



My shoes aren't a dusty brown; they're actually black. Dust from the dirt road I walked along, while also trying to drag my suitcases behind me without them toppling off of their wheels, was the reason for the color. A backpack was strapped tightly around my chest. So, with its weight, trying to drag two suitcases, and walking along a dirt road that some municipality forgot to pave, it wasn't the best day of my life.

They were new kicks my mom bought for me when we were stuck in Tuscaloosa. The shoes, I mean. A few months before, the alternator went out in her car as we were driving from Atlanta to New Orleans, and Tuscaloosa, unfortunately, was where it happened. Not that Tuscaloosa—or Alabama itself—is all that bad, but it's not a place where you want to find yourself stuck. Especially when none of the mechanics in the entire town can get the specific part needed for your mom's car in less than four days. Also, when all your mom can afford is to get a room at a motel just off the interstate and pay for sparse meals created from what she bought in a vending machine, it's not what you might think of as a glamorous situation.

Now that I think about it, my mom might have lifted the shoes from a store. She said she bought them for me, though.

Not that traveling with my mom couldn't be exciting, or even glamorous, at times. It's just that Tuscaloosa, staying in a roach-infested motel for a week

and living off of snack cakes and beef jerky the entire time isn't ideal. We'd certainly had better times, traveling together. Like, one time, when we were in Savannah, and my mom was performing in this big theatre there, she met some guy who owned a hotel. Within minutes, my mom had convinced the hotel-owner-guy to put us up in one of his best suites for the entire three months we were in town. We'd even get free room service from time to time.

That place had the best hash browns and sausages at breakfast. Lots of cheese and grilled onions for the hash browns. The sausages were always crispy on the outside and soft inside—fried to heart attack perfection.

Like all things with my mom, the Savannah hotel suite was only temporary. Three months later, the job was over, the hotel owner realized my mom wasn't looking to settle down—not that she could if she wanted—and we were back in the car after mom placed a few phone calls.

My mom is an actress. Not one you've ever heard of, though. Well, I guess she's more than an actress since she'll do almost any job necessary to keep us in gas, food, and lodging. And sometimes a new pair of kicks. Mostly, she chases jobs across America. A play in a theatre here. A commercial shoot near the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana there. Voice-over work that has to be done in a sound booth in L.A. Circus lost their magician's assistant? Call my mom! If she's not busy, we'll be there as soon as possible. Do you need a blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman who looks closer to twenty-five than her actual forty years of age to do your boat show? Call my mom!

She's kind of a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to acting jobs. No job is too big or too small, though most of them are pretty small. One time, she did puppet shows at a theme park in the Ozarks for not much more than minimum wage. That's called "scale," apparently. That job wasn't so bad, though. For me, I mean. Mom hated it, but we got to stay in a decent motel that provided fresh towels each morning, had cable, air conditioning, and a swimming pool that was actually kept clean. And it was all free. The owner of the theme park also owned the hotel, so mom was able to charm him into free accommodations as well.

That's another thing my mom can do well. Charm people. Especially men.

Almost every guy in America who owns a theatre, production company, hotel, or any place to perform, has had me call him "Uncle so-and-so."

I'm not stupid. I'm sixteen. I know these men aren't my uncles and I know my mom doesn't give a damn about any of them. Well, maybe she likes them all well enough, I guess, but she likes what they can do for her more. If a man can provide a job, someplace to live—especially for free—or a decent meal, my mom can like him.

I'm probably not making my mom sound great.

But since she was the reason that my new—well, newish—kicks were dusty brown instead of black, my back was hurting, and my suitcases kept bumping violently into my knees, I didn't really care. That was kind of my mom's M.O.

Not considering how her decisions affect me, I mean. Gotta make my son live off of junk food out of a vending machine for a week? Sure. What's that hurt?

There was a time we had to pack up in the middle of the night and leave our motel in Chattanooga because she had pissed off her boss at a theatre.

Another time, she made me hide lunch meat inside of my coat at the convenience store down the street from our motel in Memphis because all we could afford was bread. And it's hard to make a good sandwich out of just bread.

More than once she's forced me to busk when she couldn't find a job—and I can only play, like, three songs. I can't even sing all that well. And she'd never get the permits for busking when they were required.

Run like hell if you see the cops, she'd say.

I've run like hell a lot.

It's hard to scoop up a coffee can full of coins and loose bills, a guitar, and run from the police, let me tell you. But I've managed every time.

I've been running like hell since I was probably, like, twelve years old, I guess? Twelve was when my mom thought I was old enough to be dropped off somewhere to busk on my own while she went out looking for jobs or made calls about jobs. She'd drop me off somewhere and tell me she'd pick me up at a specific time. In case I had to run from the authorities, she'd give me a "rendezvous point" where she would look for me if I wasn't at the busking site. She said if I wasn't at the busking site, and I wasn't waiting at the "rendezvous point," she'd call the police station to see if I'd been picked up. She never explained what she'd do to get me out since it was rare that we had enough money to pay fines. And, I mean, would they have even taken me to jail when I was that young? Do kids get taken to Big Boy Jail or somewhere else?

It's the twenty-first century. Surely, Child Protective Services would have been called, right?

Fortunately, and somehow, miraculously, we'd never had to find out what happens to twelve-year-old boys whose mothers dump them on a street corner with a guitar and an empty coffee can.

Being dropped off is exactly why my shoes weren't looking new as I dragged my suitcases along behind me on the dirt road and they wobbled on their wheels with each minuscule bump they encountered.

Two-Mile Trail.

That's what the sign off of the highway proclaimed the name of the dirt road to be. It was just some old trail, though. A couple of cars could pass by each

other on the dirt road—but just barely. As I mentioned, the road wasn't paved, and it wasn't in the best condition, so I couldn't imagine anyone would want to drive on it. Especially if their car was new. Or *newish*. Like my shoes. They'd just end up with a different colored car and possibly a flat tire. If it was raining, forget about it. Two-Mile Trail had to be a mudhole when it rained. Any normal car would probably get stuck quickly and easily. And good luck getting someone who knew where the hell Two-Mile Trail was to come tow you out.

I couldn't help but think that there had to be a better way from the highway into town than Two-Mile Trail. Surely, there had to be a paved road on the north side of town. Or the west. Something besides Two-Mile Trail that would lead into Possibly.

That's where I was headed on foot—instead of in my mom's car—Possibly, Texas. We had left our motel in Dallas when the sun was just starting to come up. Mom hadn't had the money for a proper breakfast—like an Egg McMuffin or something—because she said she needed all the money she had for gas. The motel didn't even have a continental breakfast—not even cereal or muffins. So, breakfast had been a fun-size bag of Doritos I'd found in the backseat of the car, and a candy bar and an orange soda I'd managed to lift from the gas station we'd stopped at in Bowie. Since it had been lunchtime, and I had been walking along Two-Mile Trail, my stomach got super pissed at me. My head wasn't too happy, either.

It was the sugar crash.

The fact that it was June—in Texas—and I was walking along a dirt road, dragging two suitcases, sweating like a sinner in church, probably didn't help either. Between the heat and my body wanting some real food, it was no wonder I felt like crap. Furthermore, the fact that the road I was lugging my suitcases along should have been called Twelve-Mile Road, made things worse. Of course, if my mom hadn't been such an inconsiderate jerk, none of that would have mattered.

When she had seen the sign off of the highway, which we flew by in the car, she had hit the brakes, done a uey, and she eased up parallel to the mouth of the road. We sat there for several moments, eyeing the dirt road proclaiming to be Two-Mile Trail, and I found myself wondering why mom wasn't turning the car down the road that would take us into Possibly.

It doesn't look like an easy drive. My mom had muttered. But Jack said it would get you to town.

Again, I found myself waiting for mom to turn the car down the dirt road.

It's only two miles... She had said finally.

The next thing I knew, I was standing on the side of the highway, my backpack strapped on, and my two suitcases standing up beside me.

It won't be a long walk. You've walked further. Just follow the road and—BOOM—you're in Possibly, Jordy. She had announced brightly through the car window.

Jordy.

My name is Jordan. Mom calls me “*Jordy.*”

I hate it.

But I hated it more when she insisted that I walk from the highway into Possibly—all through the freaking window of the car—and then drove off happily, waving as she left me there on the side of the road. That's my mom. Leaving a sixteen-year-old on the side of the highway with his backpack and two suitcases on wheels to walk two miles down a dirt road so that she can get to Vegas quicker. I guess that's all you need to know about her. That, and the actress thing.

When I had started walking along Two-Mile Trail, mostly dry, grassy fields rolled outwards from each side of the road. After what I guessed was the first mile of the trail, trees and lush green grass started to appear. When the trees and green grass appeared, somehow, the walk became less miserable. The trees weren't close enough to the road to provide any shade, but they somehow made it seem a little less sweltering on the road. After a few minutes of having trees and lush grass as my view, I started to hear music off in the distance. Well, something that sounded like music. It was kind of indiscernible.

There was something familiar about it, though, and that's why I thought it was music. It sounded like a song I'd heard before. However, ahead of me was a bend in the road, and all I could see was trees. I couldn't tell where the sound was coming from or why someone was playing music out in the middle of nowhere.

Even in the middle of the day, it was kind of creepy. I mean, who goes out to the middle of nowhere, on some dirt road, to play music?

My steps became slower and shorter and my hands clutched my suitcase handles tighter as I made my way toward the bend in the road. What would I possibly do if I rounded the bend and found some banjo-picking weirdo sitting on the tailgate of his pickup truck, half of his teeth missing, and a smirk on his face? I mean, I could've run like hell—which, we've established, I can do well—but I would've had to dump my suitcases. Besides my backpack, they held everything I owned. Back the way I came on Two-Mile Trail was the only direction I could've run unless I wanted to venture into the trees. I didn't know the woods. I could've easily gotten lost. A country bumpkin—probably with fewer teeth than brain cells—a banjo, and a pickup truck, probably knew the woods well. He would've easily caught me. I would have been tied up in a cellar in no time.

Having walked down a dirt road to some tiny town in the middle of nowhere would've been the least of my problems then.

Some guy wanting to make you his teenage bride and then use your skin to make an area rug is definitely the worst way the day could have ended. I had thought to myself.

As I drew closer to the bend that cut through the trees to the left, or a westerly direction, the sound grew louder and clearer. It was a country song—I *thought*—that sounded familiar. Of course, it easily could have been a song playing on a truck radio. *The truck radio of the country bumpkin with missing teeth.* Even though the sound was familiar, and most likely a song being played, it didn't comfort me much. Sure, the sun was out, and it wasn't like I couldn't run away if I found myself in a dangerous situation, but being out in the middle of nowhere by myself, the song was just eerie. Who would be playing a song out in the sticks? Since I'd walked away from the highway, I hadn't seen a single sign of civilization, so hearing a country song playing out in the woods was odd.

My fingers tightened around my suitcase handles as I continued my sweaty march along the road, determined to make my way around the bend. If some weirdo jumped out of the trees, I'd swing one of my suitcases at him. My suitcases contained everything I owned. Having one or both knocked up against your head would knock someone out.

But this is Texas, Jordan. What if the weirdo has a gun?

My heart began thundering in my throat as I followed the road along its curve, wondering what I'd find coming into view. When I had turned along the bend in the road, the sound became clearer, no longer blocked by the trees. I had been right. The song was familiar. I'd heard it a million times when we were in places like Nashville and Memphis—where country, bluegrass, and all things Americana reigned. It was *Then I'd Be Satisfied with My Life* by Tiny Tim.

There wasn't some weirdo sitting in a beat-up pickup truck playing the song on his stereo, though. No weirdos were in sight, actually. Along the right side of the road, my eyes landed on a waist-high pole sticking out of the ground, a speaker attached to the top of it. The song was coming from the speaker on the pole. The sight made me falter a bit, but when I looked further up the road, my eyes landed on a river...actually, more of a creek. A wooden bridge, just wide enough for one car to cross at a time, spanned the width of the creek. Just beyond sat Possibly, Texas. Having walked down the dirt road with nothing but trees and grass to look at for the last several minutes, the sudden appearance of the town out of nowhere was unnerving. Everything looked normal, though. Well, as normal as small-town Texas can.

Sensing that I wasn't in danger as I had imagined, I loosened my grip on my suitcase handles and my knuckles sighed with relief. Approaching the radio

on the pole, I still felt uneasy—because who sticks a radio on a pole on the side of the road just outside of town—but with the town in view, I easily swallowed my concerns. At least what passed for civilization in the buttcrack of Texas was just over the bridge. I could probably scream for help if I did find myself in danger. Tiny Tim crooned a final time about being “satisfied with life” and the music faded from the radio as I stood at the side of the road, suitcases in hand, staring across the creek at Possibly. When a voice poured from the speaker, I nearly came out of my skin. My fingers jerked and both of my suitcases tipped over, sending clouds of dirt billowing up from the road where they landed.

“You’ve been listening to AMOR, the most popular radio station in Possibly, Texas. All day long from 6 am to 6 pm.” The gravelly male voice announced.

Ah. It’s a local radio station. I chuckled nervously to myself as I knelt to pull my suitcases out of the dirt once again.

“That was Then I’d Be Satisfied with My Life by Tiny Tim. Next up—Then I’d Be Satisfied with My Life by Tiny Tim!”

I rose, suitcase handles gripped tightly, my eyes locked on the speaker. Surely, the man hadn’t announced that he was going to play the same song they had just played. *Right?* And 6 am to 6 pm is not all day long. *Right?*

Tiny Tim’s voice poured from the speaker, warning people to never hit their grandmas with a shovel, proving that the radio DJ hadn’t been lying about his intentions. For obvious reasons, I couldn’t get my feet to move for several moments.

“What in the crap?” I mumbled out loud as I stared at the speaker.

I’m not sure how long Tiny Tim’s *Then I’d Be Satisfied with My Life* is, but that’s how long I stood there, gripping my suitcases, sweating, and staring at the speaker. Once again, the song faded away, and the radio DJ’s voice replaced it.

“You’ve been listening to AMOR, the most popular radio station in Possibly, Texas. All day long from 6 am to 6 pm,” he said.

I waited.

“That was Then I’d Be Satisfied with My Life by Tiny Tim. Next up—Then I’d Be Satisfied with My Life by Tiny Tim.”

Even with Possibly just down the road and over the bridge, clearly in eyesight, my feet didn’t want to move at first. What the heck was going on with the radio station? Playing the same song three times in a row? And not even a recent, popular hit. Tiny Tim was their choice to play three times in a row. That was just odd.

Welcome to Texas. I thought to myself.

“Ooooookay.” I rolled my shoulders.

Apparently, AMOR in Possibly, Texas had a limited number of songs to choose from each day. Instead of contemplating what was wrong with the people

over at the radio station, why they put radios on poles, and why they had chosen Tiny Tim of all artists to play, I commanded my aching feet into motion once again. Even though I had newish shoes and the walk into Possibly hadn't been that far, my dogs were barking. I just wanted to sit back and kick my feet up—preferably after kicking my shoes off. Of course, just getting to Possibly was one part of the problem. Finding the right house in town was the other part. For all I knew, I would soon be living under the wooden bridge I had to cross to get into town.

My feet carried me along the last stretch of the dirt road toward the bridge as my mother's words rang in my head. *Jack's house is to the northwest of the town square. Look for the graveyard and then head left. You'll find it. If you start seeing housing developments, you've gone too far. He's in Possibly proper. You can't miss it. I love you forever! Bye, Jordy!* That was when she started waving out of the car window as she drove away down the highway. Vegas—and getting there in a timely manner—was more important to her than making sure I got to Possibly alive and well.

Okay. So, walking through a small town in Texas in the middle of the day is probably one of the safest things you can do. As long as you don't look too liberal or anything. But I hadn't been in Possibly since I was a little kid. I couldn't even really remember the place. I didn't know the layout of the streets, where anything was, or any of the people. I didn't even really know Jack. Finding his house—and kind of meeting Jack all over again—was going to be odd. What was I going to say to the guy? I mean, communicating with him was difficult as it was, but we were virtually strangers. And I was expected to march up to his front door and say: *“Hey, it's me. Jordan. Mom said I should come stay with you because I'm cramping her style or something? Got an extra bed?”*

The further I walked away from the speaker on the side of the road, the quieter I expected Tiny Tim's voice to get. It should have faded off into the distance, yet it seemed to get louder the closer I got to the wooden bridge that spanned the width of the creek. At first, I thought I had to be going crazy. First, the phantom music that I heard along Two-Mile Trail, then the odd speaker-radio-thingie on the pole on the side of the road, then the music was getting louder the further I got away from the speaker. Possibly, Texas—as my mom had warned me—was...*odd*. She didn't exactly elaborate on what she meant by “odd”—I mean, she didn't mention any people with horns growing out of their heads or who carried around wolverines as pets—but there had been a look in her eye when she had said it.

The music grew louder, and I grew closer to the bridge, and it finally dawned on me that the town sign was staked into the side of the road a few yards before the creek. When I approached it, still dragging my suitcases behind me, I

realized why the music had not faded away. Another speaker was attached to the lower third of the pole that held the town sign. The fact that there might be poles with speakers attached to them throughout town, playing the local radio station, suddenly dawned on me. I didn't know if that was creepy or charming.

I let my eyes move from the speaker up to the sign.

Possibly, Texas. Pop. 752.

So...a small town. *Miniscule.*

Also, the town name "Possibly" and the state name "Texas" were on two different arrow-shaped, wooden signs. One was pointing to the left; one was pointed to the right. Neither pointed towards town. Both looked as though the wood had seen better days, but the names looked like they had been painted recently. Obviously, sign upkeep was of paramount importance in Possibly. I found myself imagining that one of the seven-hundred-fifty-two people in town was on sign duty, going around and making sure the paint was fresh. That's how new the paint looked. It was also obvious that the signs had been painted by hand, so I imagined my suspicions about a town sign painter were not that far off from the truth.

Why is one sign pointing one way and one pointing the other?

Just as I began to contemplate the mysteries of sign design in Possibly, movement by the bridge caught my eye. I turned to find a man—well, maybe a teenager, since he didn't look much older than me—walking across the bridge from Possibly, in my direction. He wasn't looking at me. His eyes were down as his feet *clop-clopped* on the wooden boards beneath his feet. He looked...*forlorn?*

Watching as he traveled across the bridge, I wondered if he was going to walk along Two-Mile Trail to the highway. Maybe his mom was waiting to pick him up? Mine dropped me off on the highway, so maybe his mom was the type to pick him up on the highway? However, my thoughts were interrupted by the sight of him stopping halfway across the bridge. He placed his hands upon the railing along the side, then he hoisted himself, climbing the handrail until he was standing upon it precariously. The wooden rail was just wide enough for a man to stand upon, but not for long. No one could keep their balance that well outside of a circus.

I watched in horror as the teenager threw his arms out wide and looked up at the sky. A moan-like scream poured forth from his mouth:

"Emmmmmmmiiiiiiiiily!"

Then he was falling off of the bridge and into the creek below.

I gasped in horror and ran toward the bridge, the suitcases bumping and jolting on the road behind me. They weren't rolling so much as bouncing along behind me. My feet made *clop-clop* sounds on the wooden planks as I raced

across it and to the side from where the guy had leapt. I let go of my suitcases' handles and put my hands on the rail, looking over to the creek below.

He's probably dead. I thought frantically. *There's no way the water is deep enough. He probably cracked his freaking skull open and is floating on the water, bloody and dead!*

Over the side of the bridge, I did find the teenager floating, but he looked fine. He was swirling his arms at his sides, his legs kicking to help tread water. He was simply...*floating*. He wasn't dead or hurt. At least not physically.

I watched as the teenager pursed his lips and a plume of water shot out of his mouth like a fountain, arcing into the air above him, before losing its game with gravity and splattering back onto the guy's chest. The teenager continued to paddle his arms and legs as he floated there, fully dressed, his eyes closed, as the sun beat down on him lazily.

What the crap is his problem?

"Are you okay?" I braced myself against the handrail so I could lean over and shout down at the teenager, a mere ten feet below.

"Fine." Came his response.

"Did you hurt yourself?" I shouted again.

"Fine," he said. "Just need to think."

For a few moments, I considered asking the teenager what his freaking problem was—why he had flung himself off of a bridge into the creek below. Did he have any common sense? Did he need help? Did he need someone to talk to? Should I call an ambulance? Instead, I found myself deciding to let the teenager have a moment to himself. Obviously, the dude was going through...*something*.

"Uh, okay," I responded. "Uh, hope, uh, you're okay and stuff?"

"Fine," he said.

That annoyed me. Tiny Tim was singing about being satisfied with life, my suitcases were laying in a dirty heap on the bridge, my feet ached, the sun was sweltering, and this guy was looney tunes. Like, Bugs Bunny taking a wrong turn at Albuquerque crazy.

I watched for a few more moments as the guy floated on his back, treading water with lazy kicks from his legs and flaps from his arms, fully clothed, and completely insane.

Who the crap is Emily? Isn't that what he screamed before he jumped off of the bridge like a freak?

Contemplating what would make some weirdo throw himself off a bridge—which I quickly determined was over enough water and not high enough that anyone could harm themselves—was pointless. I reminded myself that I was in the panhandle of Texas. Weird stuff was bound to happen. If I looked up and

saw an opossum driving a Big Wheel over the bridge, sipping a bottle of malt liquor, I wouldn't have been surprised.

Finally, I pried my eyes from the teenager floating in the creek and knelt to snatch at the handles of my suitcases. Moments later, my now dusty brown shoes, and the wheels of the suitcases, were *clop-clopping* over the other half of the bridge. I found myself mightily annoyed already with Possibly, Texas. The sound of my shoes and the wheels on the wood slats, the weirdo who leapt off of the bridge and scared the crap out of me, the dirt road that probably ruined my shoes, and Tiny Tim's high-pitched voice, were giving me a headache. Of course, some of that was still probably attributable to the heat and the sun beating down on me.

Hopefully, Jack will have indoor plumbing so I can have a glass of water—if that's not too much to ask for in Possibly.

When I reached the other side of the bridge, finding that the roads in Possibly, though narrow, were paved, made me feel a little less grumpy. At least the wheels of my suitcases could perform their job. Everything else that I found on the other side of the bridge made me feel...*confused*. From the other side of the bridge, I was pretty sure I could see most of downtown Possibly, and what I saw was odd.

To my right stood an old two-story clapboard house, painted teal, with red shutters affixed to its windows. However, it wasn't a house. The sign out front proclaimed it to be the post office. To my left, further down a street that curved off of the one I was on, was a gas station. But I didn't see any cars. Or employees. Straight ahead sat an honest-to-freaking-goodness pirate ship. The Jolly Roger even sailed from a mast that reached for the sky above it. A glance let me know that the ship had been converted into a shop of some kind, and a few people walked in and out as I stood there, staring like a simpleton.

Further on, just down the street from the pirate ship, was what looked like a mosque or holy temple of some kind. On the other side of the street sat two identical buildings, that could have been homes or businesses, as well as what looked like a very small reddish-orange circus tent. At the end of the street that the post office, pirate ship, and mosque were on was a street that ran perpendicular to it. Four simple-looking, one-story houses lined that street, though I wasn't sure if they were homes or businesses. If I squinted a bit, I could see that on the street behind the one with the pirate ship there were other businesses and what looked like...*train tracks*? Off to my right, and much further down the creek, I could see a big red barn. I assumed that was simply a barn, but this was Possibly, Texas. Maybe it was a church?

I didn't see a graveyard. That's what mom told me to look for when I got to Possibly. Scanning the town around me, I couldn't imagine that I had missed it.

There wasn't all that much to see in the downtown area of Possibly, after all. My aching feet told my brain to just ask the first person I saw if they knew where the graveyard was in town. It would be a lot quicker than walking around like an idiot until I just happened to stumble upon it.

My hands clutched the suitcase handles firmly and I marched towards the pirate ship. Hopefully, whichever person I found to ask actually lived in town and wasn't just visiting. Then again, from what I could see, I couldn't imagine anyone visited Possibly unless forced. Like a teenager whose mother dropped him off on the highway and said: "*Good luck!*" I mean, essentially.

As I approached the massive pirate ship, plunked down in the center of town, I realized a swinging glass door was set in the side of the hull. A sign over it proclaimed the establishment to be *Starbuck's*. Not Starbucks, but *Starbuck's*. From the smells wafting out of the place, I could tell that the pirate ship was a coffee shop. The other thing that immediately got my attention was the man—or what I assumed was a man—standing to the side of the entrance in a green-screen suit. Like the kind used to do special effects in movies. The suit covered every inch of his body, including his face and his head, but certain *things*—around the waist area—led me to believe the person in the suit was male.

"Hey," I said as I approached, "can you tell me—"

"You can't see me." The man cut me off.

"What?"

"I'm invisible today," he said. "I'm part of the hull."

"You're part of the—"

"Shhhh!" He hissed. "Hulls can't talk. Maybe waves slapping against them make some noise or something, but they can't *talk*."

I just stood there, dumbfounded.

"Crap." The man groaned.

Then he was reaching up and snatching off the green hood that covered his head. Golden curls and the sun-tanned, freckled skin of a guy not much older than me appeared.

"I ruined it, didn't I?" He asked as golden flecks in his brown eyes sparkled in the sun. "I shouldn't have said anything, right? If you're being a hull, you're a hull. Hulls don't talk. I talked. I'm hopeless, man."

"Wh-what?" I stammered.

"If you're going to be a hull, you *have to be* the hull, right?" He explained. "Everyone always tells me, '*Levi Lee, you have to commit. If you can't commit, don't bother!*' And here I am talking to you."

"I'm sorry?" I giggled nervously. "What is going on?"

The man—Levi Lee—frowned at me for a second, his eyes wandering over me before landing on my suitcases.

“Oh!” He jumped suddenly, a smile splitting his face. “You’re not from here, are you?”

“No?”

His chest bowed out proudly. “Levi Lee, my good man. Performance artist and all-around handyman.”

His hand shot out. Against my better judgment, I reached out and took it.

“That explains nothing, but nice to meet you,” I murmured. “Levi Lee?”

“That’s me,” he said proudly once more. “Now, the specials today are Café Mochas and Red Eyes. Personally, I’d stick with the mochas. Chocolate hides a lot of sin and coffee tastes like sin to me. Of course, I probably shouldn’t say that to a paying customer, but—”

“Look, Levi Lee?”

“Yes?” He smiled brightly.

I didn’t get a chance to ask my question. A gunshot rang out nearby and my instincts kicked in; I dropped my suitcases and got low, throwing my arms around my head to protect it. When I looked up at Levi Lee, he was just staring at me quizzically, the lime green hood clutched in both hands in front of him. *I prayed he would hold it a little lower to cover...things.*

“What is going on?” I barked.

“What?”

“The gunshot?” I asked frantically, glancing up and down the street as I crouched in front of the coffee shop next to him.

“Oh.” Levi Lee chuckled. “That’s Wyatt.”

He gestured vaguely toward the end of the street in the direction of the mosque-like building. I uncovered my head just enough to glance around Levi Lee’s body in the direction he had indicated. A man, dressed like Yosemite Sam—blue jeans, chaps, plaid long-sleeve shirt, a ten-gallon hat, with a handlebar mustache to boot—was strolling up the street toward us, gun in hand. It was hard to tell at such a distance, but it even looked like the gun was a six-shooter.

“His timing’s all off,” Levi Lee said, as though this explained everything. “You’ll get used to it.”

“What?” I looked up incredulously.

“He had a stroke a few years back.” Levi Lee gestured for me to rise, and I slowly obeyed, using the Hull of the ship to brace myself since my knees felt like jelly. “His timing is off but he’s harmless.”

I watched cautiously, keeping Levi Lee between myself and Wyatt as the weird man marched down the street, swinging his gun. He passed within a few feet of us, paying us no mind, then turned on the road that went down towards the gas station.

“Don’t go buying any candy, Wyatt!” Levi Lee hollered, making me jump. “You know it gets you all riled up!”

The crazy man with a gun and *no timing*—raised a hand in the air, a single finger rising to respond to Levi Lee’s demand. Levi Lee laughed.

“Grandy won’t sell him any candy anyway.” Levi Lee waved a hand in Wyatt’s direction.

“I’m pretty sure I’d give a guy with a gun anything he asked for,” I muttered.

“He’s harmless.” Levi Lee repeated.

Obviously, I was in a town full of crazy people. People who jumped off of bridges into creeks after screaming some girl’s name. Guys who did performance art in green-screen suits outside of a coffee shop that looked like a pirate ship. Men who felt shooting a gun randomly was a perfectly okay thing to do. And then there was the radio station DJ who really, really, *really* loved Tiny Tim. I could still hear the song playing, but it seemed to be coming from multiple directions. My theory about several speakers littered throughout the town had been correct.

Where is Jack’s place?

“Levi...Lee?” I asked.

“Yes, my good man?” He beamed.

“I’m looking for a graveyard.”

“You don’t look like you need a graveyard yet.” He quipped. “You’ve still got plenty of years left in you, I’d think. If you want ‘em.”

I paused. “Right. Yeah. The graveyard is supposedly close to a house I’m trying to find.”

“A marker!”

“What?”

“A landmark.” Levi Lee expounded. “One of the steps on your journey!”

“Sure. Yeah. Okay.” I agreed to avoid further discussion. “A landmark. I need to find the graveyard.”

“Well, it’s never in my interest to keep a man from his quest,” Levi Lee said importantly. “Bend of the Road Graveyard is just over there. Just beyond AMOR.”

AMOR? AMOR!

“The radio station?” I asked, looking in the direction Levi Lee was pointing. “That green building between the two yellow buildings?”

“Precisely!” Levi Lee agreed. “Just walk through the trees there. You’ll see the tram—”

Ah. They’re tram tracks. A tram? In Possibly?

“—and keep walking past the buildings. Behind AMOR, you’ll find Bend of the Road Graveyard.”

“Thanks.” I reached down to grab the suitcase handles. “Thanks a lot.”

Levi Lee bent at the waist, performing a grand bow.

“Anything for a fellow searcher and traveler,” He stated grandly.

I looked at him, my eyes darting to his waist area again.

“Maybe a pair of shorts to complete the outfit?” I suggested as I walked away.

Levi Lee glanced down for a moment, shrugged, and then he was sliding the lime green hood back over his head. When I made my way around Starbuck’s, and through the copse of trees, I found the tram tracks. I stopped for a moment, looking at the wood and iron tracks in front of me. A glance to the left and then to the right let me know that the tracks were no more than forty yards long. They started near the end of the street and ended near the creek. Which was where the tram was sitting. Squinting a bit, I could see what I guessed was a conductor sitting at the front of the tram, reading a book, his legs kicked up. The tram itself was not much more than a small train that one might find at an amusement park that kids rode for a few tickets.

Why does Possibly, Texas need a tram? Especially one that traveled along a single street that was no more than half a football field long?

The sound of metal against stone jerked me to attention once again, pushing all thoughts of the tram from my mind. My eyes darted around, looking for the source of the noise. Since the street wasn’t that long, I quickly found the person making the noise. Some guy, dressed in a plaid long-sleeve shirt, bib overalls, work boots, and a straw hat, was taking a pickaxe to the middle of the street. I nearly shouted out, wanting to ask the man if he was allowed to be tearing up the town’s roads, but then my eyes landed on the police officer, dressed in his uniform blues, leaning against one of the front walls of one of the businesses. He was watching the man with the pickaxe, not concerned in the slightest.

If he doesn’t care, then I don’t care. I thought to myself.

Upon closer inspection of the man with the pickaxe, I saw that he was tearing up a part of the road that was much different than the far left and far right ends. Different colored bricks had been placed in the paved road in front of the businesses. Reds, blues, greens, oranges, yellows, purples, pinks—all the colors of the rainbow.

Is this man installing rainbow-colored bricks in the freaking middle of the street?

As I stood there, my hands still gripping my suitcase handles, the cop’s eyes landed on me from across the road, and he smiled. He reached up and gave me a friendly wave. Anxiously, I let go of one of the suitcases’ handles and waved back. When the officer’s attention went back to the man with the pickaxe, I

grabbed the suitcase handle and hurried across the road. Within moments, I was passing between AMOR and whatever business was to the left of it.

A few seconds later, I was on a street behind the businesses, and there was the graveyard. Although, it wasn't much of a graveyard. One, there wasn't a church nearby—which is what makes a place of burial a graveyard instead of a cemetery. Two, there were maybe ten headstones—or less—and two weeping willows. Additionally, the “graveyard” was just a patch of land between paved roads. It looked like the town had sprung up around it and the roads laid so that they didn't interfere with the dead.

At least I found the graveyard. I thought to myself. I have to be close to Jack's place.

I walked across the road to the graveyard and turned to the left as my mom had instructed. There was a road on both sides of the graveyard, but both seemed to go left and meet briefly before splitting and winding around another copse of trees. At first, I wasn't sure if I should take the road that went to the left of the trees or the right of the trees. However, I could see a three-story clapboard house, a dingy brownish-yellow with a red roof that a chimney jutted out of, off in the distance.

Even though I was in Possibly, Texas—of all places—I couldn't help but smile.

That has to be Jack's place.

I took off at a jog, my suitcase wheels bouncing on the paved road as I made my way toward the house. Less than a minute later, I was letting my suitcases rest at the base of the steps up to the house, making sure they didn't topple over. Then I ascended the stairs and took a deep breath. The main door beyond the screen was shut, obviously because of the heat of the day, and the screen door seemed to be closed and locked tightly as well.

Maybe he's not home?

My feet were killing me to the point that I couldn't even think about whether or not Jack was home. I lifted my hand and knocked on the door, tentatively at first, then increasingly louder until I knew I would be heard wherever he was in the house. I stepped back from the door, just in case Jack decided to swing it open without looking. I didn't want to get pushed off of the steps. Crickets chirped in the grass around the house. Birds sang in the trees nearby. Tiny Tim sang his melody. A gunshot went off in the distance.

Finally, I heard footsteps coming from inside the house. When the front door opened, and a face appeared through the screen, I knew that at least I had found the right place.

Jack looked exactly as I had remembered when I drew upon my oldest memories.

Even if it had been a long time.