

Elevator Odyssey

By: Harshita

Chapter 1:

The Introduction

I am so glad you're my dad;

You're one in a million, Pop!

When it comes to first-class fathers,

You're the absolute cream of the crop.

You love me no matter what,

Whether I am goodie or baddie;

I really love you, Pa;

You are a fine and fantabulous daddy!

~Joanna Fuchs

Did you know that most girl's DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) comes from Dad's side? Of course, most daughters, like me, love their dads more than anyone else and are much closer to them. I always respected his wish to be an astronaut and climb up the massive rocket while blowing air kisses to my father. Even though I know that it is impossible nowadays, I still would like to be an astronaut. I loved the subject, Science. I remember, once, I had gotten a C- on my report card and was devastated. I thought my dad would be so angry with me, but he was not. Instead, he bought me a telescope, and we watched the stars the whole night in my newly built treehouse. After that incident, I had been getting straight A's in Science and Math. My dad was my guardian angel, and he was there with me while we shared our problems, but now he only resides in my heart.

The worst day was when I had seen police officers interrogating my mom. My dad had gotten into an accident during one of his business trips. The sheriffs believed that he had been drinking and landed in the river next to the road. I was lugubrious when hearing this information. My dad never drinks! I tried finding out what happened to my dad but never succeeded.

It has been a year since my dad died, and I rarely got off my bed unless woken up by Brittany, my sister. Today, though, I woke up to my mother yelling. I eavesdropped on her conversation, still an expert at it, and strained to hear. Since I was in 4th grade, I had a habit of eavesdropping.

“I know it costs a lot but...” my mom yelled. She lowered her voice, and I could not hear anything else. I was so engrossed in trying to decipher this conversation that involuntarily, I leaned against the door, knocking a vase to the floor in the process. As the vase came crashing to the floor, mom burst open the door just in time to see me trying to escape.

“Ashlynnne!” she yelled.

“Uhh, Hi, mom!” I said, feigning innocence.

“Ashly, how many times have I told you about eavesdropping?” she sighed. I managed to mumble 'sorry' as I went back to my room, deep in thought. What was that all about? Are we...

I gasped. We were leaving beautiful Oak Park. Why were we leaving? Where are we going? Doesn't my mom love this place? Doesn't she know I love this place? I shoved all of my thoughts aside and tried to get some sleep. I tossed and turned for a long time.

The Next morning, my mind wandered off to Chicago as I was busy packing my bag. Chicago, "Dream City," as many people called it, was where we were moving. You should see the technology Chicago has developed. Chicago goods covered my whole house. I had never actually been to Chicago, but I know my parents were born there. Then they settled in peaceful Oak park. Not that I hate Oak Park or something, I love it here but, it is too dull to live here forever. I finished packing $\frac{3}{4}$ of my bag when a knock disturbed me from my trance. Sydney burst open the door and crushed me in a hug. The sight of her made me smile, and for just a second, I forgot the big move. Sydney was the best BFF that anyone can ever have. She was enthusiastic and confident. She always dreamt of being an actress when she grows up.

Somehow, I had forgotten that Sydney and I had planned a very last get-together. It is not like me to forget anything, but after the death of my dad, everything went upside down. I ran with her outside, grabbing a piece of cake left on the counter. I filled my backpack with chips and junk food. I loved all types of food and was always hungry for more.

I raced Sydney to our favourite spot, our treehouse. When I was 7, dad had built it for Sydney and me, and we have been hanging out here ever since.

“I won,” I shout when I slap the bark of the treehouse. My brunette hair bounces and lands on my face, burning my eyes.

“Now, you have to bake me more muffins,” I said. I brushed my hair away and tied it into a ponytail.

“Nooooooo, REMATCH!!” Sydney replies.

“Sorry, not sorry!” I said to her apologetically, even though I didn't mean it. Sydney and I are very opposite. Sydney has blonde hair and grey eyes, While I had brunette hair and deep green eyes. Inside the treehouse, I opened my black bag and pretended to be angry at Sydney. I tore open a bag of chips and threw pieces at her, making the chips fly in the air before hitting the wooden floor. Giggling hysterically, we threw chips everywhere. After a while, we got tired, so we started talking about Chicago and what I will have to try when I move there.

Then, we broke down, announcing how we will miss each other. I was lucky to have such a friend. How will I ever survive Chicago without her?

Chapter 2:

Chicago, here I am

You may not be

With me anymore

But my love for

You will never die

I miss you, Daddy!

“Thief,” Sydney and I shouted. We both ran after a burglar with our swimsuits on, looking ridiculous. This guy had stolen our bags, which contained our clothes and food. I stopped to catch my breath.

“He is fast,” I mumbled to myself. After a minute's rest, I got ready to run again, when I saw Sydney almost catching up to him, but she tripped and fell hard to the ground.

“Sydney!” I yelled and ran towards her. The thief hesitated just for a second; he brushed his blond hair and ran faster this time.

“Uhh, if he comes again, I will kill him, and I mean it!” Sydney yelled.

“I don't even want to see him again!” I looked at her knee and saw a deep red gash. I straddled her back to my house. I wanted her treated immediately, so I ran to my house as my mother is a doctor. She is an expert at these types of cases. People stopped to look at the deep gash, but they did not help. I ignored their pity look and let my legs burn for a while.

Finally, I reach my place, and mom is busy scolding me. “Ashly, screw your bag, we- I will buy you more stuff, but I cannot buy your safety. Please use that head of yours,” I ignored her and headed straight to my room. Who is that guy? Did he have to steal our bags? Why not somebody else's? I had more and more questions about him. The main one was if he lived here or not? I sighed and glanced at the clock. I knew it was my fault, whether or not I liked it.

The next day, I filed a police complaint before going to Chicago. I gave Sydney's phone number so she could describe the burglar to the police.

“Ashly, stay safe now!” said Patrick, my cousin.

“I will, Pat. Also, say goodbye to mom, if you can. She needs your support, more than mine,” I was unsure if he could leave his police duty for a minute and meet us before we departed.

“I’ll try!” Pat said and left. When I arrived at my house, I grabbed my blue luggage and locked the door. I sat in the passenger seat of the car while my mother sat beside me. I waved goodbye to Sydney and glanced at her leg. Her leg looks much better than before. Patrick ran towards me and waved goodbye to mom, Brittany and me.

It took us about 4 hours to get to Chicago. I looked outside my window and cried with joy. Is that a skateboard park? OMG!! This place was amazing. There were so many vehicles; thousands of cars, motorbikes, skateboards and roller skates. The best part was that Spring was here. Tiny shrubs and trees were growing in cracks. There were tall buildings, groceries and shops everywhere. There were even a few bus stops. My dad lived HERE! I would love to stay here forever. I would never want to leave this place. In Oak Park, rich people had cars, while most people used bicycles and buses. I loved my bike and always used that to move around the small town. Rarely, I used the car. My parents were the ones who used it most of the time. But here, most people were driving cars.

We finally arrived at our apartment with five stars printed on the front. We arrived at the grand hotel, and mom parked the car. When we went inside, Brittany pulled onto my hand, “Look there, the stairs are moving” I looked where she was pointing and smiled. “Come on, let's ride it.”

A man, who wore a black coat with sunglasses, rode the stairs before we, and Brittany followed his steps.

I walked inside my bedroom and collapsed on the new, soft bed. I laughed, visualizing again how Brittany was running up and down the "moving stairs," dragging me along. Brittany had kept looking at the beautiful clothes people were wearing. There was one woman who wore heavy makeup and a fur jacket. Brittany had thrust the cellphone at me to take a picture of her with the woman. After a while, I took Brittany to her room.

I looked around my room and saw two tables placed on either side of a computer. There were also two TVs in my room, one flatscreen above my bed on the ceiling. The 2nd TV was in front of my bed and on the wall. This place looked wondrous.

I also had my very own backyard. It had flowers around it with a swing in the middle. I sat on the swing and saw the beautiful lake and the green hills on the far side of the lake. At the far corner, there was a ladder, safely protected with bars around it. I started climbing the ladder, I looked below, and there were many balconies below one another. I gulped. The ladder led me to the terrace. This terrace had a massive pool in the middle, and there were sun loungers around

this pool. There was also a bar at the far end. A man, approximately in his early twenties, was drinking and talking with a bartender. He was acting crazy, maybe he was drunk! Oh God, I thought. If mom catches me here, I will get a hell of a lot of scolding. But I could not even leave this place. I think this place has a magnet just for helpless 16-year-old girls. I rest in one of the sun lounges, and I call Sydney. I described this whole place to her, and it took 2 hours.

“Oh, I wish I was there, Ashley. I would love it,” she said.

“I know! Next month, I will get you here,” I promised.

“Oh, also I talked to your cousin,” Sydney said, half excited.

“Did you stammer?” I asked her. She did not reply, and I burst out laughing. She had an enormous crush on him.

“Never mind that. What happened? Did you find out about ‘mysterious man?’” I asked. Curiosity, making me heavy and anxious. Please tell me they found the thief. I chanted inside my head.

“Not yet, I have to draw him. The best part is that I can show my artistic skills to Pat if successful our ‘mysterious man’ would be in my portfolio for the University of Art Studio,” she said.

“OMG! Such a great idea you would definitely get in. Also, can you please show me your drawing?” I said, speaking very loudly.

“Sorry,” I mumbled to the bartender. I wonder if he heard me!

“I have not drawn him yet. I will show you the end product,” Sydney said, which disappointed me. After talking, I hung up the phone and went inside my room, just in time when my mom called me for dinner. Whew! Tomorrow, I will be attending my new school! Oh, I love this place already. I wonder why my parents left?

Chapter 3:

Brewing trouble

If I could write a story

It would be the greatest ever told

Of a kind and loving Dad

Who had a heart of gold

I could write a million pages

But still be unable to say, just how
Much I love and miss him
Every single day
I will remember all he taught me
I'm hurt but won't be sad
Because he'll send me down the answers
And he'll always be my dad
~Joanna Fuchs

It has been a whole week living in my Harbor Point apartment. Still, I felt uneasy and missed my dad too much. But, I was not the only one depressed. My mom has been feeling depressed, more than me, and seems to be a bit off, too. I had asked her, many times, if anything was wrong? Her answer was always a nod. My sister was the opposite, though. She has been going on playdates with her new friend, Lia Bourgeois, almost every day after school. Lia's sister, Paris Bourgeois, has been babysitting them. Paris goes to my school, but I decided not to be close to anyone yet.

“Ashlynn Lee Gonzales! I hope you understood how to Optimize Values of a Rectangle?” said Mr. Forbis, my math teacher.

“Huh?” I said, rubbing my eyes. He sighed and continued with his lecture. I had fallen asleep in class somehow. I had never done that before. I should have listened to Sydney rather than arguing with Patrick about the investigation.

I sighed and excused myself to use the bathroom. The bathroom in Whitney Young Magnet High School was bright and clean. There were not many people who used the bathroom. Thank Goodness. After wiping my wet face with a paper towel, I walked out of the bathroom feeling refreshed. All of a second, my sixth sense activated. I turned my head around to see if anyone was there. I have been feeling that someone is following or watching me. It is nothing, Ashlynn! You are just tired! I gulped some water from the water fountain and kept on walking, trying to calm myself down.

I grabbed a school map, and on its side was written, “Whitney Young Magnet High School,” and below it was our school logo. The school, named after America Patterson, the principal of the school for most of her life. Her friend had handed her this job. Her BFF, Whitney Young, was the owner of this school. Some said America had a son, Ryan, I think.

I had been listening to my English teacher talk on and on about our grammar diagnostic test and how bad we did. “Grammar mistakes, kids! Please, capitalize your nouns. Grammar Mistakes affect your mark, which affects your report card, which affects your academic reference, which

affects your life! Do you understand?" Who knew simple grammar mistakes could ruin your life? A horn interrupts our English teacher from continuing her bickering about it. Can Ashlyne Lee Gonzales report to the office, please? It is an emergency! Ms. Patterson's voice erupted from the speaker.

"Excuse me," I walked out of the classroom, feeling glad. When I got to the office, I saw Ms. Patterson was talking on the phone. Her blond hair was down, and it fell to her hips.

"Thank You," she said calmly and turned to me. "Ahh, Ashlyne, right? You are needed at the hospital right now. Your sister had... had an accident, but it's not to be nervous about, I'm sure..." Before she finished talking, I dashed out of her office and ran to the hospital with my backpack hung on my shoulder. What did Brittany do this time?

"Mom," I shouted, running to her outstretched arms. My mom was very nervous, and she was shivering. We both ran to the hospital's room, and I saw my sister sleeping on the hospital bed. She looked all right.

"Thank God" I mumbled to myself a little too loudly. My sister jerked her head at me and smiled. When she smiled, I saw a tooth missing.

"Oh, my poor girl!" I said and hugged her.

"I am fine," she said, her voice breaking. Before she could hold it back, she cried, and I cradled her and carried her back to our apartment.

Brittany had been swinging in her school's playground, then she fell, and a tooth had been jugged upwards to her jaw. They had to do surgery for her to get that tooth out of it. If I had come a little earlier than expected, I would have been with her for her first surgery, giving her lots of courage. But I didn't, instead, she suffered it on her own. My brave girl! *

"So... How is it going there?" I asked, trying to change the subject. I was sitting on a sun lounger, gazing at the pool on my apartment's terrace. Sydney was worried sick about Brittany so much. She even asked me to speak with her even though she had a test coming up soon and she had to study for it. She is such a great friend.

"I have special news for you, Ashley. The police found out about..." Before she could finish her sentence, a huge wind blew me off my chair. My eyes were watery, and I ran to grab my phone, but a loud gunshot startled me. What is happening? Is the apartment under attack? Jeez, Ashly! I tried running again away from the gunshots, but a mysterious smoke, which appeared out of nowhere, blinded my eyes and the gunshots made me feel dizzy. All of a sudden, I see a boy trying to get my attention. He motions me to follow him, and I do. Why am I following him? He hoists himself up the vent, and I do the same, struggling a bit. I need to consider the gym someday. I crawled inside the vent and found the exit, or I thought it was the exit. I pushed the vent cover and fell on the cold Elevator floor. My vision was blurred, but I could hear voices and mumbles. Then I couldn't hear or see anything. I need to be safe. I chant again and again.

Chapter 4:

An Idea in Shaft

You always clean the fingerprints

I leave upon the wall.

I seem to make a mess of things

Because I am so small

The years will pass so quickly

I'll soon be grown like you

And all my little fingerprints

Will surely fade from view.

So here's a special fingerprint

A memory that is true.

So you'll recall the very day

I made it just for you!

~Author Unknown

Are you hurt? No

Are you safe? No

Do you know who I am? No

Do you want to know? No?

Do you know where you are? No

Do you feel guilty? No...

Wake up! Huh?

I woke up sweating. My gaze was unsteady for a moment, and I fell back down on the bed. My head felt heavy like a boulder was sitting on top of my head. My stomach was uneasy, then, all of a sudden, I puked, throwing myself to the bucket below on the foot of the bed. A girl came running towards me, handing me a towel.

“Are you okay, Ashlyne?” she said. Do I know her? How does she know my name? I look up and see Paris Bourgeois. I tried calling her name, but my throat was so dry, I couldn't mutter a word.

“Give me a second,” Paris said and grabbed a water bottle. I gulped down the entire contents in it and sighed.

“You must've been thirsty,” Paris said and laughed. I nodded.

“Where am I? Is Brittany safe? What's going on out there? Why am I here? Why are you here?” I blurted out. I wanted to know most of the answers.

“It's hard to explain! Just take some rest!” she said and left the room before I could object.

My hospital room was an Elevator. I never actually used an Elevator before, as I was afraid of heights. I felt nausea again. I didn't like being in an Elevator. I started banging on the Elevator door. I tried pushing the Elevator doors apart, but nothing worked. I was frustrated. Until I saw the elevator buttons, and I laughed at how stupid I was. Of Course, Elevators had buttons. I started pressing all of them, but none of them worked. I was hyperventilating. I needed to get out before I suffocated. I grabbed my hospital bed and threw it at the door. Nothing worked. Until I saw nails bolted on the corners of the Elevator walls, I worked my way, unscrewing all of them. There was a pair of tweezers, and I used them to unscrew the bolted nails. Then, I took my bed and pushed it against the wall. Boom! The Elevator wall fell. I looked down and saw a long shaft with electric wires circuiting around it. Each of these wires connected to a room, each having labels, and it looked amazing. I was witnessing an Elevator kingdom. People were swinging down these wires to get to their rooms.

“Wow...” I mumbled breathlessly.

All of a sudden, I heard a crash, and I looked down. My bed came crashing down on the floor, and I saw people buzzing around it. I ran back into my room. Is there a whole society filled with people in this Elevator? How long have I been here? Probably 2-3 days maximum. Paris swings herself inside my Elevator.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Uhh, I don't know!” I replied. It was the truth.

“Come on,” she grabbed my arm and yanked me up to the edge of the Elevator.

“I am scared of heights,” I admitted.

“Close your eyes and think about something happy. It was hard for me too,” she replied. Now I was confused; How many days have I been here? As if she read my mind, she replied, “You have been here for 14 days.”

“I have been locked in this Elevator for 14 days!” I was surprised, shocked, and angry.

“You weren’t locked. There is a loose wall. Here!” she points at a small door connecting to a room. I walked immediately there and looked down. Happy Thoughts, Happy Thoughts, I repeat inside my head and swing to a room. I screamed until my foot hit the ground. I was sweating like crazy, but that didn't bother me. People were staring at me like I had gone crazy. I went inside the room, feeling anxious to be alone. When I saw a man welcoming me, I immediately recognized him. He was the guy who was happily drinking with the bartender on the first day I came to this apartment.

“Ahh, you're awake. Thank Goodness... I better get going,” he said and left. I closed my door and began making a plan to leave this place.

“Plan A: I will run away from this Elevator, find mom and Brittany and find myself at home in Oak Park. I will forget about everything that happened.

Pros: I can have Paris help me, as she is the only friend here. What about the “drinker guy”? I could ask him, too, for help, if needed.

Cons: Well, what if nobody wants to help me? What if I am locked in here forever? Okay, think that I did escape! I would have to find mom and Brittany. Who knows where they are? And if I do find them, how will I find my car? What if our car is damaged?” I asked, talking to my reflection in the mirror. I took a vase and threw it next to the door. I crumpled down into a crouch and cried.

“Why me?” I shout to myself.

The next day, I walked outside. I was wearing a black top and black jeans with black boots. I planned to find Paris and ask her to help me escape. Easy Peasy, right? I started walking around the shaft and tried not to shout when I swung down on these Electric Wires. They were swaying a lot. I thought it might break any second. I started lurking around the place, hungry until I saw breakfast. There was a tray filled with bread and crackers. I took five of each and started munching on them. They tasted amazing. I didn’t know if it was my hunger speaking or it was actually that tasty. I stopped myself from continuing to eat when I heard Paris laugh. She was near, and I knew she could help me. I knew she could! I followed her giggles through the tunnels in this Shaft and saw her. She saw me, too, including her fellow boyfriend.

“Excuse Me! Sorry to interrupt...” I was beginning to apologize when Paris cut me off and dragged me next to her boyfriend.

“This is Ashlynn! Ashlynn, this is Sean!” She said, introducing me to him.

“Hi!” I said. “Paris, if you don’t mind, can I talk to you about something? It is important!” I said, trying to sound stern. I didn’t want them to break their date because of me, but this was important. I can’t stay here any longer! I thought inside my head.

"Sure, Ashlynne, go ahead,"

"Uhh, you sure. If you want, I can come back later,"

"It's fine!" Paris said.

“Okay. I want to escape this elevator. So could you help me?” I asked her. Paris nodded and started rattling off her plan quietly.

“We planned to escape the Elevators. I was thinking of disguising ourselves as guards! Sean wants to ask them to leave. I don’t think it will be that easy, though,” begins Paris. She glanced at Sean for a second and continued whispering to me again. “That is the easy part! After that, we have to escape the Elevator Shafts. There are so many shafts in here, 4 to be exact, and each has its unique complications. All of these Elevator shafts are guarded by people who were sabotaging this apartment,” Paris continues.

“We still have to figure out how to get out of the last Elevator Shaft, without bringing attention! This is not easy considering the damage that it has caused, but if we stick to our plan, we might escape this mayhem alive,” Sean adds, stressing the ‘alive’ part.

“Okay... that sounds easy,” I said, fidgeting with my hands. My plan wasn’t as thorough as theirs. I didn’t even know most of this information.

“But, we need help to make an aversion! This certain person has to distract the guards outside the Elevator walls. One small mistake, and there goes your life,” Paris said, snapping her fingers as I shuddered. What Paris said was true; we need a backup helper outside these walls. Paris begins suggesting names. All of a sudden, I reach for my pocket.

“Where is my phone?” I asked. If I find my phone, I could call Sydney to help me.

“We couldn’t find your phone anywhere. Also, if you did bring your phone, that wouldn’t help us because of the connection.” Sean said. Of Course, because of the low wifi signal. I couldn’t call Sydney anyways. I groaned because I didn’t want to stay here forever. I walked outside the room, which Paris and Sean were and found myself inside the Elevator’s library. I got blueprints and information about the Harbor Point Apartment. I start scribbling away information and emergency exits. I was going to leave this place and be safe! I could just feel it.

Chapter 5:

Plan Execution

Dad, your guiding hand

On my shoulder will

Remain with me forever.

~Bindi Irwan

“I am ready!” I said to Paris.

”Where is Sean?” Paris asked while I shrugged. I didn't care if he came or not. Being stuck in this elevator is my only problem, which only for a little while, though. I strolled towards the inadequate vent when I heard Sean.

“Sorry, I had a bit of a problem.” I picked myself up into the vent and started crawling deeper.

It took about 2 hours. Even though my arms were throbbing, and I was famished, I had too much adrenaline pushing me towards the exit, which I could not see just yet.

“Can we stop? I am hungry!” Paris gasped. I sighed. I convinced myself for just a minute of rest and settled down. Eating my bread sandwich, I was revising my plan again and again. While I was deep in my own tangled thoughts, I heard sirens below us. I glanced at Sean, and we started crawling faster. I heard gunshots below me, loud and clear. A moan jerked me back to the present, and I began to move forward.

“Paris, you're shot!” I whispered. Sean scooped Paris and was half crawling and dragging her to the exit. I followed him and covered my mouth to stifle an upcoming scream.

I jumped out of the vent. Sean gently placed Paris, and we glanced at her gash. There was hot blood spurting around her thighs. I detested blood. Sean took a pocket knife and stuck it inside her gash, making me gag. I turned myself away and studied the blueprint carefully, trying to distract myself. My eyes glanced at a small opening drawn on the blueprint. I immediately laughed. There was another secret opening that I had missed. I swiftly turned my head to look at Sean.

“Sean! Look at this,” I said. His palms were sticky with blood. He glanced at the blueprint, confused.

“There is a secret opening. Here...” I explained, pointing at a dark patch.

“Find it!” He said and started stitching Paris's wound. I was overwhelmed with joy that I had found an easier way to leave. But my bliss was replaced with enraging fury. A bullet, placed next to Paris, was painted with blood. I stormed away from it and navigated my way to the secret opening. But I could not see any secret passages hidden anywhere. I threw the blueprint and started pacing, thinking inside my head.

The blueprint said it was supposed to be here. Where the hell is it, then? I glanced around me, searching.

“If you are looking for a passage, you came to the right place!” I looked behind me and saw a slender, blond-haired boy with deep blue eyes. He was maybe in his early twenties. I staggered back.

“Do you know where it is?” I was nervous. What if he was working with the people who shot Paris? He guided me to a wall. Is this some kind of joke?

I peered over his shoulder to see what he was looking at. He abruptly turned around and said, “Here it is!” Now I was baffled! I walked around him and tried pushing the wall. Nothing happened. He gently pushed me aside, knelt to the dusty ground and unlocked a hidden latch. He showed the barrier open, and I laughed. Even in the most unutilized places, there still were secret hatches and inbuilt mechanisms.

“Sean! Sean! I found it.” I yelled. Sean stood up and looked at me, then the stranger.

“Who is he?” Sean asked. I looked at the boy and just shrugged.

“I don’t know, but he did help us find the hidden passage,” I glanced at Paris, who gave me a small smile.

“What is your name, boy?” Sean questioned.

“I am sorry, I cannot tell you that,” the boy answered, grinning. They started questioning each other, throwing harsh remarks at each other like daggers. I ignored them and helped Paris up. We started walking towards the secret passageway, and I glanced at her thighs. It looked just fine, except for the red-looking blood. She was able to walk just fine.

“You guys are coming or what?” Paris yelled. Sean tried pushing the boy away, but instead of falling back, he joined us.

"Thank you!" The boy replied.

"Ahh, you're welcome. Aren't we Sean?" Sean shook his head, but Paris ignored him.

We followed the passage as it was much safer. The boy tagged along with us, and we decided to call him ‘Stranger.’ Most of the time, Stranger was busy arguing with Sean. While Paris and I were in the lead, busy glaring at the complex blueprint.

There was nothing to do past these two days besides eating sandwiches and deciphering the blueprint. Our only schedule was to sleep using our body as an indicator. We had escaped Shaft #1, 2 and 3 safely. There were people following us in shaft #2, but we distracted them. Later we figured out those people were the Elevator Shaft inhabitants. Sean took special care of the wound in Paris. Stranger and I were busy talking about our past. I told him about Brittany and Sydney. Stranger talked little about his family, which was his nephew and his elder brother. He told me that his older brother taught him how to steal and that once, he almost got caught. He also talked about how he ran away from his assassination school and was living here.

Stranger stopped. “In there! We can’t move on...”

He kicked the cover of one vent and landed smoothly on another Elevator. I followed him but stumbled instead. I got up, shrugged dust off me and picked up the pages that landed on me. We had landed on an elevator that looked like a study room. There were books and pages scattered here and there. Sean placed Paris on a chair and started reading a book.

“Sean! We need to keep moving,” I said annoyed.

“Nope, we are staying right here tonight! We can get information, you know? Also, great news, you can call your dear friend here using a phone, which is there somewhere,” He said and nodded his head outside the Elevator.

“What? Really!” I ran outside the Elevator and surveyed the area for a hidden payphone.

“You do know that he is joking, right?” Stranger explained.

“You mean...” I started and was about to go in when Stranger stopped me.

“I don’t think you want to go in there again,” he said and swung himself down the Elevator. I followed him and took in the misty cracked Elevator Shaft #4.

The Elevator Shaft walls were rough and damp. There were plenty of wires hanging on the side of the walls. This Shaft looked nothing like the previous shafts I visited. A door on one side beckoned me to step inside, so I threw open its door and went in. Stranger followed right behind me. He looked confused, then nervous.

The door creaked open, and I found myself in another office. It smelled old and dusty. There were cobwebs all around this room. I tried looking for a switch to brighten this room. Without any luck, I grabbed onto a flashlight placed on a small table. I started dusting off books and was touching dusty cups and utensils. I jumped when all of a sudden, soft music started playing. It was just Stranger.

“Sorry!” he apologized, shutting off the recorder. My flashlight shone on a portrait and it drew me in. The portrait featured a man with brunette hair and green eyes. I dropped my flashlight in shock. That man was my dad! This was my dad’s office!

Chapter 6:

Friend or Foe?

When I was little, I bragged about my firefighting father:

My father would go to heaven, because

If he went to hell he would put out all the fires.

~Jodi Picoult

It was cold and chilly that day, but I felt like I was melting away. Deeper and deeper into the darkness.

“It is nothing. You are just hallucinating?” Stranger said. I want to believe him, but there was a part of me that wanted it to be true. Is that why my mom wanted to be here? Why was she here?

“I need fresh air.” I tried the doorknob, but nothing happened! Anxiety settled in the pit of my stomach. We were locked in my dad’s office, or I think it’s my dad’s. Just great!

I settled in and started reading a few journals close to me. My hand settled on a worn diary and looked at the handwriting. Tears pooled around my eyes, but I blinked them away and concentrated on the words. As I flipped through the pages, two notes fell on the table. I picked the first one up and stared at it. I was looking at a form to sell a property. The paper said that my father owned an apartment and a ‘William Lee Gonzales’ will acquire it.

“I have another uncle,” I exclaimed to Stranger. Who was busy trying to find a way to get us out here. It was the most shocking news, as I thought I had only one uncle, Patrick’s father. I heard footsteps echoing, and by instant, I grabbed my dad’s diary and the extra note.

“Hairpin?” Stranger asked. I shook my head. I calmed myself down by taking mouthful gulps of air. I ransacked the office, trying to find something sharp, something like a hairpin. Stranger, held a hammer in his hand, which distracted me for a bit.

“I am going to kill them if they get any closer,” Stranger said.

“With that?” I asked, raising one of my eyebrows. That was an idiotic idea, and I couldn’t help by laugh at his stupidity.

He cocked an eyebrow and just said, “You’ve got a better idea?” The only idea I got was surrendering ourselves or lying about our identity.

Before I could even share my ideas, the door flung open, and a deep voice said, “Well, Well, Well! Look at what we got here.”

I immediately thought it was me he was referring to but meant it for Stranger. I panicked again and only thought about what my dad or mom would do. They both had learned self-defence.

“Who are you?” The deep voice asked, looking at me.

“Uhh, hi! My name is Stacey Patterson!” I said. A deep voice glanced my way and looked at me confused. I waited for Stranger to whip out the hammer and bang the man on his head, but he just stood there massaging his temple. I glanced at him and tried to make eye contact with the weapon he had in his hand, but he looked at me, sighed, and stared deadly at the deep-voiced man.

“It’s nice to have your sister here, Ryan.” I could now make out the man's physique. He had brown bushy eyebrows with snarling yellow teeth. I looked at the man and burst out laughing. Brown Bushy-Haired Eyebrows looked at me confused.

“Sister?” mumbled Stranger. I glanced at Str- Ryan and saw his light blue eyes bore right into me.

“Umm... You have got it confused! Do I look like his sister? Nope. This is all a mistake, so if you would please excuse us, we will get going,” I wrapped up the conversation, grasped Stranger’s arm and headed towards the door. Immediately I saw another gang and recognized them immediately. There were the Elevator Shaft Inhabitants, and before I could hide away, they saw me and started calling my real name. Before bushy brown-haired eyebrows could react, we ran fast.

Ryan dragged me behind him while I tried not to faint because of exhaustion. Ryan held onto my arm and ushered me yet inside another passageway. We had to find Paris and Sean and get out of here. As Ryan read my mind, he dropped my hand and started swinging up using elevator wires. We arrived at the elevator, just behind Ryan, when he halted to a stop. I craned my head to see what was happening. I grinned and cleared my throat. Paris and Sean stopped kissing for now and looked at us in a shy way.

"AWW..." I said.

"We have to get out of here as soon as possible," Ryan replied, looking annoyed.

"Did you know that Stranger's actual name is Ryan Patetterson!" I exclaimed. Paris gawked at him, while Sean just smiled and said, “Aha.”

Ryan grabbed both Paris and Sean and jumped down the elevator. I felt like I was flying until I hit the ground with a thud.

We ran away from the Elevator inhabitants, and the People - who - thought - I - was - Ryan’s - Sister tribe. I grabbed Paris’s hand and ran faster, begging my legs to move. All of a sudden, gunshots echoed through my ear loud. The people chasing us started shooting. Where did they get their guns?

Something sharp hit my elbow, and I looked at it. I WAS SHOT ON THE ELBOW! Pain stabbed through my whole body, making me weak, but still, I kept going. Paris held onto my hand too hard, but I didn’t complain.

The only thing I could do now was a distraction. Another bullet wheezes past my stomach. The bullet had left a scar on my hip, nothing else. I released Paris's hand and ran in the opposite direction towards the Elevator Inhabitants. I fell to my knees.

I just said, “I am Ashlynn Lee Gonzales! And... I...” I couldn’t talk. My head was spinning, “I think you will need me more than them.” The Elevator Inhabitants looked at me. The bushy-

haired eyebrows tribe shoved the Elevator Inhabitants to the ground. A smile crept on the bushy eyebrows man and yanked me up, using my bad elbow. It hurt, but I didn't wince.

"It's great to see you, my niece," the man said. Before I could understand what was happening, I was hit in the head, and I could only feel the cold Elevator Shaft floor.

Chapter 7:

The Truth

My secret is that I love you.

My failure is that I never told you.

My regret that you're gone.

~Bentley

So many secrets. So many of them. Why do we keep these secrets? Is it necessary? Secrets are told to relieve pain from your loved ones, but sometimes it hurts more.

"Niece? You do not have my permission to call me your niece," I yelled. How can an uncle lock your niece up and make you starve to death?" My uncle threw a journal at my face.

"Have fun reading it! I won't waste any more time talking to you. I need that boy, right now!" he said.

I flipped through the journal, still unsure what information beholds in this simple decayed book. Until I remembered the note was hidden in my pocket. I plucked it out and started reading through it, soaking up the words. The letter was from my dad to mom.

Dear Annabell,

I have so much to tell you. William is planning a dangerous scheme to get this apartment. He will never get it. Never! Right now, my apartment is in danger. I need to go! Say to Ashly that I love her and that I will come back soon. Anna, if I don't come back, don't ever try to find me. Do not come back to Chicago.

Your brother, Talon, will come back for you in Oakville, and the Shafters will be safe here. He has the original note, and if something terrible happens, I want to take over this apartment for me. I need you to burn the other form that was signed to my brother so that he won't get it. If that form falls into the wrong hands, the shafters will not be safe.

I love you and will be back!

Love,

Matthew.

I tried hard not to cry. It was short and sweet and amazing. Patrick's father was supposed to be the owner now, but does he know? I was still confused about some of the information, so I read the journal.

"How long have you been reading?" my uncle asked. I gave him no reply.

"You are boring me. These idiots failed me to bring the boy. Ask any questions? Anything?" my uncle happily gestured at the book.

"You killed my dad, didn't you? Where is the form? Do you have it?" I asked. My uncle was shocked.

"That was not informed in the journal, right?" Uncle asked and grabbed it.

"You were giving me false information, right? Answer me!" I demanded. I needed to know.

"If I tell you, I'd have to kill you," He replies back and swiftly snatches the journal, turning its pages.

"Kill me then!" I shot back.

"All right! If you say so. My father built this place for both of us. Because Matthew was the oldest one, he got to take control of all of this. My brother was a generous lad; he decided to give it to me instead. I liked the taste of power and waited for 25 years to get it again. But then, your father married your mom and decided he was going to be the 'owner' of this place," My uncle began.

"What happened?" I was afraid to inquire more.

"All right... My brother was fond of orphanages. I mean, that's how he met your mother. Anyways, he always used to bring in a bunch of orphanages, and my father said 'yes' every time. Some people, including me, didn't like that. You know, Chicago is meant for fame and posh, not for sad little shelter homes for nobodies."

I glared at him, confused about where this was going. "But I let that slide through because he was my beloved brother. Until then, I asked my brother to marry Annabelle, your mother. He said no and instead married me to someone else, right after my dad died. My 'wife' didn't like orphanages and hated my brother. So I asked him to send all the orphanages to a school and asked for half of the apartment. Your dad gave me all that, and I thought everything was fine until I found out about the school. Your dad was making orphanages into spies. Later, from my wife, I learned that they were setting a rebellion to get to my side of the apartment as well."

I gasped, "THAT'S NOT TRUE!"

"Yes, it is, darlin'. In the middle of the night, your father let out these spies to take over my side of the apartment, and your brother tried to kill me," My uncle stopped to let it all sink in while he brushed his eyebrows.

"That is..." I trail off. I can't believe it!

"When I tried talking to your father, he kicked me out. So, yeah. I was angry at him and I had to do it!" I tremble and scoot backwards, farther away from him.

"You killed him, didn't you? My dad would never kill you! You're a liar," According to the journal, Uncle had planned a scheme. This is not right!

"So, I told you. And tomorrow, you will die!" Uncle left me while I mulled over what had happened.

They gave me food and a bed to sleep in. I behaved, but by the end of tomorrow, I know I will be dead. I was scared!

The next morning, I sat on a chair with wires, as plain as silver, coursing around me.

"Stay still, tosser," replied a British man.

"I know!" I said to him, I waited and saw my uncle. He wore a stupendous grin and looked at me like I was sheep.

"Darlin', I have a surprise for you!" he exclaimed. I didn't want a surprise from a murderer. There standing behind him were my mother and sister.

Chapter 8:

The Final Battle

This is the price you pay

For having a great father.

You get the wonder, the joy,

The tender moments - and

You get the tears at the end, too

~Harlan Coben

"Is this a show or something?" I asked, frustrated.

“Oh, my dear...” my uncle starts.

“Don’t you dare call me your dear! I told you to kill me silently. Alone,” I barked. My uncle ignored me and looked at the person who was operating my death chair.

“You done?” he asked.

“Done!” said the British man.

“Any last words?” the uncle asked and looked at me.”

I didn't have any. The operator pressed a button, and we waited. Nothing happened. I was sitting in this electric chair, alive? I didn't feel the sting.

“It should have worked?” The operator pressed the button again. After a second, the computer and the button exploded. Misty gas filled the air, and I panicked. There were a lot of yelling and 'code red' alarms blaring. Somebody came behind me, and I elbowed in the stomach.

“Yeow! Ashlynne...” said Ryan.

“Sorry. You're here?” I asked.

“Of course, now come on!” Ryan said.

"I... I heard you tried to kill him," I said, pointing at my uncle.

"What!? Whoever told you that," Ryan pulled me away from the chaos. Fire ate through everything in its path. I found wires and started climbing.

"Uncle said that you went to a spy school and joined with my father to steal uncle's property. He even said that you tried to kill him," I said, trying to concentrate on getting my footing right.

"Who said that to you? It was actually the opposite. Your uncle was the one who stripped the apartment from us. And I wasn't killing him; I was protecting myself," Ryan huffed and continued again.

"Your uncle is a liar!" The smoke was making my eyes blurry, and I was coughing drily.

"That's what I..."

“Ashlynne!” I saw my mom catching up to me. I grabbed onto her arm and dragged her towards me.

"Mom, uncle killed father because of some stupid property!" I stated, tears coating my eyes.

"Well, not just that," Ryan blurted out, then looked at my mom in confirmation. My mom nodded.

"Well, I didn't know how it happened, but William fell in love with me while I was in love with your father. But Matthew didn't know his brother liked me, so he decided to marry him to my sister. I didn't know either, and your uncle accepted it. Until I figured it out, this was all a part of his plan of getting me and the property. But, my sister loved William and married him. Because of that, your uncle turned cold, but slowly my sister changed him," I interrupted my mother.

"But he didn't change?"

"Yes. Emmeline, my sister, thought of building a school for the orphanages but William planned an upheaval and decided to make the orphanages killing machines. Emmeline figured this out and threatened to kill him. She wasn't going to kill him, exactly, but all the same, William, who was now enraged, killed her. The exact time your father came in. He promised himself never to give this apartment to William."

"Because he was enraged, he tried to kill my father..."

"He did after dad, and I hid away from William for a while. I think he..." Mom looked away and sighed.

Paris walked towards us, and I smiled at her. "Where is Brittany?" I asked.

"Oh, I took her out of here as soon as possible," Paris looked at the fire and frowned.

"Do me a favour and keep mother safe," I gently nudged my mother to her.

"Sure, come on, Mrs.Gonzales. What about you?" I shook my head while Paris took my mother in hand.

"Yeah, what are you doing here? Go on with your mother," He tries shooing me away, but I resist.

"I'm here to end my uncle. That's the end of this conversation. Go," Paris took mom away in cue, but Ryan still stood there, his hands crossed on his chest.

"I'll take over that. GO!" Ryan now drags me towards the shadow, smoke covering every part of the shaft.

"No, You go! I need to end this, Ryan. He killed my father," What else should I do to get him to leave me alone.

"Ashlynn... never mind," he said, and I looked at him.

“What is it? Don't you dare say the same thing again and again,” Before, I could yell at him. He held my face and solemnly said, “Stay Safe!”.

Ryan grabbed onto a journal from his jeans pocket and handed it to me, "You will get answers in this book. Everything you wanted to know about your father is in here," he bent forward and kissed me and then abruptly left me there.

I was still processing what just happened when I woke up from my trance when I heard my uncle yelling. I ran towards the sound and saw him, his body was below a big elevator wall crashing into him, but miraculously he was alive.

"Niece, get me out of here! You don't want your uncle to die!" I glanced at the fire close to devouring him and started to move back. This was a better way to kill him.

"Darlin', show mercy to your uncle. Come here and lift this piece of..."

"Sorry, uncle. But I have to go. I have to say my dad shouldn't have let you live like this at all. He should have killed you when he had the chance." I ran away from there. I ran near the shadow and looked and turned to look at my uncle. The majestic fire roared in the shaft and swallowed my uncle up. I ran inside the shadow, and someone dragged me inside a vent.

My sister crushed me into a hug and then let me go for a bit. Paris and Sean crawled away somewhere else while my mother crawled towards us.

"Here," she said, and I followed her towards the exit, I think. We hopped down on an elevator and walked outside its open door. Cars were parked everywhere. Immediately, I remembered something and walked back into the elevator. Paris and Sean shoved me away, instead of letting me through.

"Don't go there, Ashlynne. Fire, remember."

"But, Ryan?" I asked. He needs to be out. He is out.

"I... uh..." Sean stammered, "We couldn't see him."

"What do you mean by that? He is alive. I'm sure of it. Let me through," I begin pushing my way in.

"Ryan didn't come out of there, Ashlynne. So..."

"He is not dead, Paris!" I exclaimed. He couldn't. He needed to be here. He needed to tell me everything about my father. I tried forcing my way into the vent but was unsuccessful. Once I had given up, I started crying. I don't know how long though, but it seems to be for ages until my mother comes by. She didn't do anything by sitting beside me.

“Hi, mom!” I said, wiping my tears furiously.

“Ashlynnne, we're leaving! I know how you must be feeling, and I'm so sorry," She hands me her phone and gives me some time for myself. Also, Paris wants to talk to you..." I looked at the phone and looked at the notification bar. There were 47 text messages and 100 missed calls from Sydney a week ago.

I grabbed onto Ryan's journal and sighed. Without thinking, I flipped open the old dried book. A picture falls off from the journal. The photo illustrated me talking on the phone while I relaxed on the sun chair. I looked through the text and found the image Sydney sent. It was him! Ryan was the 'Mystery Man'. The boy I was trying to find all this time was there with me all this time. I burst out laughing, tears still streaked on my cheeks. Sydney had drawn him well; he looked exactly like Ryan. She was a great artist, all right. I looked at Ryan's journal and held it in my hands like it was money. This book was worth more than diamonds, in my case, as this would fill in all the gaps I wanted to know.

For me, Ryan is alive. He might not be physically next to me, but he is always here in my heart.