was no proof that the man had even killed my father. Let alone grandpa or me.

“I think I can see him!” mum called out in a relieved tone of voice.

But there was a dark figure standing next to him under a umbrella. Aunt Madge screamed.

“Let me handle this!” I yelled, painfully aware that I didn’t even need to raise my voice to grab my family’s attention. They were hanging on to my every word. They were desperate and I hated that dependence, they shouldn’t trust me. I don’t know if it will work again. “I’ve stopped him once I can stop him again.”

“Wait! What do we do if you can’t.” Chris asked, the worry in his eyes becoming more and more defined.

“Then get yourselves out of here, there’s only so much you can do without getting killed.” I replied grimly.

I hovered towards the dark figure glancing back savouring the memory of Chris and mum. I don’t know if I’ll be coming back or not.

Soon I was just behind the figure. Uncle Logan could see me easily although he refused to admit it. He was shielding his eyes.

“You can’t be here!” he exclaimed.

“I thought you’d be happy to see me again.” I mentioned.

My tone was sour but I still had to save him.

“Oh yes I can.” said Mr Prime. “I’ve been hunting down your family for so long now, but Andrew kept you well hidden, well protected. Now you’re out in the open you will die.”

Well protected? Grandpa didn’t do anything for us! Dad wouldn’t have died if he’d done something. Startled at the insane man’s response I stepped back.

“What are you waiting for!?” Logan screamed.

I could no longer tell whether he was talking to me or Prime.

“Nothing.” He murmured as he raised the rifle.

It was so huge and chunky, I could not believe I hadn’t noticed it last time. But then again it blended into his black coat so perfectly it was barely visible so long as he kept it close to himself; inevitably he made sure it was that way. But I was getting distracted from my goal, saving my family. I focussed on Logan as much as I possibly could, he was an attachment to this world, even if he annoyed me at the best of times. He was still human, he was family. I held my hand over Prime’s shoulder. Then I touched him. I could actually feel his shoulder, cold against the harsh wind. Jumping back as if he’d been electrocuted John turned round.

“Who’s there? Oh no this is just too good...Andrew?” he laughed evilly.

He started groping the air like he’d done before when I thought he’d sensed me. He sniffed.

“No Andrew smelled of the musty books he spent all his time reading. Who are you? You’re new aren’t you? What do you think of the afterlife?”

Uncle Logan stood gawping. I mouthed at him to run. He did. He at least had some sense. I had to get rid of this terrible man. I had to lead him away. So I hovered towards the park river. It was barely visible in the darkness and there was soon to be a lack of light if I had anything to do it with it. Letting out a piercing whistle I sucked up the light with my blue energy focussing on my hatred luring him further and further towards the drop. It would be so easy -

Swipe!

His hand barely missed me. I must concentrate, I must dodge him. Or else I won’t be able to warn anyone anymore. We’re not too far away from the river now...

“Or is it his son?” he said more to himself than to me. “No far too recent a death, Andrew wouldn’t have taught him how to soar this fast. Or would he?”

Soar? He shouldn’t know about that. He’s only human and there’s the fact that he’s alive unlike some, he shouldn’t know about that kind of thing. We were on the bankside...

“Your precious protection won’t work! Not since I banished you Andrew! So whoever’s out there has no chance of defeating me. Oh, you used to come down here and keep a wary eye on my everyday; along with your family. But you never showed yourself to anyone. That was your downfall. You knew if I didn’t banish you surely the Higher Powers would for all your interference? Who are you? You brave stupid person. Who are - ”

Then his eyes widened in surprise as his monologue broke off, he was falling backwards. In the next few seconds there was a loud splash and I was glad I wasn’t alive, in my ghost form I couldn’t get wet and there was a lot of spray fountaining up at me. I didn’t bother to try and see him in the dark. Now I had to fly back to my worried family. Sure enough they were in the same place I’d left them huddling together in the cold for warmth and protection.

“Okay, I’ll believe you for the moment,” said Logan wearily. “Nicola is a ghost and there’s a murderer after us.”

I couldn’t help but smile.

**(Andrew)**

**George has spent the time he’s been conscious in pacing through the clouds. He’s muttering snippets of plans to himself, then shaking his head. I can hear parts of them. I wish I couldn’t.**

**“He didn’t even try!” I heard George say.**

**Feeling my anger flare up I tried to keep the lid screwed onto my container of emotions. The worst part about the sentence was that it was a statement, not a question and I knew it was right. My body was filled with a desire to go out there and prove him wrong. Then I remembered what happened last time I tried to protect someone and knew I couldn’t do it. Not after that. I’d be condemning them not saving them. I remember it as if it were yesterday. Then again time doesn’t really seem to exist of here, George’s watch stopped when he arrived. That brings me back to him. He’s still muttering.**

**“ – absolutely nothing – “**

**I could tell he was talking about me. That was when I lost it.**

**“WILL YOU STOP SAYING THAT!?”**

**“But it’s true!” spat George childishly in return.**

**“I was dead for longer than you, you don’t know what it was like. There was no one to guide me just strangers. You have no idea how lucky you are.”**

**I said my angry tone transforming into a sombre melancholy one.**

**“Oh so having you is meant to make me *lucky*?” he bellowed.**

**“I never said that.”**

**I sat down on the soft ground that was part of the wide expanse of heaven I feared I may fall through one day and sighed. This could take some explaining.**

**“I’m not making any excuse for myself. I’m just saying that I was unlucky.”**

**Sensing a story George quietened down like an eager 5 year old**

**“Chena came down to me and was cryptic. Apparently this was meant to answer all my questions so they’d stop irritating her. I swear Higher Powers are far too receptive! It made my curiosity worse. My family were already in the Beyond, unable to guide me. I’d asked the strangers for help in the new existence but they said I had to discover the new world myself; it was as if I were a lost tourist and everyone was refusing to help me find my way. So I did. I started to teach myself about the ways of this realm. This was the worst possible thing I could have done. Sure I discovered how to soar and track people in the dimension of the living but I stumbled upon it all by accident and I knew nothing of interference or even how to get back to the spirit realm. Not particularly that I wanted to initially. I vowed to protect my family.”**

**George snorted at my last comment unsurprisingly but said nothing.**

**“In the end the Higher Powers dragged me out in the nick of time, they were very angry but discussed my fate with a deadly calm. Apparently I was ‘destined for greatness’ so I could not be handed over to the Lower Powers.”**

**“Ha! Not in this lifetime. It’s a shame really,” sighed George wistfully. “Then I wouldn’t have to listen to you blabbering irrelevant nonsense about the good old days!”**

**Despite his complaints I could tell from the gleam in George’s eye that he was intrigued.**

**“They explained the rules and left me alone to comply with them so there’d be no more mistakes.”**

**“Why did you get pulled out of the dimension by them in the first place?”**

**“I tried to help my family but things got complicated. Apparently it was ‘not my time’.”**

**“That’s because your time was a long time ago and you didn’t do anything!” moaned George.**

**“I know.” I replied quietly.**

**“You didn’t answer my question properly anyways, why did they pull you out?”**

**I remained silent. I didn’t want to relive it all.**

**“TELL ME!”**

**“I was keeping a watchful eye on John. I wanted to know what he was up to and be able to stop it if I had the chance. I got the chance. Many times, I stopped him but every time he’d come back to attack my family with a dangerous vengeance. I stayed stuck in the dimension of the living for weeks, but it was not long enough to make a big enough difference. He began to notice that I was there. Started doing all the things we used to do, all the techniques we developed, I knew it wasn’t good but I couldn’t just abandon everyone. He started groping the air, sniffing me out, it was obvious I did not have much time to exist left. His knowledge of the spirit realm if anything seemed to have increased drastically over the years we spent apart, he was trying new more effective ways of finding me and they were working. The day the Higher Powers pulled me out was the day he caught me, he’d invented a new trap that did not kill, or destroy, but contained you. I was forced to watch my own son die because I was careless. The Higher Powers cut in just as I escaped, I could’ve stopped the bullet but they wouldn’t let me and now I had to let everything unfold as planned by history and by them to a certain extent. I can’t go back down there; I’d just condemn everyone who I care about.”**

**George had finally shut up. He was speechless. At least now he understood the true weight of my guilt. I turned away ready to de-materialise, not wanting the see the look of disgust at my feeble excuses on his face, but then I felt his hand on my shoulder.**

**“The future influences us just as much as the past. We can change this.” He stated gently.**

# Chapter 3: “I love you not because of who you are, but because of who I am when I am with you.”

(Nicola)

I don’t know where to go, how can I ever keep them safe? Prime won’t stay underwater for forever and I don’t have the heart to drown the evil man although I get the feeling one of my family members currently surrounding me does. But would I be sucked into hell if I committed a deed as wrong as that? Now there’s a question, but is it really wrong if you kill someone who’s horrible?

“What do we do?” asked a voice.

I almost laughed; I’d been asking myself the question for the last few weeks. But the panic in the tone of voice stopped me. I looked down at mum. Her eyes were pleading to me, begging for an answer but I could think of none other than:

“Get as far away as we can from here.”

We’d been running for a while, through the darkness but I knew we could not afford to stop no matter how tired we were feeling. If we stopped then we’d wake up from our exhausted slumber to find ourselves staring into the barrel of Prime’s rifle and that was a bleak fate that none of us wanted to end our lives with.

“Can’t we stop? We *are* far away!” panted Madge.

“No! This man went rapidly from grandpa’s hometown village, to my house, to his funeral and then to London in only a few weeks. Don’t you get it? You’re lucky you’re not dead already and to be honest I’m surprised I wasn’t dead earlier.”

I could tell from her staggering steps that she was very tired. She opened her mouth as if to argue her point but I interrupted her first.

“We can’t stop.” I said again but I knew I was convincing myself more than them.

“You keep saying that, but we’ll never be able to get away if we don’t rest.” Uncle Logan pointed out to me as if talking to someone who had the maturity of a five year old.

I’d kept him safe for this long; he could at least respect me for it. Did he not trust my judgement? I did not realise I was automatically giving him what my school friends had nicknamed: the Evil Eye. My glare had never been pleasant, and even he quailed under it. Silence fell as we trudged along the dark muddied path. We could barely see our footing. I was glad that I didn’t need to sleep yet I could tell everyone else did. We couldn’t let our guard down and we couldn’t have another close shave like the one before but we also couldn’t afford to be caught dozing in the middle of the day either. I made my decision. I may not have to sleep but everybody else did, if I truly have their wellbeing in mind I have to let them get some shut eye. If we were going to stop though, we had to find a decent place to sleep. As we continued onwards I noticed the droopy eyelids in my relatives, it was as if they had some contagious disease and were suffering badly from the symptoms. Eventually I realised they could walk no further; we had to settle for a convenient bushy hide out. We were very lucky to find one in the end.

I motioned for them to stop. Most of them collapsed on the spot, others wearily wandered into the small hideout. I suppose you could say it was an opposite of a clearing. Wildlife and woodland nature was all around us but in the dark it didn’t seem so friendly. We crawled down into the slight dip in the ground, it was as if there was a hollow bit of mud almost like a tunnel underneath the bushes, covering ourselves with autumn leaves and snuggling against each other most of my family fell asleep instantly. Soon everybody was surrounded by the shrubs, safely hidden from danger. At least I hoped so; it was not easy to hide from a predator like Prime. First I zoomed upwards into the sky until I was high above the trees, then I looked down upon our location. I could see a city to the west of me and a lonely pathway to the east. For a while I stayed up there. It was peaceful. It gave me something to think about other than survival tactics and it had felt like an age since I last did that. After a few hours of being up in the thin air occasionally glancing downwards to check on my family, I reluctantly decided I had to go back down to them. Now I had sufficient bearings and a clearer mind I plummeted back down to earth.

I was face to face with Mr Prime.

***(Chris)***

***I couldn’t have got to sleep, not in a million years. If Nicky’s innocent enough to really believe that I’d shut myself off just like that she’s got another thing coming. Too much has happened today for my mind to close down. If I had gone to sleep (which I didn’t may I remind you) I would’ve had bizarre dreams involving Mr Prime’s voice leaking into them.***

***Maybe I’m dreaming now because I can hear him. I can also hear Nicky. I hold my breath, desperately hoping beyond all hope that she’s okay. I can’t lose her again. It tore me apart when I had to leave but I had to. Nate said he knew how he could make the machine, he said he needed my help, it was not like I had anything to stay at home for. Dad and me were fighting more and more often, mum avoided me after the fights and frustrating Nicky still expected me to open to her even though that was when I most needed to be alone. That was when I closed down properly; I just couldn’t be me after one of those family arguments. It was easier to leave it all behind and take off. Sometimes I wondered whether they’d miss me when I was on the road, other times I wondered how they were all doing and occasionally I’d want to go back. I’d picture their happy faces suddenly cut down and distraught and I couldn’t leave them. My pangs of homesickness were rare but powerful and several times Nate had to coax me out of leaving. I knew he was right about my family, he told me what I needed to know. His words echoed in my head now.***

**“They don’t understand you, they never will. If you go back it’ll be even worse than ever and they might find out what we’re doing. Now help me out with this equipment, you know the boss wants it fixing. I’m just here to make sure you do your job, and to be a good friend.”**

***Then I’d smile back at him in return and the feeling would leave me. But now I think back to it I know he was wrong. I suppose I should probably tell him that.***

***Nate’s been my best friend since nursery school and has been the only one I can talk to for a long time now. Even though I came back I still phone him up occasionally for a chat. I remember being startled when he let me go back home. He just grinned mysteriously and said that it was time I went back into Nicky’s life. He said he knew she’d be missing me. I had to remind him that my sister was dead; I nearly broke down crying on the spot. Nate’s grin vanished in that instant and he apologised sincerely on seeing my expression. How could he forget something like that? He was right about everything in the end though. It’s funny that, Nate’s always been right. However I’m not too sure whether our job choice was right. I never even saw who we were working for, but we’d always loved to tinker. Nate came up to me one day at school and said this man had approached him. The man had asked if he wanted to be employed, when Nate eagerly nodded the stranger produced a chunk of money and told him to split it between a partner of his choice, Nate didn’t care who the guy was, just that we got paid. He asked him what he wanted us to do and the man gave us this old bag, inside it were chunks of metal, wood and plastic. He told Nate that he wanted him to report back to him on a regular basis about how progress was going and to get me to rebuild the pieces slowly so it was back in its original form. Reverse engineer if you like. When we ran away that was what we focussed on as our work paid for our living. I ran away, but Nate still came over to the flat where I stayed to work on our little project. Over time it was getting closer and closer to being ready. Nate would also slip into my neighbourhood to find out how my family was although he believed it was pointless. But no matter how hard I tried I could not leave them alone without knowing how they were.***

***“Who are you?” hissed gruff voice.***

***Prime was here, this wasn’t a dream.***

***“Someone not to be reckoned with.” Nicky replied even though she knew he couldn’t hear him.***

***That’s my sis. I could tell she was angry. She was meant to be petrified, I certainly was, but no. Trust Nicky to be so easily ambiguous. I quickly stuffed my face into my arm to stifle my chuckle but doing so rustled the leaves covering me. The man stiffened, then turned bending down. I could see him clearly now, but fortunately it didn’t look like he could see us.***

***His clothes were completely soaked and he was dripping everywhere leaving small pools of water wherever he went. John Prime looked more like a zombie in this state, not that he had ever looked human. His lips were blue and his hands were a pale white, he was violently shuddering in the cold. I noticed his brown, thin hair for the first time now he seemed to have lost his black umbrella, it was plastered back over his forehead ruffled by the water and wind but that did not take anything away from his menacing stance and his searching eyes. Nicky was descending on him from behind; I tried to not give anything away in my expression. Stupid really, I knew he couldn’t see me that was impossible. Her hand glowed blue with energy but just before she grabbed hold of his collar he winked.***

***Directly at me.***

***It would’ve seemed like a friendly gesture if anyone else had done it but on this wet figure I knew better. He knew we were there, he knew we were all there and he knew Nicky was behind him right now. He’d been one step ahead of us all the time, so what was he waiting for? Her hand was an inch away from grabbing his collar and thrusting him back, away from us when he turned and grabbed hold of her fist.***

***“Oh you’re so incredibly predictable.” he cackled. “I would’ve preferred it if I were finally finishing off Andrew that monster once and for all. But you my darling will have to do.”***

***Her anger was not gone completely but the confused panic now was as clear as daylight on her bewildered face. Blue sparks were now flying from his hands as well as Nicky’s. But she’d told me no human could do that! She’d told us all that, why would she of all people lie? Surely she has nothing left to hide?***

***By now I was watching with bated breath through the gaps in the leaves.***

***“Do what you want to me but leave my family alone. One man did this to you, why punish his entire bloodline?” she questioned trying to get through the human underneath the skin.***

***“I’m not going to kill your precious brother yet, he seems to be one of the few good people in your family tree. After all, he did help me.” said Prime still sounding amused.***

***How do I help* him *of all people? I wanted so badly to yell out and tell Nicky not to listen but that would betray even more of our hiding place.***

***The astonishment and hurt on Nicky’s face were clear but her stubborn voice rung out sounding like the complete opposite to fears.***

***“Chris would never help you!” she denied.***

***I could still sense the edge of worry creeping into her logic.***

***“Oh really? I suppose your grandfather never really explained what our ghost buster machine looked like. I bet young Christopher there can describe it to you easily.” he said gesturing in my vague direction.***

***I couldn’t stand to sit back and let him get away with insults such as this. I leapt up from my blanket of leaves angrily. Unwilling to listen to his accusations I didn’t take in too much of his sentences.***

***“I did not help* you*!” I exclaimed in frustration. “Leave her alone.”***

***“Believe what you want but you did help me.” he smirked letting go of her. “Don’t try anything I can grab you again just as easily or do something worse.”***

***I doubted it, in his state of near frostbite it looked like the worst he could do to you was look disgusting. But Nicky did do something as the man approached me. The blue energy burst from her finger tips hitting Prime squarely in the chest, before he had time to reach his gun he was flying into a far away tree. There was a thud and a muffled ouch. I turned to her.***

***“Let’s get out of here! We have to wake the others.”***

***She was just staring at me, trying to figure me out, but then nodded. For a minute I wondered whether she believed that insane man.***

***I knelt down shaking mum’s shoulder. She began to stir. Her eyes opened delicately.***

***“Whassis wrong?” she muttered sleepily.***

***“We have to get up and out of here. Nicky just got rid of Prime for a third time. He’s going to catch up again if we don’t get moving.”***

***Mum sat up instantly as rigid as a ruler in under a second. I would’ve smiled at her reaction if there was no good reason for it but unfortunately there was. She began violently shaking the others with a force I would have never dared to use on Uncle Logan. When he lashed out she lashed back with the truth and that force kept him quiet. Madge reacted similarly to mum but more lazily, it took her a while to wake up enough to realise what was going on. Mum had been a very light sleeper. However it was clear that we were all refreshed from our deep sleep. It had been needed and now that it was done with we were ready to run.***

***Glancing down at my watch as we ran it said 3am. That made sense. The sky was still dark but as we moved on and the hours past the rising sun illuminated the silhouette of the upcoming town. We talked occasionally but not often and focussed all our efforts on keeping up our steady pace. Nicky’s urgent eyes still found time to rest upon me although she averted her gaze whenever I caught her at it.***

***“Who should we warn next?” I gasped.***

***“I have no idea. We have so many people to save and if we don’t want another incident like this where we have to run away from home otherwise we’d turn into a miniature tribe.”Nicky finished gloomily.***

***“I bet you wish you never came” I said under my breath.***

***She looked at me in a startled yet indignant manner. It was clear that she’d heard me.***

***“Christopher Evans Coyle don’t you even let me catch you saying that again!”***

***The task had never been easy but now I knew she didn’t regret one bit of it. That put a bounce in my step.***

***“You sound exactly like mum.” I replied.***

***Her face flushed a pale pink. She seemed so real, so alive – but no. That’s where I went wrong the last time. I want to reach out and hug her so badly. I longed to never let her go. But this is the way we’ll always be; one world apart.***

(Nicola)

“We’re here!” chorused Madge and Logan.

We’d been following a long winding road for a while now. It was very quiet and no cars passed us so we couldn’t hitchhike. I was learning to hate the lonely muddy road. We’d just arrived at the town entrance thanks to my navigational skills. As we walked further into the bustling place we visited a checkpoint and hired a hotel room to stay in for the day, or at least as long as we could afford to with Prime on our tail. As we entered the posh marble floored reception we must’ve looked like tramps in comparison or at least this was how the receptionist regarded us eyeing our dishevelled clothing in disgust. However she accepted our money and gave us a key warily as if we’d pick her pocket as soon as look at her.

I watched my family’s reactions at our quarters. It had only been a day since Uncle Logan and Aunt Madge had been sleeping in the rough, in fact it’d been longer for the rest of us but still Logan ran into the bathroom and starting running the hot water into the bath. Chris collapsed onto the pristine white bed, covering its impeccably clean covers in his grimy muck. Madge ran to the toilet and mum happily switched on the TV as if in a daze as she stared at the screen.

“Keep your guard up! I’m going to see if I can find Prime so we’ll know how much time we have.” I warned.

But they were barely listening. Blissfully making the most of the room with delighted, relaxed expressions I decided to leave them like that. They wouldn’t notice my brief disappearance. I closed my eyes and pictured his cold angular face that I knew so well. The way his cat-like stance was always predatory. I shuddered.

Then I was there.

John Prime lay unconscious in a barn. He was asleep, somehow he seemed less dangerous when he was snoring but I had no desire to go any closer. I knew what this man was capable of. He still had a long way to go to get to us though. It seemed he had only just left the forest and was now in the golden fields of corn between the place he’d come from and the town. As I left I could’ve sworn that he was smiling in his sleep.

***(Chris)***

***I started to feel dizzy the minute Nicky left. At the time I thought it was just exhaustion, but after a long sleep it was back and it felt worse. I didn’t want to say anything; everybody already had a lot on their mind. I didn’t want to worsen the burden. When I awoke Uncle Logan was almost himself again. It annoyed and pleased me at the same time.***

***Once we were all thoroughly rested and had eaten breakfast despite the odd looks we’d got we went on a shopping spree in town. Nicky look delighted even though she couldn’t properly be part of it. We bought new clothes for ourselves to replace the disgusting ones we’d been wearing for what seemed like an age. In every place we went we were followed by distrustful glares from shop assistants until we got changed into our new, clean attire that we’d bought. I found it a bit funny I must admit. I lost track of time rapidly after that, looking at my watch didn’t help. The constantly circling hand drove me up the wall, it just never ended. I knew this was not normal, but I didn’t particularly care.***

***We were just about to get lunch when I began to see double. Nicky seemed to split in two. I panicked for a few seconds then realised it was happening to everybody else’s bodies. I quickly told them I needed to go to the toilet and dashed off. As soon as I got there I splashed my face with cold water. For a minute the dizziness got worse, my entire body was shaking. I felt like I was having an out of body experience. I made a mental note to ask Nicky about those, then as soon as it had came it passed. I felt a bit better but not much. When I came back out I bumped into Nate. I’d never been more happy to see him.***

***“Nate what are you doing here?” I asked weakly.***

***I forgot about my family when I saw him, he was all I needed, and he’d always told me I’d never need them. Nate was now leading me towards a cafe, I left my family waiting for me. I didn’t remember to meet them.***

***“Never mind me, how are you? You look pale.” he said in concern.***

***I could feel cold sweat dribbling down my forehead, why was it so hot? It shouldn’t be this hot at this time of day.***

***“S-something is wrong Nate!” I stuttered.***

***No, we weren’t heading towards the cafe, we were heading towards the alleyway by it. I felt myself dragging my feet along I didn’t have the strength to do anything else.***

***“Calm down mate. How’s your family? How’s Nicky?” he questioned a smile playing about his lips.***

***“Something – really – wrong –“ I began but I never finished the sentence.***

***I never told him about her ghost. Nate knew about Nicky. The danger sign flashed in my head several minutes too late. Gasping I tried to take a deep breath, but it wouldn’t come. I couldn’t breathe. My mind was overloaded with worries, Nate wouldn’t hurt me, he’d been my friend since nursery school! Hadn’t he? HADN’T HE? There was a dark tunnel closing in on me. It was getting closer...***

***“You never spoke a truer word!” Nate laughed as I fell at his feet.***

(Nicola)

I don’t remember how long we waited for, I just remember the horrible feeling of anticipation mingled with worry when Chris didn’t show. Maybe Prime had caught us up? I refused to believe there was a problem but mum’s stricken eyes persuaded me at least to track him. I closed my eyes but I didn’t need to imagine him. He was already on my mind.

I was in what looked like a cellar.

But there was no sign of Chris. Then that friend of his, Nate, walked in. I calmed down instantly; Chris had been friends with this boy for a long time, he was probably fine. I was about to leave but then I saw Chris draped over Nate’s shoulder. It was a dimly lit cellar and I barely spotted him. Nate threw Chris to the ground with a loud thump. I winced. Kicking a chair in his direction he lifted my brother’s limp body. He began tying Chris to the chair. Knots I could handle but I didn’t need to yet. I wanted to hear was Nate had to say. He slapped Chris round the face until he was red and eventually gained consciousness.

***(Chris)***

***I felt like there was a ton of bricks on my shoulders yet I was strangely light headed. I felt hands jerking my chin, forcing it up and I found myself looking into Nate’s eyes.***

***“Help me.” I croaked.***

***“I poisoned you in the first place, why on earth would I want to let you free?” he smiled mockingly pronouncing every word with pleasure.***

***“Why?” I asked him.***

***“Because she knows what she’s doing. There’s no point trying to fight it! She promised to tell me about the afterlife and more if I did this.” He smiled. Then added: “Plus I think she’s rubbed off on me because I am rather enjoying this.”***

***My brain is panicking, my whole body is panicking. I try to think of escape but instead I imagine the darkness, the end, and what would happen if I came crashing down into its depths. Nothing good would come of it; that I knew for sure. I tried to imagine what would happen but then shook my head trying to clear my mind. This was not what I’d intended to be worrying over. I couldn’t think S***

***T***

***R***

***A***

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***As I swayed precariously I could feel the chair rocking with my movement. I flexed my hands and my bonds dropped away. Even though my hands weren’t tied anymore I knew I could never escape.***

***WHAM!***

***Nate was suddenly slammed into the wall but I couldn’t tell what by. I wish Nicky was –***

***Oh. She’s strangling Nate. At the moment I certainly can’t complain.***

***“Tell me where the antidote is!” she snarled.***

***Nate couldn’t hear her but she spotted something. I got distracted by the yellowness of the room, it had been grey when I came to, but now it was a yellowy white. Then I fell again. This time I fell off the chair, it was not as painful as it had been in the alleyway. As I passed out though I feared that I might never wake up this time.***

**(Andrew)**

**George had managed to get me pacing as well, fretting over every single action. It was infectious; once he started I automatically joined in and it was just as addictive. Technically we were both banned from the Dimension of the Living let alone interfering with it. We needed desperately to find a loophole in the Higher Powers’ cool logic. Yet we needed something solid, if we interfered in a place where we weren’t allowed the Higher Powers would just convict us and we’d simply wind them up further with a clever clogs last minute excuse up our sleeves. What could we try that they hadn’t already thought of? They can see the future and into your mind they wouldn’t have missed anything. There was the option of just legging it to the Dimension of the Living and hoping for the best but that was going to be a last resort. I felt so hopeless. Then George stopped pacing and turned to face me with a mischievous glint in his eye. This could mean two possible things. Either he was about to something incredibly stupid and risky or he had an idea.**

**“I’ve got a plan!” he declared gleefully then quickly muttered a group of random words underneath his breath, to my great surprise.**

**Maybe this plan was going to be a bit of both, but this time with an element of danger.**

**“Ch –” I began but I was rudely interrupted after barely a syllable had escaped my lips.**

**A young business man had materialised in front of me. He was dressed like a lawyer. My gut instinct told me this was a very bad sign.**

**“Chena has business to attend to and so do I so unless you’ve got anything important to say I suggest – ” Luca droned in a bored tone.**

**“Jam, pineapple, David Cameron!” I chanted pleased to observe that Luca looked thoroughly bewildered.**

**I’d always thought of him as a slightly more intellectual version of Baro so it was a good sign that he did not understand me. As I thought this a pair of old-fashioned spectacles in the style of Harry Potter appeared upon his face. It really didn’t suit him.**

**“Relhok! I think the old man has finally cracked.” reported Luca scornfully.**

**There was a hint of pleasure in his tone though. Maybe he really wanted to get rid of me.**

**“Nah kid, he just doesn’t like you much.”**

**Relhok had appeared no sooner had Luca said its name. It always called me kid despite my age confessing that the Higher Powers were a lot older than I’d ever be, especially it. Apparently it was one of the original Powers created by the Maker before the Maker’s suicide. It was as a result a lot less cold-hearted than the more recent generations. However I always referred to Relhok as an “it” instead of a specific gender, not because I considered it to be a beast but I could never tell whether its name was meant to be male or female. Relhok smiled.**

**“I agree.” it remarked to Luca, then Relhok turned to me. “Trivial concerns my friend.”**

**Nothing could sum up Relhok more than what I was picturing now. It was the friendliest out of the lot of them. The thing in front of me was in the form of a stereotype I knew well from sitcoms, books and the like. A fat, red faced jovial plant sat in front of me. The fat, red faced, jovial part of that description was the one I got off the TV and books, the plant side to it was because I viewed Relhok as asexual. It was like some rare, foreign cross-breed.**

**“I’ve been imagined as stranger things.” Relhok said conversationally.**

**I quickly blurted out more gibberish as my thoughts wandered back towards my original purpose and instructions.**

**“Cherry pie, chicken Italiano!” I recited and continued to do so as my thoughts ran chaotically through my brain.**

**This only served as a method of distracting them from what I was doing and now they’d soon also know this I had to keep going.**

**“Diciduous mumps!” I added and stopped tearing my mind away from thoughts of our plan I focussed on what to say next.**

**“This is ridiculous.” mumbled Luca.**

**Relhok’s reaction was quite different. It *winked* at me. Unsure of how to react myself I kept my face blank Relhok always knew what it was doing. It pushed Luca forward using a forceful leafy hand.**

**“Go on then! Confront your problem.”**

**“Aren’t you going to help me?” asked Luca indignantly.**

**“You know I’m useless in this form, I’m just here for moral support.”**

**It was a good excuse because it was true, in its form it was more of a hindrance than a help and whenever it walked it looked like it was under the influence.**

**I was still babbling my head off. Luca warily approached me in his elephant – grey suit.**

**“Spit it out! You called Chena here for a reason!” snapped the Power.**

**Behind him I could see Relhok mouthing what looked like ‘good luck’ I couldn’t help but grin. It’d seen through our plan instantly and I knew there was no way it’d spill the beans. Relhok was the kind of thing that believed in trust.**

**“ – a waffle with spinache. Chena wished me good luck.” I said simply.**

**“So?”**

**“So I wanted to know why.”**

**“What?”**

**“She knew I had no hope of stopping my granddaughter from leaving this realm and she never cared for George. She always found him a nuisance. So what did she wish me good luck for?”**

**Luca opened and shut his mouth like a goldfish. What made it worse was that he knew it made sense, in a strange way.**

**“Where are you going with this!” he eventually spoke stubbornly.**

**I had him where I wanted him now.**

**“It’s not only that, she’s been dropping not-so-subtle hints since when I first met her. She told me it wasn’t my time. Then she started talking about future decisions and guess what? I’m putting the pieces together!” I said raising my voice dramatically yet barely noticing. “I was MEANT TO BE.” The words sounded capitalised in my head, how could I not have seen their importance before? “I have been destined for a long time now and my time has finally come! It’s not my *job* to save my family, it’s not my *responsibility* it’s my destiny. I was MEANT to enter the Dimension of the Living and some stupid ban will not stop me from entering it again!”**

**I could see from Relhok’s expression that if plants has opposable thumbs it’s would be up.**

(Nicola)

After forcing the liquid out of the tightly sealed bottle I’d grabbed from Nate’s pocket I practically shoved the antidote down Chris’ throat and then watched him, impatiently waiting for him to wake up. Fortunately I didn’t have to wait for long and I noted, in amusement, that he spluttered out of his sleep like an old engine that needed oiling. By the time I remembered to ask Nate who “she” was he’d gone. I shouldn’t have let him out of my sight in the first place anyways. Chris sat up, steadied himself and stared at me. It took a little while for his eyes to focus.

“I really need the loo.” he groaned.

I laughed. He was himself again.

“Come on, we’re getting out of here!” I proclaimed triumphantly.

In all the excitement I almost forgot. I reached out for his hand ready to pull him up and run, a motion that would’ve made perfect sense, if I was alive, if I was physically capable of doing such a thing, but I wasn’t. My face fell but I turned away. We had to get out. Whoever “she” was maybe we’d be able to find out for ourselves.

“Chris, how much did you see on your way into this place?”

“Not much, but hey I can look after myself.” he said cheerfully.

“Why are you so happy?” I asked curiously.

“I’m alive.” his jovial tone convinced me further, not that I really needed it. “Plus I like to live in the moment.”

For a minute I wished that Chris really had died, and then at least I’d have decent company. I couldn’t save my entire bloodline on my own and I felt it was beginning to show, he should’ve never been kidnapped that easily and Nate should’ve never got away with it.

“Do me a favour and keep that up will you? Find a way out, I’m going to track Nate.” I told him.

“That might be kind of hard.” he responded as I closed my eyes. “You don’t know him.”

I tried to imagine the tall, lean supposed friend but Chris was right. I couldn’t. Still keeping my face in the shadows I was about to ask him for a description but it seemed like I didn’t need to.

“He had the cheekiest grin you’d ever seen, as a boy he was small and freckled but was always friendly despite his constant being in and out of trouble. He was a cute little red head as a kid but as an 18 year old he was smart, funny and drooled over frequently by various girls living nearby, I found it gross but unsurprisingly he didn’t mind. It was when the strange man appeared giving him a job that things went wrong - ”

I frowned. Opening my eyes I asked him who the strange man was but he was no longer with me. I was by Nate and I hadn’t even realised it.

I looked down at Nate and saw everything Chris described and more. His eyes were wide, they looked like they were about to bulge out of their sockets; he was clearly petrified. Then I realised why, there was a rustling noise coming from a nearby bush. Suddenly out jumped a young girl.

“Michaela I told you not to come!” he said in frustration whilst letting out a relieved sigh.

“I wanted to see what you were up to!” she chirruped as if her voice was over-excited birdsong. “You talk so much about this Chris, I wanted to meet him. Is that really so bad?”

She was using a pair of puppy dog eyes the size of Mars which drew my attention to her freckles. She was a spitting image of her brother. The girl looked about my age except she was cuter and knew how to use it to her own advantage.

“You need to go. Get out of here, go back home!” he insisted.

“I’m staying with you!” she insisted in a little chiming voice, this time it seemed a bit more forcefully. pure.

I could tell from the pain in his Hazel brown eyes that he loved her like I loved Chris. Then the moment was over. A figure stepped into the alleyway. It was Prime. I hovered, ready to attack but I was easily hooked in on my eavesdropping.

“Nate? Who’s this?” asked Michaela anxiously quivering at the sight of the mighty silhouette.

“I’m Katie Lane and you’re dead.”

Katie Lane? He really was insane. The rifle was raised and lowered in what seemed like an instant I didn’t have enough time or power to stop the bullet from piercing the innocent sibling’s heart. She fell, her eyes still open in shock. Nate knelt down beside her, hoping and praying beyond belief that maybe she was still breathing. I could tell that she wasn’t and so could he but he really didn’t want to believe it. He leant over her to check her pulse but it was nonexistent. He looked at Prime in horror.

“WHAT DID YOU DO THAT FOR? SHE IS MY SISTER!” screamed Nate.

“Shut up and leave her side now or you can join her in the afterlife.” explained Prime calmly.

“Sorry Katie – I mean Miss Lane.” he apologised scurrying away from the rapidly reddening body. Why did they keep calling Prime that? Why did he call himself that? But I could worry about that later; my eyes were currently fixed on Michaela. I could see a silvery gold wisp of light shining out from the bullet wound, I watched as it grew bigger and bigger, expecting the growing ball of light to shoot off into heaven without a second thought. But it was now human sized and features were beginning to form on it. First the carefree smile followed by the eyes, aged by sudden experience. For a moment she looked like an alien, then I realised what was missing; her nose. As it faded onto her smooth face the rest of her clothes that she’d previously been wearing slowly appeared with it. The young girl was now a colour of a trophy and was gliding through the air. Towards me.

“According to the voices you need a side kick.” she stated as if hypnotised.

“Voices?” I asked.

“In my head. They’re giving me a head ache, I thought I wasn’t meant to get those now I’m dead.” she said.

Michaela sounded so empty as if the only part of her left was an echo. Then again she was very recently dead so it was only to be expected.

“What do these voices call themselves?” I questioned once more.

“The Higher Powers. They say they can shield me from this dimension, so I can’t be seen by any mortal. They say – they say they’re going to fill me in?”

They her head jerked backwards in one sudden motion, her eyes unfocussed and her body went rigid. Tears were pouring down her cheeks and the longer she stayed this way the more she began to shake. She remained like this for several minutes before she went back to normal. Now Michaela was sobbing violently, her entire body convulsing with the newly found knowledge. It was obvious that she didn’t want it, she needed to shy away from all the death but she was in the afterlife. There was no escape.

“I – I can feel it all – all the pain –“

Although slightly puzzled by what she said I knew it was too much to take in at once but at least now she understood our situation. I knelt down so I was looking into her eyes and took her hand. It was ice cold which was probably how her heart felt right now.

“We need to stop this.” I said gently.

“Oh how sickening!” muttered Prime.

He couldn’t see Michaela. But if he couldn’t see her then why did he say that? How could he even see me? Then it hit me, I knew. It was a question of who not what. And then the blue fireball almost hit me.

He’s possessed.

***(Chris)***

***I walked around in circles once more. My navigational skills were no better than the time I got lost on a school field trip, a geography trip. I remembered the embarrassment I felt then when they found me at least a mile away from our original destination, the embarrassment I felt now. I couldn’t be left alone for five minutes without getting myself in a muddle. My definition of the word being: lost, kidnapped and confused. Thinking of mum I promised myself I’d get out of here, but so far I was having no luck. It was just one grey wall after another. I grimaced as I came face to face with another dead end, this place was like a labyrinth. Where was I?***

***Then I stopped and looked at it’s plain surface carefully, something was etched into the wall but I couldn’t quite tell what it said. The handwriting was so delicate and neat it was as if a fairy had written it. Almost as soon as I began to squint a new scratched message faded onto the wall. Nobody was here.***

***“You’re ghosts aren’t you? What are you trying to tell me?” I wondered out loud.***

***There was no more writing. I felt rather stupid talking to myself.***

***Maybe this one’s brighter than the others.***

***We’ll see. We’re here to help you get out. Nicola knew you’d have trouble so she sent help.***

***Feeling slightly hurt that Nicky had predicted my stupidity and predicament I could not help but wonder why the ghosts had chosen to do something so risky. I knew enough to know that interference was bad.***

***Oh interference doesn’t apply to us. Did Nicola ever tell you about Powers?***

***“What? How come you can read my thoughts?”***

***We’ll take that as a no. Well I’m Lowi, that’s Lowa. We’re here, to guide you in the right direction. We’re Lower Powers, the best sort to encounter. Sure the name sounds pretty misleading but the afterlife is a weird place.***

***“Why did Nicky not tell me about you guys before?”***

***This was beginning to get suspicious.***

***She didn’t have time, so much was happening all too fast. So much still is, you need to get out of here quickly and we can help you.***

***At the mention of getting out of this place my desperation over-rode my intuition. They could help me leave?***

***Yes. Have you ever heard the famous story of the Minotaur? The legendary beast from mythology that lurks in the labyrinth killing anyone who dares defy it? The beast that can’t walk backwards but can easily stride forwards for the kill?***

***That’s enough you’re scaring him.***

***He needs to be scared, he needs to know what’s in here.***

***I found myself agreeing with the fairy writing, being cushioned got you nowhere. I remembered what the writing had said when I first saw it: maybe this one’s brighter than the others. What others? How many other people had passed this way?***

***We helped them too.***

***Insisted the writing, but I didn’t believe it. It sounded like there had been a lot of others who’d lost their way. If there was one thing I knew more than anything you could never save everyone. I stepped back trying to turn away but to my horror I found I couldn’t. Looking down at my feet in panic I saw furry hooves. Why are they doing this to me? They’re meant to help me! Nicola sent them!***

***I take it back, this one’s is even stupider than the others.***

***I could hear the cruel laughter echoing down the corridors.***

***I thought this would be fun but it was boringly easy.***

***Well we did need a new victim, and now the deed is done. So quit whining! Elderthorn will be happy. Ever since the Maker died you know he’s been our best inside agent for a long time, he practically caused the Maker’s death!***

***The Maker? I would’ve listened more closely to what the walls were whispering if I hadn’t got other things on my mind. What was the one thing that stumped the Minotaur? What was the one thing that could save me? Theseus. If only he wasn’t a Greek hero. If only he was actually alive. He probably didn’t even exist in the first place. I thought of my family, then prayed.***

# Chapter 4:

# “[You don't have to be a "person of influence" to be influential. In fact, the most influential people in my life are probably not even aware of the things they've taught me.](http://thinkexist.com/quotation/you_don-t_have_to_be_a-person_of_influence-to_be/219836.html)”

**(Andrew)**

**I thought of my granddaughter, I thought of my son’s wife, I thought of my other children and I thought of my grandson. I was falling, down, down, down. Maybe they finally decided that I deserved hell for daring to yell intrusively with my voice and thoughts at such powerful beings. Maybe they had had enough. I wouldn’t blame them. So much has happened to them. One minute I was yelling in heaven, next thing I knew I was falling through the floor of clouds. Descending rapidly through the sky I sighed curious of where my journey would end. What was my destination?**

**It was not long until I found out, I’d only been falling for about a minute or so when I arrived. I was on land, that much was clear but it was so dimly lit that I wondered if I was in hell again. I looked around the strange gloomy corridor that I’d had the pleasure of meeting. Perhaps pleasure is the wrong word. Then I saw Chris. His expression was one of pure fright and as I looked at his body I could understand why. His body was covered in fur from below the torso and his head was beginning to look monstrously big as if it was swollen. Yet sometimes he flinched, in a transformation with such smooth transitions this was highly unusual, somewhere deep down inside Chris was fighting this, fighting his own personal minotaur in the maze of his heart. There had to be something I could do!**

**Then I noticed the writing on the wall. It was like reading a script but with one character missing from the group. These two weren’t even Lower Powers! If they were I knew that Chris would be dead by now, I have heard of their true ruthlessness and Powers. These must have been minor demons lurking on the surface to do evil probably doing the bidding of a real Lower Power. When I read the talk about the mysterious Elderthorn I was worried, an agent on the inside? Well I suppose we had dropped our guards down a bit further after the Maker’s death. We were so preoccupied that safety came last when protecting the gate. It must’ve been easy to leak someone in.**

**Go away old man, this is none of your business.**

**I was sent down here for a reason you know. It’s my business, I thought quietly.**

**Leave now! There’s nothing you can do for him.**