“No fighting, no whining, no bloodshed. Got it?”

Ambril’s mother said as she marched Zane, Ambril’s older brother, over to the passenger’s side of their old car. The car, loaded down as it was with boxes and bags of their stuff, dipped as Zane got in. They had been packing all morning. As the door slammed, Ambril noticed a large, fat squirrel scramble up and disappear among the boxes and bags strapped on top.

Ambril noticed it not because it was very fat, had startling blue eyes and a white ruff of fur around its neck but because she could have sworn she had seen it talking to a friend of hers earlier that morning. Or rather almost seen it. She had been retying her shoelace just around the corner from Chao Feng’s Herbal Remedies at the time.

“When’d she get here?” Ambril had heard a small squeaky voice say.

“Just before you.” Said the low, familiar voice of Chao Feng. “She felt it too, of course.”

“I don’t see how you could NOT have felt it if you had the least bit of magic in you!” The squeaky voice continued. “I guess things have well and truly started, wouldn’t you say?” There were some chewing noises. “She’s too young though.” There were some louder chewing noises. “Ummm yum what are these?”

“Edamame, very good for you,” said Chao Feng.

There was more munching. “Well,” the squeaky one belched. “No telling what that old witch will do. I wouldn’t put it past her to try something nasty while they’re on the road.” “Sid try these they’re so tasty.” The squeaky voice mumbled, her mouth full.

“I am *NOT* eating off the sidewalk!” Someone squawked.

“Who are you to talk? Oh don’t be silly, a little dirt won’t hurt you, just look at yourself!”

“It’s not the dirt, it’s the sticky chewing gum, candy wrappers and bits of plastic that I mind, they tend to give me…eeeer… gas. “ Said the squawker.

There was a squeaky snort. “Pl—easse!”

Ambril straightened up. As she stepped around the corner she saw her old friend Chao Feng sitting in front of his shop and no one else around. There had been a fat, blue-eyed squirrel with a collar of white fur sitting comfortably on its haunches right in front of him. A crow was perched on the back of his chair.

Ambril could have sworn she’d seen the squirrel talking. But as soon as it saw her, it had disappeared into a drain gutter. The crow had flapped a bit before flying off with what looked like a large bean in its mouth.

“Hey, who were you talking to?” Asked Ambril.

Chao Feng stared a bit too long at a massive gray bird settling itself on top of a telephone pole across the street before turning to her and answering.

His blue eyes crinkled. “I talk to my bunions, they have a lot to say today.” He grimaced as if in pain and then twinkled at her from his scuffed- up plastic chair. Chao Feng looked at least 200 years old Ambril. He was so old his body curled into a “C” when he sat down. But, he also wore hand painted sneakers and sported a dragon tattoo on his arm. He was pretty cool for being so ancient.

“Ah, good, you come to say good bye before you go?”

Chao Feng had jumped up from his chair with one last look at the menacing bird across the street he had ushered her hurriedly into his shop.

Of all her favorite neighborhood haunts, this had always been her favorite. Ambril paused to take a big breath of the pungent, mysterious smells hidden away behind the worn drawers stacked to the ceiling. Miss-matched stools were parked in front of a long low counter. The drawers were every size, shape and color. Yellow star shapes, green triangles, one was even a snarling tiger. Each labeled with its own Chinese symbol. Chao Feng could cure anyone of anything, from bad breath to the black plague.

He knew where everything was in his shop. Ambril had loved to watch him deftly move behind the counter, sometimes up the rolling ladder, sometimes straining to open a drawer near the floor. Adding bits of this and that to a large bowl. Then, in a whirl of activity he would empty it all into a paper packet and send his customers happily on their way.

Ambril was brought back to reality by the sight of a crow settling itself on top of their car as well.

“Mom? Mom I think there’s---“

“NOT A WORD.” Her Mom came around the car looking scary.

“But---“

“I WANT ABSOLUTE CALM!” It had been tough work to pack up everything once again. It was funny how it didn’t get any easier. This was now number---eleven. Their eleventh move. So without another word, Ambril meekly squeezed herself in between the crochet set and a stack of Zane’s stinky tennis shoes cradling her backpack.

All the crochet balls broke free and rained down on Ambril as the car pulled jerkily away from the curb . Ambril watched as the ond turret house overlooking the San Francisco Bay slid away from her. She grumpily rubbed her head and stuffed the balls back into their case.

She sighed, dispirited, they were off on a journey to where she had been born but not a place that was home. It didn’t matter how much her Mom told her it was, it just wasn’t.

It just wasn’t because they were moving back to the town she had been born in but she didn’t remember it. She had been three when she last saw it. Trelawnyd, that was its name and it was a stupid name she decided.

She mashed her face up against the crochet bag. As she rearranged the backpack in her lap she was poked by something unfamiliar. She unzipped the pack and pulled out a wooden cylinder. She had managed to save it from the movers today.

It had fallen out of an old cupboard and hit her on the head. Just as it did so, Ambril remembered the sharp, jarring sound of an earthquake which reverberated through the old house followed by a lot of creaking and swaying.

“There goes another one!” Said one of the movers hoisting the hutch. “Just an itty bitty one, though.”

Ambril rubbed her head irritably as the strange object bounced into her lap. Normally she didn’t mind a little earthquake now and then. It sort of spiced up the day. But that one had gotten personal. She looked down at the thing in her lap. It was filthy and ancient and very, very interesting. She gently held up the slim, carved cylinder to get a closer look. It was a little longer than her foot and slightly thicker than her wrist, but not perfectly round. It looked like the thick part of a twisty branch. It was hollow. She shook it slightly and could hear something sliding around. It had little ridges where it had been carefully and intricately carved.

Her mother had frowned at her. “Ambril give me that old thing, it has to go into storage, honey.” She said as she reached for it. But Ambril was not in an obedient mood. She wrinkled her nose.

“Why does everything have to go into storage? This is our stuff we grew up with this! It’s bad enough we’re moving to a brand-new house in a weird little town but do we have to go without ALL of our things?”

Her mother pursed her lips and put her hands on her hips saying, “I’ve told you this at least a hundred times, Ambril. Feldez, your soon-to-be stepfather has gone to a lot of trouble with this new house. And though our antiques looked fine in this house, the new house is very modern and these old things…lovely as they are---.” Her hand reached out to sadly pat the old grandfather clock as it marched by---“just won’t fit in.”

She grimaced at her daughter. “You’ll see what I mean when we get there this afternoon.” She stroked Ambril’s hair absently as she watched the living room furniture being heaved onto dollies. “It won’t be forever, we’ll look around for a summer place and give these things a new home someday soon.”

Ambril wasn’t having any of it. She wrinkled her nose in distaste. *Modern, New, -just won’t fit in*. Well what if she didn’t fit? Would they ship her off someplace too?

Ambril protectively hugged the funny old tube to her chest and pointed at the underside of their old coffee table. “You might as well put me in storage too. “ She said as petulantly as she could. “I’d be happier there anyway….See, there I go!” Her name was childishly scrawled in what looked like toothpaste across its underbelly. She had done it when she was seven and was mad that her mother had gone off to a party without her.

Her mother blanched. “That’s a Nineteenth century Biedermeier table, Ambril! I had no idea you had---how could you do such a thing!” Her mother scowled at her then ran after the table with a wet rag.

Ambril was still angry. “I don’t see why we can’t take a few things!” She yelled after her and then defiantly stuffed the old tube into her backpack. That was when she had taken herself off to say good bye to Chao Feng.

He had gasped when it had fallen out of her backpack. She told him about the earthquake and how it had fallen on her head.

The old man had smiled. “It hit you there?” He had rubbed his own head and then nodded wisely. “It stay with you then. You must take it.” His wrinkled hand had traced the engravings and carefully examined it from every angle. The more he looked the bigger his smile had gotten. He finally had said softly, “This is puzzle box, very, very old and very, very good quality. We have also something like it in China. My grandmother had one to put her secrets in.” He smiled to himself. “It took my mother three years after my grandmother’s passing to unlock all of its mysteries.”

His hands moved slowly up the side of the box. “Then she locked them back into the box and gave to me.” He had chuckled softly. “I still trying to figure them out and she been gone over 15 years.” His hands had slid along just under the top prodding carefully.

Suddenly his face had brightened. “Ah yes,” He offered the cylinder to Ambril. “Now, press here and here.” He had shown her where. Ambril had felt small bumps though she couldn’t see them. She had pressed gently and then harder. As she had done so, there had been a small, soft click and a small drawer had popped out. Ambril had bent closer and peered into it. There was something shiny there. She had carefully fished out a long loop of a thin gold chain until it had snagged on something in the back. She had wiggled and pulled gently until she had felt it give and a round object then had slid into view. Twirling in the bright sunshine it had dazzled.

“Wow!” One of Great Grandmother’s secrets!” Chao Feng had said.

It was circular with a sort of rose like shape carved into a peculiar kind of stone. The stone was shot through with green and copper. The gold around the edges was decorated with tracery resembling the Ashera. Ambril thought it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

“Ambril,” he had said. “This very precious to you. This is keepsake of your ancestor, your heritage. In my country, such things are more precious than gold…. and more powerful than swords…. Guard it well.” He had taken the chain and had gestured to her head.

Ambril had dipped her head slightly and he had slipped it over her head. It had felt light around her neck, a tickle and whisper of family secrets.

Mr. Feng hadn’t release her right away but had turned the object toward her he had held it up for her to see. “Hide this from everyone. It will keep you safe, bring you good luck.” He had said in barely a whisper. “It must be your secret shared with just your great grandmother.” His eyes had crinkled at the edges as he had continued.

“Tell no one, not your family, not your friends until you know you can trust them. They not understand that your ancestor give it to you, that they *choose* you.”

Ambril felt for the medallion under her shirt and smiled. As the car veered around a corner, her backpack clanked. She reached in and pulled out Chao Feng’s going away present. Just before she left his shop for th elast time he had pulled it out and set it on the counter.

“It’s an antique, from the 60’s.” Chao Feng had told her. “I put in all new works, and added some AI, you know, Artifical Intelligence. So it’s up-to-date, more or less.” He continued obviously proud of his work.

“This not just a toy, he special robot!” He had said proudly as he turned it on. “You know, AI, he learn things, you teach, he learn so that one day, he like a little friend to you.” Chao Feng pressed a button and the robot had begun walking jerkily toward them.

The robot narrowly missed walking off the counter. Just as it teetered on the edge, It swung a foot around, swerved and marched the other way.

“See? Spatial sensors too! He learn. More you let him do, more he do it better.” He twinkled at her as he handed it to her. It was clearly a used robot, but felt solid, good quality. It was made of red metal with lights around its chest that lit up when it turned on. The front label had been partially ripped of leaving only ‘ff ‘on the top line and ‘Litatron’ below.

“Ah! Little Amby is playing with her new toy!” Zane sneered from the front seat. Ambril just glared at him and turned away. It was just better to ignore him these days. Zane---earlier that day he’s been his usual, horrible, big brother self.

He had snatched the robot out of her hands as they had headed out of their empty house for the last time.

“Hey! That’s mine, give it back!” As Zane had begun to toss it in the air he had kept an eye on her face and had watched it go from horror to pleading and back to horror.

“It’s from Mr. Feng, Zane, come on!” Ambril had made a grab for it but Zane had held it up higher. He had shaken it right over her head and had laughed at her as she had jumped and had tried to grab it back from him. Then he had lazily tossed it over her head straight into the tangled branches of a tree, where it had stuck.

“You jerk!” Ambril had been furious. She had run over to the tree and had tried to shake the robot down but either the tree trunk was too stiff or she hadn’t been strong enough, the robot had stayed stuck until a large crow had landed on the branch, and had bounced the little metal man out. It had fallen to the ground with a clank.

“Zane! You really need to control yourself.” Ambril’s mother had snapped from the front steps. “It isn’t her fault, you know very well. And It isn’t your fault, either. What happened, happened.”

“Yeah,” Zane had replied slowly, “But we’re going to have to pay anyway.”

Zane had recently acquired that stretched look of a boy who had grown way too much too fast. H had turned and sneered at her over the front seat. His curly brown hair stood out in wild strikes from his head. He regarded Ambril morosely.

“Looking forward to our new digs?” He taunted her. “Thinking you might actually make some friends this time? Hoping you might for once, fit in?”

He smirked at his little sister. “Yep, we have to keep up appearances, or at least you and Mom do.” He said sarcastically. He turned back around again. “Me? I’m not gonna bother. It’s a waste of time. Our ‘home town’ is the one place on earth that our family will NEVER make it in.” He slid down farther in his seat. “Mom’s delusional.”

Ambril made a face at the back of his head. Ever since they had learned of the move back to Trelawnyd Zane had been a terror. Granted there had always been times when he had been a jerk, but after the night Feldez and her Mom had broken the news to them about their engagement and the move back to Trelawnyd, he hadn’t grinned sideways at her or joked around, not once.

Ambril remembered that night vividly and how Zane had sworn that he wasn’t going back, that they couldn’t go back, and that he’d run away or join the army or something.

He had raged and shouted insults at all of them. His Mother had stopped him by wrapping her arms tightly around him and not letting him go.

It had left Ambril shaky and jittery to see him so crazy. He had always been the calm one who had helped her look for the better things about every move. She couldn’t figure it out, Mom was happier than she had been in years, they had enough money for clothes and food, for once. Ambril shook her head. There was something about this hometown of theirs that really freaked out her brother.

She sighed and began to examine her robot, looking for damage. She’d have to plan her revenge on Zane carefully, she thought ruefully, he was so touchy now.

The robot looked O.K., really. A few more scratches and a little dent to one foot was all she could find that was really wrong. It seemed to work just fine when she turned it on. Though the head listed to one side, it was kind of friendly looking that way, she thought. The label on the front said “ff” then “Lit”. The rest had been ripped off.

“Fa lit,” she said, sounding it out, “ffffa-lit. fLit, yeah, that’s a good name for you, actually.” She liked it, it wasn’t a usual robot name, so the geeky, nerdy robot lovers wouldn’t take her for one of their own. “Flit, it is, then pal.” She cocked her head the same way as the robot and smiled.

Zane made a raspberry sound at her and slouched down in the front seat. Her mother guided them expertly through traffic as Ambril watched her favorite city roll by.

Outside, On top of the car, it was bedlam. Both the crow and the squirrel were obviously not used to car travel, at least when traveling on top. They were getting blown around, blasted by horns and choked by exhaust. The squirrel shook itself a bit and began gnawing a hole in a nearby bag. “We need a safe haven, Sid.”

The squirrel rubbed a sore spot on her arm. She had gotten it when a cord had broken free and boomeranged her into a nearby bus; onto the lap of a blue-haired lady and her rabid Chihuahua.

Both began shrieking, one nipped her while the other wacked her with a tapestry handbag. She managed to clamber out of the window and make a swan dive back onto Ambril’s car just before the bus veered off onto another street.

She was just spitting out a large mouthful of canvas bag when she stopped and sniffed. “What’s that awful smell?” Looking around she suddenly froze. “Uh Oh---Sid---!” Sid cocked his head and looked up at the large gray hawk just above them. As the squirrel pointed, it folded its wings and launched itself into a meteoric dive straight at the car.

“Lord, Aster, it’s her! Quick, nip inside there, I’ll see if I can deflect her!” The crow cawed as he spread his wings. Aster wriggled through the hole she had made just as the car made a sickening lurch to the side. Peering out she saw that the hawk had grabbed one of the stretchy cords; which lashed everything onto the roof and was pulling on it, destabilizing the car.

“Cheeky nasty old bag!” She said ruffling her tail. Sid was dive-bombing the hawk’s massive head and squawking insults but it had no affect on it.

It now began to beat its powerful wings, jerking the cord up and up. The bag Aster was in careened to the very edge of the rack, knocking her hard into a Christmas ornament, a sharp, pointy candy-cane…that gave her an idea.

She picked up the ornament and heaved it through the hole she had come through. A box labeled “Grandmother’s tea cozzies” tumbled off narrowly missing the squirrel’s tail. Aster raced over to another cord with the ornament clamped in her teeth. This hurt a bit and made it hard to see. But she hurriedly pulled back the cord, and loaded the ornament onto it. Using it like a sling shop, she took aim and let the ornament fly. It shot upward, straight at the hawk’s head and broke into a thousand little pieces.

It surprised the bird so much that it let go. The stretchy cord snapped back hard making the car veer dangerously onto the shoulder. Inside the car, Ambril’s Mother wrenched the steering wheel hard the other way, the car corrected itself and found its way back onto the blacktop.

“Whooo! That was close, I’d forgotten how strong these coastal winds can be!” Ambril mother exclaimed.

Zane grunted and rearranged his slouch. Ambril, having been bombarded by Just above her the squirrel was preparing another missile. The gray bird flew smoothly alongside the car watching her as she stretched the cord back behind another ornament.

“Come on you nut case! You fancy some more?” Shouted the Squirrel as she pulled out another ornament. The hawk glared at her for a moment and then banked swiftly sideways. The squirrel was caught off balance as a large talon came out of nowhere and grabbed her so powerfully it squeezed all the breath out of her. It then flicked the squirrel away and off the speeding car.

The squirrel twirled around helplessly, her paws flailing until she hit the rocky shoulder and rolled head over tail several times before becoming still, very, very still.

It was dark now and Ambril’s mother switched on the headlights, illuminating a dense forest on either side of the road. Above the hawk had grabbed another cord and had was preparing to unbalance the car and send if off the road again. But before it could do so, a shiny black blur came at it from above, a bright yellow beak stabbed it smartly in the eye and knocked it off-balance. The hawk rolled as it caught a nasty up current and was hurled crazily into the trees.

The crow hung there a moment searching for any sign of the giant bird, but the forest remained quiet. He looked at the car taillights and heaved a sign of relief as he watched the car pass through a gate in a massive stonewall.

He flicked a wing as he turned smartly. He flew low and swift over the pavement to the inert fuzzy lump lying in the road.

“Aster? He nudged her gently, come on now, you’ve had worse.” He looked at her worriedly. He prodded her again a bit more anxiously. Finally she stirred and sat up, rubbed her shoulder and winced.

“What? What happened?” Her eyes suddenly snapped open wide. “Mercy!, they’re O.K., right? Where’s the car?”

“It’s alright, they made it inside. They’re fine, at least for now.”

The squirrel smiled wide at her old friend. “Ha! We got her this time, didn’t we!” Then her brows flew together and her chin came up. “What was she thinking? Going after a family of helpless humans like that!” She got unsteadily to her feet. “I tell you Sid it isn’t like the old days when everyone knew their place and stayed there.” She paused to gingerly probe a new lump on her head. “Well except for that time when the Tylwith got uppity, and they thought they had been cheated and left, remember that?”

“Tylwith’s have always been uppity if you ask me.” Said Sid.

She paused to shake her right rear paw and take a tentative step. “And then all the earth-kind went off in a huff, Sheesh!” She groaned a bit and pulled out a twig from her left ear. She looked at her friend who had cocked his head at her in a knowing way and she sighed.

“Yep, I know what you’re gonna say; stop grousing, it’s just business as usual, the world’s always been a rip, raging, mucky, mess so you might as well just get used to it, roll up your sleeves and get back to cleaning it up as we always do.”

The crow lifted his beak and cawed in a laughing sort of way.

“O.K., I’m done.” She stopped, looked about her and put her hands on what would have been her hips if she were human. “Now what?”

“NOW, we find ourselves a snug, warm place with a pot of tea and a fire.” Said Sid looking at her critically. “In other words---home for you. I think I’d better be the one to—“. There was a flash of light and in place of the crow a tall thin man dressed all in black stood.

He reached down and in a fluid motion swooped up his furry friend who rubbed her eyes and said. “Gees, Sid, give a body some notice.”

“Notice? Come on Aster, you’ve known me for what…four or five hundred years? And you can’t tell when I’m gonna shift by now?” He cackled as his long strides soon took them inside the walls and into the darkened forest.

# Chapter 4 What Happened Inside

The loaded down car had made some progress through the forest on the other side of the wall. “Aren’t you the least bit excited?” Ambril’s Mom asked as she peering anxiously at her in the rear view mirror. “Going back to where you were born?--- Finding out about your heritage?----Think of it!”

She turned to smile at Zane staring fixedly out the window in the front seat. “Zane you remember Circle Park in the center of town? You used to play tag for hours there on the big stone circle.” She smiled a little wider. “And the old wall trail through the woods. We used to take a lunch, walk for a bit and then picnic on a log or a pretty piece of grass we’d find just off the path. Do you remember?” She patted his leg to get his attention. He jerked it away and continued to stare out at the passing landscape.

They had been driving for too long thought Ambril. She peered out the window at the dark forest. There was nothing much to see except that the trees had grown so close together that the underlying branches had died leaving ghoulish, lashing shadows of naked limbs.

“Almost there!” Her mother’s voice was overly cheery as she switched on the high beams though they didn’t do much to dispel the thickening darkness. She cleared her throat. “Now that we’re all in a better mood, I have something to say to all of you before we arrive.” She straightened in her seat and gripped the wheel firmly. “Something important so listen please.” She looked pointedly at the back of Zane’s head. “You’re soon to-be-stepfather and I feel it’s in your best interests to use his family name of Petri instead of Derwyn from now on.”

“What?” Ambril sat bolt upright. Though her father’s last name had been Silva, for as long as she could remember, they had used the name Derwyn, her mother’s family name and she had been proud of it. “But I don’t want to change my name, I like it just the way it is!”

Her mother’s eyes were too large in the rear view mirror. “I know, sweetheart, I like the name too but, you know, it’s a new school, new home, new start for you and the townspeople are just, well they’re just a bit old fashioned about things.” She wrinkled her nose. “It would just make things---well---easier for everyone if we all had the same last name.” She paused and looked at Zane’s unresponsive back. “What does everyone think?” She was greeted with stunned silence. “Okay then!” Her mother’s cheerful voice sounded forced and too loud. “So now we’re the Petri family!”

A grunt was heard from the front seat and then a mumble.

“What was that darling?” Ambril’s mother placed a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Zane reacted violently to her touch, practically throwing himself around to face her and causing the car to swerve erratically across the road.

“AREN’T YOU GOING TO TELL HER THE REAL REASON, MOM?” His face was contorted with anger and rage. “You are going to tell her why we had to leave in the first place?” He snorted a laugh. “Sure I’ll be a Petri, because I don’t want them to know I’m a Derwyn. And, I sure don’t want them to know I’m a Silva,“ he sneered, “that’s really it, right Mom? You don’t want anyone to know we’re Dad’s kids. That would be bad. But I thought you told me you thought it had been so long that no one would remember it right?” He faced his Mom fully his left hand gripped the front seat hard.

“Well I’ve got news for you, Mom, I REMEMBER!” And with that he twisted around and started wrestling with his seat belt. “And here’s a heads up; I’m pretty sure, in fact POSITIVE they’re going to remember it all too!”

Ambril’s mother had managed to get the car back under control and had brought it to a halt by the side of the road. Zane tore open the door and bolted from the car running straight into the woods.

Ambril and her Mom sat frozen a moment; then her mother found her voice.

“Zane!” Zane wait, let’s talk about this! She was wild with panic as she fumbled with the door. “Don’t run, Zane!” She raced to the edge of the forest. “You don’t know these woods, Zane!” The last petered out into a plaintive sob.

But Zane was long gone, the deep mossy black of the forest shut them out like a wall. Her mother hovered indecisively on the edge of the road looking worriedly back at the car.

Ambril scrambled from the car. It was bad enough starting a new school in a new town without all the additional drama. She rummaged in her pocket and found the mini flashlight she had won at a Street Fair last weekend. “Mom!” she said loudly trying to sound braver than she felt. “I’ll go find Zane.” Her Mom was frantically pacing like a lioness about to charge at the edge of the road. She whirled and Ambril saw the cell phone glued to her Mom’s ear.

“Ambril! Get back in the car this minute!” She grabbed her by the arm and started to drag her back to the car.

“Feldez, you have to come now!” She screeched into the phone. “I don’t care what kind of an emergency you’re on your way to---” Swaying slightly she tried to stuff Ambril bodily back into her seat. Ambril just stood there with her arms folded glaring at her.

“---It has to be right now!” Her hair had completely escaped the bun and had begun to stick out wildly in all directions. “Do you really KNOW there is nothing that can really hurt him inside the walls? He doesn’t know the forest at all, Feldez AT ALL!” Her mother’s lower lip started to tremble. “He could slip and fall and hit his head, and wander for hours not knowing who he is or where he should go-o-o!” She drew out the last word into a long heaving sob.

“Mom, really, I’ll go and find him, I’ll be fine.” She looked a little apprehensively at the impenetrable shadows. Being a city girl the forest was pretty intimidating.

“No, No, NOOO!’” Shouted her mother. “Don’t be silly, I’ll go, honey.” Her mother flicked her phone off and took a deep breath. “I know these forests fairly well, or I did when I was a kid.” She looked up at the overbearing trees that seemed to be growing towards them, listening. “All I need is a little light, that’s all.”

Ambril sighed and handed her the flashlight before allowing her mother to stuff her back into the car. The door clicked shut. Outside her mother pantomimed locking the door and mouthed the words “stay put” just before she wheeled and ran back to the edge of the woods.

Taking a deep breath and whipping the mini flashlight before her like a sword she slowly disappeared. It became still and silent as the forest settled in around the old dusty car.

Ambril was still stunned by what Zane had said. What was going on? Something horrible must have happened when they were here before. Did it have something to do with her Dad? Ambril shook her head, bewildered. It was too confusing; she needed to talk to Zane about it, if he would talk.

What did she really know about her Dad? Well her Dad had died in some sort of explosion she knew that. She had been young, it was before she had started school; maybe three or so. She vaguely recalled the funeral in flat snap-shot moments. How cold and empty the church had felt, how crumpled and sad her Mom had looked, the feeling of disbelief when they told her that her Daddy was in the big box covered with white flowers. She had asked them to open the lid, that he probably couldn’t breathe in there. It had taken awhile before she really understood that her Dad wasn’t coming back and by then they had moved to San Francisco. And then moved again, and again and again. At some point they might have changed their name from Silva to Derwyn, her mother’s family name, but why?

She shook herself willing the sad memories away and bringing back the dark interior of the car. She had a pretty good idea that whatever had happened back then, her Mom would try to shield her from it as much as possible. She wasn’t going to give her all the details. She’d have to get it out of Zane if she could. And that wasn’t going to be easy.