

A few miles from the shop, my legs were getting restless. I amped up my pace to a jog. The thoughts started rolling through my head. They are always about my parents. Thoughts I would rather not have, but once they start, I cannot stop them... *It's just me and mom. That's all she does is work, so I have lots of time on my hands. The jerk she calls my dad left us and choose his career. She refuses to answer any questions I have about him. She says he didn't have a choice. It was to protect us. Whatever. Everybody uses that excuse when they leave their family!* After that thought, my anger go the best of me and I sprinted all the way home.

Right as my sweaty hand hit the front door my phone rang.

"Hey man. What's up?"

"Hey. Oh nothing much just got back from a job interview with the weirdest lady. So what's up with you?" I replied as I skimmed over a note from my mom:

Troy, I had to run an errand. Be home after supper... I have some news for you when I get back. Love Ya. Mom

"I was thinking me, you and Tyler could go to the park and hangout, we could go get ice cream, talk about girls and yeah... get caught up and plan our summer."

I smiled. "That would be great. I will see you in a bit."

I snapped the phone shut and ran up the stairs. 10 minutes later, I strolled out the front door. The wind picked my hair up and flung it across my forehead. I passed by two skate rats attempting jumps with skate boards on a homemade jump. They gave me the peace sign as I strolled by. "Hey."

Aaron on the other end of the field. I amped up my speed and ran toward him at a dead run. BAM! I tackled him. We flew back and skidded across the grass. We mocked a wrestling match, then busted out in laughter.

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Looking at Aaron was like looking into a mirror. We're both 6 foot 2 inches, blue eyes, floppy blonde hair and what I like to think as a muscular build. We often got remarks that we look like twin even though we are from totally different families. Mine; Scandinavian. His: German/Mexican

Aaron picked at the grass and rolled it into a little ball, then he tossed it above his head. He laid down, and caught it. "Who is the new chick this week?"

"Nobody! I ain't got time for that." I caught the grass ball he threw in my direction and tossed it back, "Heck, we are only sixteen. I got the rest of my life... girls are way too complicated."

"You're birthday is coming up. 17 before you know it." He sat up and laughed. "Yeah they can be some times, but you gotta love'm."

We heard Tyler before we saw him! He was running, yelling and waving his arms as he run toward us across the field.

As he came closer, he exclaimed. "What up, dudes? I hate to say this, but I really missed you guys. A week at camp is rough! Exercise. Healthy food. 10 hours of sleep. Yoga. Tai Chi every other day..."

He plopped down next to us. Pasty white skin flushed with exertion, brown hair wet with sweat. Camo shorts and a bright orange T-shirt. I don't wanna get mistaken for a buck, was his excuse for the orange clothing. Yep, that was Tyler. Mouth running faster than him and a Mountain Dew can tucked securely in his back pocket.

"Yoga?? Haha. I'd pay to see you in the dog-ward dog pose." Aaron punched Tyler's shoulder. "Missed ya, too, Buddy!"

“Yeah, whatever.” Tyler mumbled around his can of soda. “You should’ve seen the chick teaching it.”

“Really?” Aaron’s eyes lit up. “Chicks at camp. I wanna sign up. I can do a mean downward dog.” He stood up and bent over, ready to accomplish the pose. Tyler shoved him over.

“Seriously. You are not going to believe what happened to me while I was at camp.”

“This is how it starts every year you get back from camp,” I was so done with his lame camp stories. “Same boring stories, about the same lame people doing the same lame things. Let’s get ice cream.”

Tyler just got back from a three week camp in California. Camp EHLB (Eat Healthy, Live Better). His parents are rich and they go to Paris at the beginning of every summer. Usually they send him where ever he wants to go, but this year they wanted him to try one of those crunchy-granola heath camp. Looking at him, he needs a whole lot more than three weeks!

“Hello to you, too,” Tyler grumbled as he pushed himself up off the grass.

“Who’s paying?” Aaron asked.

We settled this with a game of rock, paper, and scissors. Tyler lost so he had to pay. I picked my regular: Black raspberry with chocolate sprinkles. Aaron always chooses different flavors, this time he settled for Peanut butter chocolate swirl and Tyler, who is still trying to be healthy went for a strawberry smoothie. The place was empty. It was silent for a few moments, while we eat our food; Tyler was the first to break the silence. As usual.

“Yeah, so as I was saying. The camp was a HUGE facility they had everything there. There was every exercise equipment known to mankind. Massage tables. Mud baths. Facials. Gardens. Their own farm. A farm! Grow your own food. Disgusting. We have Mickey Ds! The place was strange.”

“Grow your own food is the latest venue.” I licked the dripping ice cream off the bottom of the cone. “Fresh eggs. Angus beef. Local honey. Free running chickens.” I glanced at Aaron, he was doubled over laughing. We knew how to gross Tyler out and I was exceeding.

“Yeah right. I said I missed you guys.” Tyler groaned. “Who would miss this?”

Aaron and I finished our laughing fit and sat back. “You were saying...”

“Oh, yeah. You guys ain’t gonna believe this. But something weird happened to me. I met this woman who told me about 12 people old or young who hold the very universe in balance, she said that I was one of the Keepers.” His brown eyes were as big as the hunter moon and his voice was barely above a whisper.

I rolled my eyes at him. “What are you whispering for, Tyler? Do you actually believe that bull? I mean for real...”

“Yeah, Tyler, for real...” Aaron said with his mouth full of Peanut butter chocolate swirl. But Tyler wasn’t finished. His head was nodding like a bobble head in a VW bug.

“Ok. Look I know this sound stupid but it’s real... I promise you. She helped me... she taught me so much about my future and she also taught me how to do a few things. And if you guys would just believe me I would show you.”

We both rolled our eyes.

“Tyler, I truly think that that your strawberry smoothie has gotten to your head... let’s go for a walk and maybe the fresh air will relieve your insanity.” Aaron chuckled and gave him another friendly jab at the shoulder.

“Yes... I truly agree with my fellow brother Aaron.”

“Guys. This isn’t a joke. It is for real.”

Right as Tyler said that a cold wind blew through the streets. Goose bumps covered my body.

“Come on guys... let’s go somewhere.” I tried to shake off the weird feeling of cold I was feeling in the 90 degree heat. I walked away from the table and headed in the direction opposite of the field. I glanced behind me, Aaron and Tyler were hot on my heels. As they caught up we walked by an alley way. There was a black box van parked kind of to the side and three figures stood a little in the shadows... watching us.

They were cookie cutter imagines dressed in black. Hiking boots, pants, trench coat and a face mask. The only color was the piercing blue icy following our every move.

“Let’s go...” Tyler whispered in a small voice.

He didn’t have to say it twice. We took off at a dead run. One of the figures’ voice carried over the wind to our ears. His ‘s’ words hissed at the end like a snake.

“We want you... Tyler Williamsss. You are the Keeper of nature. We need your power and talentsss. Our master has commanded it... And. We. Will. Get. You.”

“Run faster.” Tyler screamed. “RUN!”

I was sure I was moving as fast as my legs could go, but they caught up to us. In like, a second! The first figure grabbed Aaron and tossed him into their van. I stopped when I heard the sickening thud of Aaron’s body crash against the wall of the van. The guy who grabbed Aaron ran to the driver’s side door and yanked it open. I heard him shout, “Hurry up! Jussssst grab the boy.”

I weird sensation came over me, when I had this strange thought, that I can’t feel my feet touching the ground. I looked down. I was hovering about three feet off the ground; suddenly twelve rings of light formed around me, each one of them were different colors. I reached for one

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of them; I caught the ring which was pure white. The rest of the rings disappeared and only the white one stayed. It started to shine very brightly and the earth around me started to tremble. There was a final burst of light and in the middle of this stood a boy. His eyes were glowing white.

“Command me.” He said

“HELP.” I screamed.

I turned around and saw Tyler. His hand shot out, an arch of bright green lightning extended from his fingertips, it streaked across the ally and smashed into one of the two things. One staggered, and jumped into the van. The other moved toward me, the boy tried to get in front of him but was easily overpowered. The man in black smashed me in the face I fell backwards they grabbed Tyler... before I could get up the van was gone, my two best friends were gone, and my world turned upside down.

I ran over to the boy, he was slumped over on the ground crying,

“Are you ok?”

He backed up... “Please don’t hurt me.”

I reach toward him but he backed up further and got him on his own, shaking.

“How did I get here? I was being attack by a man with icy blue eyes... I thought I was going to die. How am I here?”

“I don’t really know... something really weird happened and now you’re here. What’s your name?”

His eyes filled with fear, “My name is Chris. I was walking home from my girlfriend’s house and I was attacked and now I am here? Where is here?”

“What’s that in your hand?”

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He looked down and was all of a sudden really scared... he opened up his hand and it was a pure white orb, just like the ring. It glowed... we were both gazing into it.

“Here take it... I have a feeling this is just bad... please take it. I just want a normal life; no weird things... please... just take it...”

He rolled it to me I picked it up, I looked up and he started to run away. Then I looked back to my hands. The orb was gone, and then all what had happened hit me.

“My two best friends are gone... They’re gone!”

Suddenly anger coursed through my veins; it flooded my brain, thoughts, and every nerve in my body. It was like a disease spreading through my body affecting every cell; my very being was riveted with rage.

I was in the field. The air was all of a sudden getting really thick and hot; cloud boiled over head and lightning struck down. I kept on walking; the field erupted into flames, burning the thought of my friends being gone... then everything went black... the fire went out and the air got really cold.

I shivered. “Calm...” I said and I summoned all my strength and ran all the way home, ran upstairs and fell into my bed. Into a nightmare full of perfect white smiles and icy blue eyes.

I awoke with a start. My bones are aching, it feels like my joints were on fire and I have a horrible headache. I turn and look at the clock 9:30.

I got out of bed and hobbled my way to the bath room. I splashed some water on my face and took a long refreshing drink, as I was walking back to my room I felt a cool breeze coming from my dad’s office... the door was opened.

“That’s odd... no one ever goes in there.” I said as I walked in. I shivered and a tingle ran up my spine. The cold floor boards creaked under my bare feet; this is the first time in years

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since any one has been in here... it was the same. A small oak desk sat snugly in the corner and three huge mahogany book cases ran along the wall. There were books ranging from the bible to the study of 'gifted' humans. Everything was covered in a thick layer of dust. The window was opened, I walked over and shut it... my eyes swept the room, they settled over my dad's desk. There was three picture frames on the far corner of my mother in a red strapless dress and a huge smile and the other one was of me, sitting on a blue block at Wal-Mart photo studio, saying 'cheese.'

"Troy. Time to get up."

I took one last sweep of the room and closed the door and raced down the steps. I walked into the kitchen and my mom was smiling.

"Hey Troy, did you sleep good honey? Did you hear what was on the news?"

"Yeah I did... something about some radiation or a bomb or something."

I was pouring my frosted flakes; I turned and faced my mom.

"And I slept good... very good but I am starving.." I turned and sat on one of the bar stools.

"Honey... umm I got a call this morning. I have an emergency meeting in New York. I will be gone for about three and a half weeks. My plane doesn't until twelve, so I am going to run to the store to pick you up some food; also Mrs. Francesca called and said you will be working today starting at ten. So I can drop you off at her store, go get groceries and then leave. You're going to have to run home again."

I was on my third bowl of cereal. I nodded occasionally to let my mom know I was listening; my last bite of frosted flakes.

"Ok, I need to go up stair to take a shower."

“Honey... I love you and you know this already but I am so sorry I had to leave on such short notice but I have a job to do. I got you everything you need and I am giving you two hundred dollars for the next three and a half weeks. I am sure you will do fine but if you need anything at all you can call me.”

We just got back from grocery shopping; now my mom is giving me a lecture on how sorry she is about leaving... even though work started five minutes ago. The wind was rustling the leaves, I could hear cars past by and I could hear my own heart beating.

“Mom. I know all this I will be fine. I have to leave. Work started five minutes ago. I love you... but I have to go.”

I got out of the car ran to the other side and gave my mom a hug. I started to walk away... she called to me.

“I will drop bring the food home and cleanup for you... then I am gone. I love you.”

I smiled and walked into the Red Rose Shop, I waved goodbye. I walked in, that same bell rang. I inhaled deeply, all the fragrances gathered in my nose and tinged. My eyes swept the room, everything was in it picture perfect place.

I approached the desk... it was clean. All the papers were stacked neatly, a new and shiny bell replaced the other one; but the same white chipped register sat on the desk... like a useless paper weight.

I rang the bell... the brilliant, metallic sound rang though the store.

“Troy. You’re finally here. Good, I have much for you to do.”

I met her periwinkle blue eyes, and once again my eyes rose up to her hair... it was a pillar of fire going from the palest gold to the fiery red. This time it was woven with one inch flowers, the middle was an onyx and set around it was sixteen diamonds.

“Hello, yes I am here and I am ready to work. What do you want me to do?”

The air was getting hotter, but I paid to attention to it.

“Ok, first I want you to meet your fellow employee, her name is Carol, and I hope you to get along. She’s also special like you. Now I have to go back to my office, make sure you take care of your customers. Carol, come and meet your fellow employee.”

She smiled at me; then left with a swish, her bright colored skirt bouncing after her with each step.

Soft footsteps echoed thought the small store, *which was weird because this place isn’t big enough to echo*. As she walked the world around us went silent. I could no longer hear the leaves or cars passing by; my own heart beat was soundless. Suddenly the sounds came all at once and it was like an explosion in my brain. I could hear everything now, all the cars going bye, my heart beat racing and her footsteps got louder and louder.

“Hi, my name is Carol. How are you?” her voice was angelic.

Her strawberry blonde hair hung past her shoulders, semi-covering her baby blue tank top. She had eyes that looked like chocolate swirl with a bit of caramel; a picture perfect smile and an extremely short skirt.

“Hi, umm I am great. How about you?”

I had to admit I was a little surprised about how gorgeous she was.

She smiled, “I am like you. I am the Keeper of Sound. We are both special.”

I was draw back; I remember what those things said about Tyler... he was the Keeper of Nature.

“I don’t understand. I am sure I’m not the Keeper of anything. I am just a normal kid trying to get some money for a car.”

She was still smiling, “In time Troy, you will understand but right now we have costumers to help.”

“Ok. Lead the way.”

For the rest of the day she taught me how to use the register and what items went ware, there cost and gave me the lay out of the whole store. We also made a list on what we had to do. Today I washed the floors, vacuumed, and dusted. She counted the money, did inventory and cleaned the windows. By the time we were all done it was eight.

“Ok Troy, I did great and I will see you tomorrow at eight O’clock sharp. Also I have business to lend to tomorrow so you and Carol will be running the store all day. Bye for now.”

Ms. Francesca said, waving me away.

“Ok. I will be here, have a nice day Ms. F. Good night and thank you.” I walked out the door and started to run home. As I ran home my thoughts kept coming back to what Carol said. She said she was the Keeper of Sound. What is that? I will have to ask her tomorrow. Also what am I supposed to do when I get home? My friends have been taken and I will be home alone for three weeks.

I walked up my front porch step and went inside. The cool blast of air conditioning hit me. It felt good. I walked over to the counter ware my mom left me a note:

Dear Troy,

I got all the groceries and you should have enough for the time I am going to be away. Here's two hundred dollars for anything you need, I am sure you will keep yourself busy but if you need anything you can call your aunt or your grandmother. And if it's an emergency then call me.

I love you honey and I will miss you.

Mom

I took the money and put it in my pocket. I went straight to the radio put it on my favorite station put the volume up on high and walked out on my back deck. A girl was sitting on one of my lawn chairs she has long strawberry blonde hair and was wearing a baby blue tank top. I stopped.

“Carol? Umm what are you doing here? How do you know I lived here?”

She turned to me. “Oh, Hi Troy. I followed you because I need to convince you that I am a Keeper and perhaps you will believe me?”

I was shocked. “Umm... why do I need convincing?”

She was totally calm, she smiled. “Because when I said I was one of the Keepers, I saw you didn't believe me, and the fact is that we have so much in common. But you don't believe me.”

My mind was reeling. “Umm... Carol, I don't even know what a Keeper is... and I truthfully have no idea what you talking about.”

Her face didn't change, “Sit down and I will explain.”

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I sat next to her in a lawn chair, she started to speak.

“Ok, the earth is maintained by twelve people, they are called Keepers and they keep the earth and everything else in check. Ok... enough of history, now a days every Keeper is a child and we are run by the high counsel. The high counsel if four selected people from anywhere in the world, they make sure we are doing our jobs, not fighting too much.” She paused,

“Any questions?”

“Umm... yes I have a few, Why children? Why me? And do we go through some special training thing or something?”

She turned and looked into my eyes. “They choose children because we have a clear mind and we aren’t easily distracted, and I can’t answer why your one... maybe because your dad was one, or your mom. And yes every Keeper is trained by the former Keeper. By the end of the year they will give you your amulet and you will be a Keeper. But you have to pass the training.”

I was fully envelopment by this convocation. “Are you done training yet?”

“Nope... I haven’t even started though I can do a few tricks here and there but once I am in training I will learn as much as possible. Training start in three days, so use Keepers that know we are, it’s our duty to get other kids like us willingly or by force. So do you want to come with me? Or do I have to make you come?”

“Give me time to think about it.”

“Choose wisely.”

After she said that, she was gone.