

The Newerth Sun



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Chapter One

“Here we go again...” With a long sigh, the scrawny young man slid his ID card through the slot and picked up the ringing receiver. “Hi dad...” A loud voice boomed out of the phone, forcing the young man to pull his ear back. “Hey D-dude, you never call, so I thought I’d at least get some mail or something, but no! Mr. Bigshot apparently is too cool to call his own dad? I thought we had a deal: you either write every month or you call every two weeks! It’s been over three months, and not a sign of life from you! I understand, you moving to the big city takes up a lot of your time, but...” While his father droned on, the young man blubbered a few excuses here and there. Three months already! It somehow felt like he hadn’t lived with his father in years. He looked at his ID, still in his hand. “Dewi Whit. Birthplace: La Manche.” His picture was horrible: he had just spent a day walking with the taxi to the city, so there was dust all over his face, which looked even bonier than usual. His brown hair was completely crazy and he was sure that he could see a piece of a leaf over his left ear... His green eyes were glazed with fatigue and his whole expression seemed to say “blech.” The receiver blared into his ear again, startling him. “Hey kid, you listening? As I was saying, I’d love to come down to see you, but life down here at the farm has just been crazy, why just last week the cows jumped the fence and ran all the way to

Gaston's place! Can you imagine?" Dewi looked around at the room he was in, absentmindedly letting out a word here and there: "Wow dad, that's amazing! No dad, I didn't know... Cool." His mind wandered with his eyes around the room, noticing the small cracks in the paint on the ceiling and the spider webs in the corner. Next to him was a line of open cubicles, each with their own receiving phone. There was no buttons, you had to pick up the receiver and tell the operator who you wanted to talk to. It usually took about a half hour before they finally connected the call, and even then the quality was poor. The room itself was an ugly white, clean but oh so boring. A long silence on the end of the line brought his attention back to the phone. "Dad, dad are you still there?" The phone answered with static a few jumbled sounds before his father's voice reappeared. "Dewi? Something happened with the phone, I couldn't hear you for a long time, are you still there?" "Yeah dad, still here." His father seemed so enthusiastic, it was almost exasperating. "Well Dewi, you didn't answer my question, how is it in the big city? Tell me all about it, you know I've always wanted to go there!" The city... Dewi didn't know what to tell his father. When he arrived at the borderhouse, he was assigned a room on the ground floor in a building on Main Street. An old bus was waiting to bring him and a few thirty others to their respective buildings. After waiting about an hour in the smelly, sticky bus, the driver started the engine and set out. Nobody spoke, most of those in the bus were about the same age as he was: 25, the age of withdrawal. When you reached 24, you received a letter

with a list of towns and cities and you had to choose one as your future home. When you reached 25, a taxi came to pick you up and bring you to your destination of choice. Dewi had picked Newerth, the big city. Apparently, the bigger the city the smaller the space, as his room only had room for the small bed and a dresser hung on the ceiling above it. It was all he could do to avoid thinking of the family farm, where he could sleep out in the fields, in the stables, or wherever he wanted to. Now his room was only a door in a hallway of more doors, each leading to the same small room. At one end of the hallway was the communal bathroom, at the other end was the living rooms. After following a series of nondescript hallways and doors, you arrived at the phone room: a remarkably dingy place, even when compared to the rest of the building. It was as if they didn't want people calling other people. What to say, what to say... He had been working for the local newspaper, the Newerth Sun, from the day after his big move, and it was unsatisfactory, to say the least. He had been the school newscaster in the last years of school, and he expected the real thing to be a job of action and discovery. What it turned out to be was a dead-end job which had him writing articles about which areas of town had the most burned-out streetlights and the like. His boss, William, or Mr. Marris as he liked to be called, assured him that after 5 years he would be promoted to traffic, then to weather, then to the horoscope, and so on until he died or something extraordinary happened. He cleared his throat: "Well dad, the food is great. We get to eat fish pretty much

every other day, and there's a really great choice of meals available on the off days." "Well that's just great son, you better not skip meals, you know how you just shrivel up when you don't eat... We never did get that checked, did we? Darn it, add that to your to-do list: go get a checkup. Hey listen D-dude, I gotta go, apparently your kid brother is having trouble with the roof again, I mean how hard is it to hold a hammer, right? Anyways, talk to you later kiddo, please don't wait another three months to call! I mean, what good is a phone if you don't use it, right? Okay see you bye!" With another long sigh, Dewi hung up the phone. Finally... He looked at the clock on the wall, saw that it was almost 7:00 in the evening, and he still hadn't eaten. He quickly tried to think of any restaurants that he could reach before closing hour as he walked through the hallways towards the exit of building 40 of First Street. Dewi ran down the street, passed buildings 41 through 49 and finally reached building number 50, the food court. He slammed the door open, nearly crashing into a couple exiting the building. He reached the nearest food counter, panting and letting out a short-winded "wait!" but the employee simply shrugged and pulled down the grate. He looked up to the giant clock hanging on the wall of the enormous room full of empty tables and chairs, it read 6:57. "Hey, I still have three minutes left! You can't close!" he said, shaking the grate. He heard the employee pick up the cooking utensils and switch off the different machines. Indignant, Dewi kept banging on the grate. "I am SO going to write a complaint, and your pay will be docked! Hey!

Listen to me!” The sounds on the other side stopped, and the employee spoke through the grate: “Listen, boy, I’m not opening up, and you’re not going to write a complaint. What you can do if you’re really desperate is head on down to the wharf, they stay open until midnight. Or you could just go home. What will happen is you’ll get arrested if you stay here, so you might as well try one of those options. Now get out and let me do my job. I’m not going to get in trouble because of some punk who couldn’t be bothered to come at the right hour.” Having regained his breath, Dewi looked around and noticed the police officers glaring at him from across the room. One of them slowly raised his index finger, pointed at Dewi, and motioned for him to leave, all the while glaring into his eyes. Dewi averted his gaze and returned to the street. Ugh, the wharf, he thought while he walked back down First Street. That’s where the refuse eat. There is no way I’m going to be seen down in that hole. He tried to keep his mind off his hunger by looking around Main Street, but nothing really caught his attention. All the buildings were the same brick-laden blocks both ways down the street. So many little rooms, all the same. Each block had the same features: the dormitory had five floors, each floor had 60 rooms and a bathroom at the end of the hallways. The living rooms were bigger rooms, and they had pretty much everything: a small movie theatre, a library, a VR room, a casino, a shopping area, the phone booths, and there was probably more that Dewi still hadn’t seen. All the doors were locked with a key card system and misbehaviour could land you restricted access for a

day or two. The odd numbers were for women, and the even numbers for men, but every 25 blocks was a food court that served breakfast from 6 to 8, lunch from 11 to 1, and supper from 5 to 7. Out of habit, Dewi swiped his keycard in the lock of his building. Nothing happened. Huh. He swiped it again, still to no effect. That's weird. He swiped it again and again, still to no effect. He looked around, trying to find someone to help him out, but people all avoided his gaze and walked quickly past him. It was extremely dangerous to try and break into a building that you weren't authorized into, and Dewi looked just like an intruder. He wasn't sure what to do, but he was starting to be worried and through the avoiding glances of passersby he could see that he was quickly becoming suspicious. He awkwardly walked back into the street and merged into the moving crowds. Since nobody who lived on First Street had access to any vehicles, it seemed strange that there was a street in the first place. Locked out of his building, unsure where to go, he headed to the only other place he knew: the Newerth Sun office of the district. He hoped that someone would be working late and would let him in. He swiped his card in the door panel, to no effect. Of course, I'm not supposed to be here at this hour. He looked over his shoulder; nobody seemed to be paying any attention to him. He quickly slipped into the dark alley and walked around the building. When he reached the back, he saw it: a beam of light coming from a window. He crept over to the window and peered in; it was Mr. Marris, and he was sitting in his chair, bald head tilted down and his hands

resting on the slight bulge of his stomach. Dewi rapped on the window, timidly at first, but when Mr. Marris didn't move he started tapping loudly on the old glass. The old man stirred, but didn't wake. "Come on, Mr. Marris, wake up!" Dewi growled from the chill outside. In frustration, he banged the window with his fist, and the window broke, sending a large chunk of glass falling towards the hard floor. The crash was enough to scare the sleeping man upright, grumbling unintelligible words and exclamations. After gaining his spirits and looking around, he saw the face looking at him from the dark and grabbed the nearest object, a pen that was lying on the desk. "Don't you come in here, I may look old but I won't go down easy, you little rat..." He squinted through his sleepy eyes, "Dewi? What in blazes are you... You almost gave me a heart attack, boy!" He put down the pen and brushed himself off, taking on an authoritative stance. "And that window is coming out of your salary, be sure of it!" Dewi stuttered as he tried to speak quickly, "I'm really sorry Mr. Marris, my keycard wasn't working, and I didn't know what to do so I came here, and it was locked, so I saw the light, and..." He was cut off by a wave of Mr. Marris' hand. "Don't worry, it's just a window. Now go around the front and I'll let you in." He rubbed his arms as he looked at the broken window which now let the chilly wind inside, and turned away into the hallways. — Mr. Marris switched on the light in one of the small offices and motioned for Dewi to sit down on the plastic chair normally reserved for invitees, while he took the more comfortable chair on the other side of the

desk. He yawned, propped his chin on his knobby fingers and looked at Dewi in silence. Dewi looked down at the desk, not too sure where to look under the weight of the stare. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. Instead, Mr. Marris spoke in his slow, rough voice, coughing every few sentences. "You know Dewi, I must say that I'm surprised to see you here, even more so that you broke my window, but that's not what I mean. I don't know if you believe in luck, but I was here tonight reviewing your situation here at the Sun. I know you're still getting used to the city, but every morning you come in looking like death herself, you don't talk to anyone all day and then you leave. I've spoken with some of the staff and we're considering letting you go." Dewi made to speak, but a slight raise of a hand stopped him. "Now, when you came in here on the first day you looked like you had potential. I'm willing to give you another chance, but I want to know if you're ready to make an effort. We're a team here at the Sun, and your job includes being part of that team." Dewi looked at Mr. Marris; his grey hair was rapidly receding and the top of his head was almost entirely bald. His shoulders were still very square and the arms leaning on the table were tough. A few stringy scars traced lines up and down his arms, hiding under the rolled-up sleeves of his white shirt. He had stopped leaning on his hands and was now sitting back in his chair, looking intently at the young man in front of him. The contrast was marked: the young man was underweight and his shoulders sagged as he looked at the wooden desk in-between them. He cleared his throat for a

second too long to be natural, and spoke softly and slowly. “Yes, I am aware that I’ve, uh, not been... my performance has been a bit under expectations. Yes, the city is probably effecting me, and the job... uh, my expectations weren’t really realistic when I got here, and it’s been a bit hard to adapt, I think. So, what I’m trying to say is that I agree with you, but I will try, uh, I will do what I can to... do better.” He looked up, hoping to see something in his boss’ expression, but he was yawning with his mouth wide open. He shook his face and said sleepily “Well that’s great to hear, kid. Can’t wait to read your article on the best restaurants of First Street. Let’s get ourselves to bed, hm? You’re in block 40, right? I have to go further anyways, so we can walk together.” It wasn’t so much an offer as an order, and Dewi had no choice but to accept. Most of the people had left the streets by now, so they walked in silence all the way from 70 to 40. When they reached it, Dewi told Mr. Marris to wait while he tried his keycard, and when the door swung open, he looked at Mr. Marris with a bewildered look, while the other just shrugged and resumed his walk home. He entered his room and began to undress, when his stomach growled quite noisily, reminding him that he hadn’t eaten since breakfast. Great... I really need to stop doing that. While he lay in his bed, his mind twirled with good resolutions and changes to be made the following day, but it wasn’t until late in the night that he finally drifted off, his empty stomach keeping him awake.

Chapter 2

“Seriously?” Dewi scowled as he read the sign plastered on the food court’s door. “This evening the food court will close at 6 instead of 7. We apologize for the inconvenience.” He had made a special effort to get there much earlier than his usual 6:50, and it was closed. He tried to peer through the windows, but the room was dark and the windows were too high to get any kind of view out of them. He walked back away from the door, kicking a small stone to the side in a futile act of frustration. “How am I going to write an article on the best restaurants if I’ve never eaten at any of them?” he pondered. The due date was the next morning, and he still had no information whatsoever. He stood on the side of the street, looking from one side to the other, hoping to find some kind of miracle solution. Nothing came. An idea kept creeping into his mind, but he kept pushing it back. “I can’t go to the wharf! Besides, any food I could find there will be barely edible, let alone ‘the best food on First Street!’” He looked up and saw the sunset, beautiful reds and yellows painting the tops of the bland buildings. He didn’t have much sunlight left, and he certainly didn’t want to go to the wharf at dark... “I’m not going to the wharf!”, he told himself, but his feet had already started moving south, and before he looked up he had reached the checkpoint at building 1. He reluctantly joined the masses of people exiting the district, planning to

spend as little time there as possible. The wharf was a long beach dotted with little wooden docks, and small fishing boats were moored at each of them. Along the beach, little multicolored stalls were crookedly aligned facing the water, each selling mostly the same thing: fish. The wharf wasn't a district itself, it was more of a buffer zone between districts 1 to the north, 2 to the west and 3 to the south, so it didn't receive the same amount of supply as the official areas. That meant that most of what was available was directly from the wharf, which meant fish. People were loud and brash here, to Dewi's great discomfort. The stall owners shouted to try and attract customers, to call out meals when they were ready, to get their friends' attention, basically everyone shouted all the time. Dewi much preferred the stifled quiet of First Street. He walked past the stalls, getting bumped by running children and adults alike, nearly falling down when a particularly burly man ran into him to catch a mischievous kid who had just taken some of his meal. He hurriedly picked the stall with the least people massed in front of it, a kind of plywood box that seemed about to crumble at any second. The cook was a slightly overweight woman with a black eye poorly disguised with makeup. Her black hair was tied up in a tight bunch and she was wearing a blood-stained apron over brown shorts and a red and white t-shirt. She was washing a frying pan in grayish water, violently rubbing a tough stain. "Well, look what the tide dragged in," she said in a surprisingly soft voice. Dewi cleared his throat and asked "I'm hungry, what do you have?" "You're hungry,

eh? Well, I don't got much left since you come at such a late hour, but I can probably scrounge up a few leftovers. Wait here, and try not to wander too far. You don't look like you come out here that often..." Her voice trailed off as she turned around and tossed a few small fish into the pan she had been washing, sending it sizzling onto the stovetop flame. Shortly after, she dropped a plate onto the counter, with a mismatch of fish and potatoes and different vegetables mixed in, giving the entire meal a kind of goopy texture. Dewi hesitated before taking it, which prompted the cook to exclaim "What, it isn't good enough for ya? I can always just take it back, y'know. Although, lookin' at you, that would probably kill ya. What's the matter with you, anyways?" Dewi was taken aback, and considered just taking the plate and leaving, but instead blurted out "Excuse me?" "I said, what's the matter with you? You look like you haven't eaten in days, and that's telling me that somethin's wrong with you. So come on, spit it out, nobody's listening here but me, and I don't even know your name." Dewi looked down at the unappetizing mush on his plate. "Nothing's wrong with me. I eat just as much as I need." To prove his point, he drove a fork into the potatoes and brought an oversized bite to his mouth. He involuntary flinched as it reached his mouth, but soon realized that it wasn't as bad as he was expecting. He looked up, saw that the woman had her hands on her hips and was looking intently at him, the way a mother looks at a child trying to lie his way out of a bad situation. She sighed. "Listen. I'm going to close up shop. While I do that, you

finish your meal, and then we can go for a walk together, hm?" Dewi looked around for a clock, and not finding one started searching for a different excuse, but couldn't find any. He also wanted to finish eating, so he nodded and shoved another bite in. A sly smile appeared on the side of the woman's mouth, and she turned around and started cleaning up the dormant kitchen. Stars were shining in the dark sky over the wharf, escorting the duo as they walked along the beach. A warm wind was blowing in from the sea, and what would have been a very cold evening turned out to be quite pleasant. "Y'know, I still don't know your name." Dewi was torn back from his daydreaming by his companion's voice. "Uh, it's Dewi. What about you?" "Sarah." They had been walking for about thirty minutes, and that had been their only conversation. Dewi began to wonder why she had wanted to have this walk, and just as he was about to excuse himself, she looked out towards the sea and spoke in a soft voice, Dewi had to focus to make out the words she was saying. "You know, it isn't easy out here." Her face looked pale in the twilight, and Dewi thought he saw wetness in her eyes. "Great, now I can't leave, she's crying!" He managed to keep a straight face, and looked out in the same direction. "Do you ever wonder what's on the other side?" she said without turning. Dewi was caught off guard, and quoted what his history teacher had hammered into his brain. "Well, it used to be other masses of land called continents, but those are all gone ever since the last war. Now it's just water and a few rocks here and there." "That's not what I meant,"

she sighed, turned and resumed walking, forcing Dewi to hurry back to her side. The tide was slowly rising, and the waves reached nearer and nearer. Sarah stopped and looked at the stars. Abruptly, she blurted out: "Hold my hand, Dewi." Dewi was completely taken aback, and almost took a step backwards. He wasn't really sure what to do, but he looked over his shoulder; the beach was empty and only a few people were still walking along the road up past the dunes. He looked at her extended hand, extremely white in contrast with her dark coat. He slowly approached his hand, and gently took hers. Her hand was very moist and warm, and it took all of his self-control not to recoil. She fell silent again and stared out towards the sea. Dewi was starting to have enough of the weird walk, but couldn't bring himself to just leave, even if he only knew her name. It actually felt... nice to have somebody to hold hands with. Then she spoke without turning away from the water. "Dewi, I feel old and tired, but I'm only 32." "You look old and tired" was the first thought that popped into Dewi's mind, which he shooed away sheepishly. Her melancholy voice continued: "You know, when I was young, everything was simple. The best way to fight evil was with a sword or a bow. Good guys wore white armor and were nice to orphans, while bad guys hid their faces and kicked puppies. Sometimes I get the feeling that I chose the wrong side by accident... Everything comes at a price, what if the only difference between good and bad was the price you were willing to pay to get what you want? Do you know what I mean, Dewi?" He did not. She looked at him and saw

this, sighed, and let go of his hand. “I’m sorry, I’ve got a lot on my mind tonight.” She looked at Dewi with a curious expression, and Dewi didn’t know how to react, so he took a step back. “I really should be heading back, it’s been a long day, and...” He couldn’t finish, because Sarah had grabbed his arm and held him back. “Dewi, I don’t have any more time left either, but before you go I need to give you something.” Dewi made to refuse, but she didn’t give him the chance as she slid something into his shirt pocket. She let go of him, and her shoulders sagged as she seemed to have freed herself of a great weight. “You won’t understand, but don’t worry. Keep your wits about you, and you’ll be okay. And Dewi... thanks for tonight. It’s too bad we won’t get to know each other better, you seem like a nice guy.” Dewi was completely lost, but Sarah turned and walked away before he could say anything. He dug in his pocket and fumbled around, grabbing what she had placed there. It was her keycard. “Why would she give me this? She can’t go anywhere without it...” He looked up, meaning to give it back to her, but she had disappeared. He looked around, but there was only sand and sea in sight. He looked back at the card, saw that the name wasn’t Sarah, but Jade Bardier. He squinted to see the picture in the darkness, but a light suddenly illuminated him, startling him as he stuffed the card back into his pocket. He turned to see the source of the light, but the flashlight blinded him. A gruff voice sounded across the beach: “Sir, it is strange to be out on the beach at this hour. Are you lost? Allow me to bring you to your building, Mr. Whit.” The

light approached, and he felt a strong arm grasp him at the sides and force him to walk quickly back towards the wharf and checkpoints. Dewi struggled to look at the man dragging him, and saw a glint of light reflected off a metal hawk on the man's hat. "A police officer... Oh I'm in for it now..." Dewi docilely followed the officer's pace, and they were soon back at the checkpoint. When they crossed into First Street, the officer let him go. "Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Whit. Please note that your access card will be restricted for a week. You may only enter your building, your office and the food courts. Attempts to pass a checkpoint or to access unauthorized buildings during restriction will result in harsh reprimands. Thank you." The officer then stiffly turned around and passed back into the wharf. Dewi hurried back to his room and shut the door, only turning on the small reading light he had brought from home. "Whew... That was close." His heart was pounding and he found it difficult to breathe. He lay on his bed for several minutes, just concentrating on breathing. When he had regained his spirits, he took out his keycard; sure enough, the little yellow light under "Restricted" had turned on. "That's okay, I don't need to go anywhere other than those places. Besides, it's only a week, I just need to be careful." He turned over in an effort to relax, and felt something hard in his pocket. He put his hand in and pulled out the other keycard belonging to Sarah, or Jade Bardier. With the reading light, he looked at the picture; instead of a brunette with chubby cheeks, he saw a young woman with a slender face and auburn hair.

He looked at the date of birth: June 21st, 2275; this girl was 25, but Sarah had said that she was 32... Had she been lying? Dewi wasn't sure what to make of it. He examined and analyzed the picture, trying to remember what Sarah had looked like, and the more he looked, the more it seemed that this was a different person. "How did Sarah get someone else's keycard..." With a gasp of horror, he dropped the card to the floor. "If I'm caught with this... It'll be a whole lot worse than restriction! What is worse than restriction..." Dewi realized that he had no idea what could happen to a criminal in the city. Still somewhat panicking, he reached down and picked up the card, and stuffed it underneath his personal belongings in his dresser. He lay down... and got up again, rummaged through his things, found the card and stuffed it into his pants pocket. "What if they search my room? Do they know I have this? Does it work? No, I can't use it, that would be insane!" He stood up and paced his tiny room, cold beads of sweat sliding down his back.

Chapter 3

Dewi slowly woke up from a great night of sleep, stretching out to turn himself towards his alarm clock to turn it off... But it wasn't ringing. Dewi opened his eyes, looked at the time: 9:27. He jumped out of bed and stepped on his belt buckle, sending a flare of pain through his leg as he crashed to the ground. "Oww... I can't believe I slept in the day after I got promoted!" He hurriedly dressed and ran out the door, nearly crashing into an elderly woman who was entering the building. "Sorry!" he yelled back as he sped up First Street. He arrived at the door of the 70th completely out of breath, his hair standing straight up in multiple places and his shirt buttoned in the wrong holes. He took a few seconds to groom himself before swiping his keycard and entering the building. He felt awfully self-conscious, almost expecting everyone to cheer or hate him for his promotion, but nobody seemed to notice. Nobody even seemed to care that he had arrived almost an hour late. He scolded himself for having expected something extraordinary and sheepishly walked into his small office. Nothing had changed, and again he was disappointed but ashamed to admit it to himself. There was a brown folder on his desk beside the typewriter, and it was sealed. He looked around, but nobody was paying attention to him. "Stop being so paranoid! Deep breaths, okay, open the envelope slowly, it's just an envelope, nothing special, you

can do this.” He realized that the envelope was shaking in his hands, and he set it down. He picked up the small letter-opener his mom had given him when he left the house. He had never used it, preferring to open envelopes by hand, but this was a special envelope. As it cut through the paper, he thought to himself that he should use it more often. He put the two objects back on the desk, and stared intently at the opened envelope, as if it would disappear or run away, but it did not move. He slowly reached inside and gingerly pulled out a document entitled “JOB DESCRIPTION”. He looked for a title, but there wasn’t any, as the entire document simply described what he would be doing. You will be in charge of writing articles for a new section we will be adding to the Newerth Sun. You will be the only writer for this section, so you may manage it as you see fit. You will produce one article every two days on the topic of “Undiscovered treasures of Newerth”. I expect you to use the same creativity you used earlier this week in the finding and describing of these unique items of interest. If you need any more information, you may contact my secretary, Mr. Arnaud. Please have your first article ready in two days’ time, this Thursday. You will hand in all your articles in my message box instead of sending them directly to the printer as you used to. Signed, William Marris Dewi flipped the page over, but it was blank. “This is it? ‘Undiscovered treasures’, what the... How am I supposed to find new things every two days? This is insane! I have to talk to him...” He picked up the envelope and made to walk out of his office, but

stopped abruptly in the entrance to his office. "Wait... I get to write about whatever I want! This is great! Oh man, I better get on it!" He grabbed the envelope, a notepad and a pencil and rushed out of the building filled with the sound of fingers hitting keys, into the street. After pacing from buildings 25 to 75 about three times, he realized just how hard this assignment would be. He tried the food court, his building... then returned to the food court, to no success. He looked down at his card; the yellow light was still blinking. "This would be a lot easier if I had access to places!" He decided to contact Mr. Arnaud, and trudged back to the office. When he walked into the secretary's office, there were about five people already sitting down, reading old newspapers or staring into space. He sat down and waited his turn. After what seemed like hours, the man behind the desk motioned for him to approach. He spoke in the bored, monotone voice of someone who had had a long and unfulfilling day. "What may I do for you, sir?" "Hello, um, I'm here about my assignment..." The secretary looked at him, rolled his eyes, and shuffled some papers on his desk. "And you are...?" "Oh, uh, sorry, I'm Dewi, I'm writing the 'undiscovered treasures of Newerth segment'... Mr. Marris said I should see you if I needed anything." The conversation was becoming more and more uncomfortable by the second, and the man behind the desk wasn't helping matters: he had started reading a page and didn't seem to be listening at all. He mumbled, as if speaking to someone else, "Yes, yes, I do remember something about that... Well, what do you want, kid?" "Um, you see, I'm supposed to be

writing articles on things that nobody knows about, but at the moment I can only access a few areas, so I don't know if you can do something..." Dewi crossed his fingers, hoping that there would be no questions asked. He let out a small sigh of relief when the secretary grabbed a small stack of paper and lumped it onto the desk, still without looking up. "Fill this form in, bring it back here when you're done, we'll give you a temporary access card, thank you very much, have a nice day." "Wait!" Dewi ran towards the secretary, who was just exiting his office at the end of the day. "I filled out the form, sir, I would like to have that access card you mentioned. Please." He handed out the completed forms. Mr. Arnaud looked at him, then the forms, then the clock on the wall; it read 4:57. He let out a sigh (which seemed quite exaggerated to Dewi), grabbed the papers and trudged back into his office. He dumped the papers on his desk, reached over into a drawer and grabbed a small white card and placed it into Dewi's hand. "There you go, have a nice day." He mumbled as he pushed past Dewi, locking the door quickly this time and heading out. Dewi looked at the blank card, meant to ask Mr. Arnaud a question, but he had already turned out of the hallway. "I hope this works..." he thought as he walked out of the building. He wasn't sure where to try it out; surely crossing a checkpoint was too risky, but would it give him access to any building? He tried it out on 71; the door slid open. He cautiously slipped inside, trying to look as if he belonged but not succeeding very well. He didn't even know what the building was supposed to be. There were hallways with lots of doors, but they

were all closed and there were no windows. He stayed just long enough to be thoroughly spooked, then quickly exited the building. "This is not going to work..." He thought as he walked back down the street. It was very crowded, since almost everyone had just finished working, and he had to concentrate not to crash into anyone. Even so, he couldn't help running into a woman who had been reading. Her book was sent flying to the ground and was quickly trampled by the masses. Dewi apologized but kept walking, hoping that she hadn't gotten a good look at him. Then he had an idea: "The library! Most of the sections are closed off, but with this card..." His pace suddenly accelerated as he excitedly wondered what kind of book would be sealed off. He had always been more of a reader in school; when most of his companions would be out on field trips, he would hide in the library and read book after book. There were hardly any books in his family's home; now that he thought about it, he couldn't remember there being any books in any home that he had visited. He promised himself that when he would have a house, he would get some books and show them off. He reached the library, building #14, and went straight for the small checkpoint. He realized that he was sweating down his back, but not because of the walk. "Here goes nothing..." He swiped his card in the slot, and the little light above the door turned green and the door opened with a whine. He walked in and the door rapidly shut behind him. He turned on the lights, and appeared a small, airtight room with a moldy smell. There was a small table with two chairs in the middle of the square

room, and all around there were short bookcases with few books; some bookcases were completely empty, most were only partly full. “Well... I don’t know what I expected.” He sighed, and almost turned around, but curiosity and lack of better ideas prompted him to scan the titles of the books available. Most of them were illegible with age, but a book that was much larger than the others, so much that it had just been placed on top of the bookcase, caught his attention. He dusted off the cover and read: “World Atlas”. “Huh. What’s an atlas?” So he opened the book and began to read. “Here’s my article.” He thought with great satisfaction as he perused the large, pictured pages. Two days later, he sat at his desk, hands on his lap, exhaling as the final words of his article were inked onto the page. He had entitled it “Undiscovered Treasure: the Old World”. He had actually torn out a page and smuggled it under his shirt, and later on copied it onto another page to be published. “I should have started with something easier, this’ll be hard to beat!” he congratulated himself. Finally, after admiring his work for several moments, he took the pages and brought them to Mr. Marris’ deposit box as instructed. As he let the pages slide down the chute, he wondered how he would spend the evening. Surely a celebration was in order... As he thought of what would be a fun way to celebrate, he was surprised to find his mind wandering to the wharf and the evening spent with Sarah. “Well no, I can’t go back there, it’s way too dangerous. Besides, I should probably call dad, get some rest, work on the next article...” As he walked out of the building, he set out to do just that. But when he

reached number 40, something pushed him straight past the entrance. He kept walking, telling himself that he would turn around anytime. Number 30... 20... 10... He stopped and looked ahead: the checkpoint was looming over the street, its large concrete walls creating a long shadow. "Okay, time to turn back..." his brain told him, but his feet remained rooted in place. He reached into his coat pocket and took out the blank card, fiddled with it, put it back. "Maybe I'll find a new topic for an article?" This was the excuse he needed. He pulled up his coat around his face and walked rapidly towards the gate. He swiped the blank card in the machine, awaited a response. Nothing seemed to happen for the longest period of time, but finally the gate opened and allowed him to exit. He breathed a sigh of relief and quickly walked through. Now that he was through, his anxiety focused on Sarah. "This is stupid. She probably doesn't even remember me. I can't believe that I risked getting caught in that checkpoint just to see some girl I met on a, let's admit it, very weird evening. Heck, she probably doesn't even remember me... Why do I remember her so clearly? This is insane... I should probably just-" His thinking was cut short when his feet came to a stop in front of what was Sarah's stall. There was absolutely no trace of there ever having been a stall there, just a three-person wide space between two bigger stalls. He backup up and looked up and down the line of mismatched colours, trying to remember where her stall had been. He walked all the way back to the beginning of the line, then walked all the way down, but still didn't see it. He went back to

where he thought the stall had been, and approached the neighbor who was sorting through boxes, getting ready for the supper-time rush. "Uh, excuse me, sir..." The man grunted as a response, apparently searching for something in particular. "Uh, yeah, there was this stall right beside yours, it was owned by a girl named Sarah... What, uh, what happened to her – uh, it?" His hands were sweating, and he tried to dry them by rubbing them on his pants. The man picked up a heavy-seeming box, dumped it in a small icebox, then wiped his forehead and turned to Dewi. "Listen kid, I'm busy here. I don't know who you're talking about, the neighbor on my left is George and always has been for years, and the neighbor on my right's been Regis for at least six months. I don't know anybody like you're talking about, okay? Now leave me alone, we open at 5." With that he turned his back on Dewi and walked into the small room behind the kitchen. Dewi scratched his head, not too sure how to react. "Did I dream the whole thing? I was in bed when I realized that I had to write that article... But no, how could I have gotten that other girl's card?" Instinctively, he patted his pockets to make sure he still had the card in question. It was a confused relief when he felt it in his pants pocket, as it proved that he hadn't dreamed, but he still had no idea what had happened to Sarah and her stall. He started looking around again, trying to see if he hadn't missed anything... but Sarah's stall had truly and utterly disappeared. He returned to the nook and bent down to see if he could find something, anything to explain his apparent hallucination. He pushed around some

sand, ran his fingers along the sides of the surrounding stalls, even tried to smell something, but there was still nothing. He looked over his shoulder; it still wasn't 5, so the beach was mostly empty. "Well, no time like now, I guess." He sighed as he rolled up his sleeves and started digging in the loose sand. "What on earth am I doing?" He thought, shaking his head as he continued to dig. He had managed to move around all the sand on the small lot, but absolutely nothing pointed towards his memory of what had been there only 2 days ago. He stood up, feeling extremely confused, stupid and sandy, and walked out towards the beach where he had walked... or had he? With Sarah. He was still looking for some kind of sign that what had happened really had happened, but he was having no luck. After walking until he was sure he passed the place where the officer had grabbed him, he trudged back. He did not know what to think. When he reached the wharf, it was well past 5, and the whole area had become extremely lively: loud music was playing from somewhere that Dewi couldn't see, people were chatting and yelling, fish were sizzling... Dewi was shocked by the contrast between the wharf and First Street. He looked around, almost expecting police officers to come bring the tone down, but they stood near the checkpoints and didn't seem to be moving. Dewi felt extremely out of place, but was quite hungry, and wasn't ready to test his card at the checkpoint again ("Maybe it works on a time limit, and it ran out while I was out here... Or maybe I just got lucky."), so he got in line at the stall whose owner he had questioned

earlier. A few minutes later, he was searching for a place to sit, plate of steaming fish and potatoes in hand. The wharf was packed, and he was about to sit on the sand further away when he heard someone yelling “Mr. Whit! Over here, Mr. Whit!” He peered through the crowd and saw a rotund man sitting at a table not too far away. It took him a few seconds, then he recognized the man he had met during his promotion meeting, Mr. Barum. Dewi wasn’t sure if he should sit with him, but it was too late to back out without a good reason, so he walked over and sat down in front of him. “Well now,” Mr. Barum exclaimed, loudly as usual, “I certainly didn’t expect to see you here! Although it does make sense, since it’s thanks to this place that you got that new job, hm?” He winked at Dewi, who wasn’t sure how to react, nor what this peculiar man wanted, if he wanted anything. Dewi decided to be civil: “Yes, well, I was taking a little break; I just finished writing my first article for that job, actually.” He took a bite of the potatoes, found that they were over seasoned, and was surprised to realize that he had actually preferred Sarah’s mush. “To be honest, Mr. Barum, I’m the one who is surprised to see you here, usually...” his voice died out, not wanting to say what he had been on the verge of saying. The man leaned over the table, as if about to tell a grave secret, and whispered “You can call me Glas, friend, I really don’t like titles all that much. And for what you were going to say, I can only answer that sometimes it is in the strangest places that you find the best stuff. Speaking of the best stuff, I couldn’t find the stall that you described in your article. Could you point

it out for me?" Dewi choked a little on a stray fishbone, pulled it out of his mouth, and tried to clear his throat. Glas waited patiently, a smug smile on his mouth. Finally, Dewi spoke, holding a hand up to his throat. "Well, I would love to, but..." Glas interrupted "What? Sworn to secrecy? Dewi, can I call you Dewi?, you mustn't keep such secrets from a friend! I'll have you know that I am a great culinary appreciator, and if you so highly praise an establishment, I must taste it for myself!" Dewi was a bit taken aback, not sure how to gauge this strange man. He looked like a businessman, he spoke like someone educated, but he acted like a kind of overeager teenager... "As I was saying, I would love to, but it isn't there anymore. It used to be right between those two stalls over there, but I couldn't find it anywhere." Glas frowned. "Are you sure it was right there? There are at least fifty similar-looking kitchens facing this side alone, couldn't it have been elsewhere?" Dewi was getting frustrated; he had always preferred to eat alone, and Glas was invading on his privacy a whole lot for someone who he hardly knew. "I'm telling you, it was right there. She must have not had enough customers or something." Glas' frown deepened. "Hm." he grunted. Then he looked at his watch and stood up. "Well, Dewi, my good friend, I'm sorry I must be off. Busy man, yes sir! Please promise me that we will see each other again, hm?" Without waiting for an answer, he huddled off towards the checkpoint for Third Street. "What a weird guy. If he can go to Third Street, he can go to much better restaurants than anything out here on the wharf. Bah, I guess he can do whatever he wants,

not that I really care.” He finished his meal, then left to get some water to wash down the taste of too much basil.

Chapter 4

As Dewi walked up First Street towards his building, a rather large man crashed into him, sending him flying to the sidewalk. “Hey! What’s wrong with...” his voice trailed off as the man had already gotten too far away, creating a hole in the pedestrian crowd where he had passed. Dewi stood up, brushed off his pants, and was about to resume walking when he heard a voice coming from the alley between buildings 23 and 24. “Hey, psst. Over here!” Dewi was going to ignore it, thinking that the person couldn’t possibly be talking to him, but then he heard it again “Hey! Don’t leave, come over here! Quickly, come on!” Dewi was a bit scared, but this had never happened before and he was extremely curious. He looked around, made sure that nobody was watching him, and he plunged into the gray shadow of the alley. Almost instantly, his hands were caught behind his back and a black bag was thrown over his head. He tried to struggle, but a swift knee-jab in the stomach took out his breath. He was dragged quite a long distance, and at first he tried to remember which directions they were taking, but after a few turns he gave up and turned to hoping that they wouldn’t kill him. After what seemed an interminable maze, he was dropped to the floor. It was covered in gravel, and he could feel the small pebbles push into his face through the bag. He wasn’t sure what they expected him to do, so he just lay there. Eventually a

voice was heard, he thought it came from behind him, but couldn't be sure. "Where is she?" was all that the man said. Dewi's mind was spinning. "Where is who?" In response, he received a kick in the side. He let out a loud groan as the pain spread through his chest. "You were the last one seen with her. Where is she now?" "Last one seen with her... with her..." he tried frantically to figure out what was expected of him, but his brain had gone into panic-mode. After a few seconds of silence, another kick caught the side of his face, which proved too much for the underweight man, as he passed out. When he came to, it felt as if he had just woken up from a nice, long nap. "Why is it still so dark, what time is it? Why am I sitting down, where is my bed?" He tried to yawn, found that his hands were tied to the arms of a chair. As consciousness slowly returned to him, he remembered pieces of what had happened, gradually leading back to the questioning. "Oh... oh man, this is not good. Maybe if I don't move they'll think I'm still out." Unfortunately, he heard footsteps echoing towards him, followed by the voice again "Well, look who's back with us. I'm sorry for what happened, we don't get in many fights and my boys can get... excited. I promise you, it will not happen again." Dewi opened his mouth, felt a searing pain throughout his entire jaw and jerked his mouth closed again. Instead he let out a low moaning, but even that proved too painful to maintain. The voice continued in a smooth manner. "I assure you, we have no interest in your belongings or even your person. You will be returned to the First Street as soon as you give us what we want. It's quite

simple actually, just answer our one, easy little question, and all this will be forgotten within a week. Now then, where is she?" Dewi was reluctant to try to answer, the memory of the pain still fresh, but the fear of more blows pushed him to mumble slowly: "Who is she?" The other man was silent. Dewi heard footsteps circling his chair. "Here, let me help you a little: you were seen a few nights back on the beach with a woman. Where is she?" Dewi mumbled in surprise: "Sarah?" The man stopped pacing. "Yes! Finally, now just tell me where she went, and we'll bring you to the hospital to get that jaw fixed up." Dewi was confused, and the more he thought about it the less he understood. Who were these people (or was it just the one?), why were they so obsessed with finding Sarah? She had seemed harmless enough, even nice. He couldn't imagine why someone would go to such trouble to find someone so inoffensive. Dewi realized that he needed to answer. "I... don't... know..." enunciation was very difficult, so his speech was barely comprehensible. The pacing resumed. "Well, you see, my young friend, that is quite a problem. Because if you don't know, that must mean that something bad has happened to her. We're only trying to prevent bad things from happening to people, which is why we really need to know where she is, understand?" Dewi wished that the man could see him rolling his eyes in disbelief, then on second thought, was grateful that he couldn't. He simply repeated what he had just said, this time grunting a bit more: "I... don't ... know!" The voice drew closer until it sounded very close: "That's too bad, isn't it?" Then Dewi

heard footsteps walking away, and shortly there weren't any sounds. He tried to move, but his feet were tied to the chair as well. He sighed, leaned his head against the back of the chair, and closed his eyes. — "Excuse me, have you seen Mr. Dewi Whit recently?" Glas had gone around the Newerth Sun's office, but nobody seemed to even know who Dewi was. He walked into Dewi's office and looked around for the third time; no notes, nothing out of place... It was the same in his room. Dewi had simply disappeared two days ago, right after they had had lunch together. Glas scratched his thick black beard. Mr. Marris had called him because Dewi had been supposed to write another of those articles for this morning, but nothing had appeared. "The checkpoints don't hold any records of him leaving, and his cards don't show any activity after re-entering First Street. I really hope he wasn't killed or anything. That would really suck." He looked around Dewi's office absentmindedly, then left the building. He headed back towards Dewi's building, swiped his keycard and entered Dewi's room. Everything was as would be expected. He rummaged around, looking under clothes in his dresser, under the bed, just in case, but he had already done this with no success. He sat down on the bed, which sank under his weight. "Man, I hate it when this happens..." He walked towards the phone room and dialed a number. It rang once, then someone picked up the receiver. "Yeah?" Glas exposed the situation. "I need a small police force, four to five men, we've lost an MVP on First Street. I think he's been taken to the sewers. Tell them to meet me in front

of 10 in 5 minutes.” The receiver on the other end hung up, and Glas quickly waddled out of the building and down the street. “Should’ve said 10 minutes...” he thought as sweat beads trickled down his forehead. — Dewi was half-asleep, his thoughts wandering back to the family farm. It was a law that every family could only have two children. His younger sister, Megan, was turning 19 this year. There was a special allotment in the laws for families that owned farms: one of the children could stay in the family home past 25 years of age in order to keep the farm going. Dewi, as the elder, had first choice. He had brought his sister for a walk around the fields on her 18th birthday. The sun was shining, and the hazy summer air made their clothes stick to their skin. Dewi turned to his sister, realizing for the first time that she was more than his sister: she was now an adult. Her frizzy brown hair was tied up in a ponytail, she was wearing jeans and an ample shirt that had belonged to their father. “Meg, have you ever thought about what you want to do, you know, when you’ll have to decide?” Megan looked up at her brother, a little frustrated at the awkward question. “It doesn’t matter what I want, you get to decide. One of us gets the farm, the other is stuck in the city.” Was what she wanted to say, but she decided to play his little game. “Oh, I don’t know D, I don’t see how I could live without all this open space! I have friends who’ve been to the city, almost all of them regret it. Sure, you don’t have to work as much, but is it really work if you love it?” Dewi looked up, watching the fields as they extended into the horizon. He knew what he wanted to say, but

the words were all bunched up in his throat. “Yeah... you know, I had an idea for a birthday present, since it is your 18th today... I was thinking... Well, I don’t really have a preference for where to live, I don’t really know... Uh, what I’m trying to say is that I think you can choose whether you want to go the city or stay here, is that okay?” He kept his gaze focused on a faraway tree, almost regretting his words but not knowing why. He was extremely anxious about turning 25; he didn’t know what he wanted to do, he didn’t have very many friends... He liked the farm, but maybe he would like city life more? His sister seemed to know what she wanted, so it seemed like the right thing to do. He realized that Megan was looking up at him, and that she still hadn’t answered. He coughed, cleared his throat. “Well? If you want time, there’s no rush, I still have a few months.” She hesitantly drew closer, leaned her head on his shoulder, and sighed. “I do like it here, Dewi.” She said, speaking to the fields in front of them. That was how he had decided to come to the city, but the sound of footsteps slowly approaching brought his awareness back to the present. His head was still in a black bag, so everything sounded muffled. He didn’t know how long he had been there, but his empty stomach and parched throat told him it had been far too long. “Have you finally decided to talk?” Every hour it seemed, the footsteps approached, the question was asked, no answer was given, and the footsteps departed. This time however, the footsteps didn’t leave. They paced around a little, then stopped. “Do you know your history, friend?” Dewi almost yelled out that they

weren't friends, but remembered that the pain wouldn't be worth it. He decided that silence would be the better option. "They teach us that beyond the sea, there are only desolated islets, remnants of the great war that happened centuries ago. Our island was spared by some odd chance, almost as if the world had forgotten that we were here. We rebuilt slowly, keeping whatever technology we could salvage, becoming independent producers of everything we need to live on. Our experience was not wasted in the rebuilding of humanity: we planned out the perfect society that would never give birth to war, that would never lack of anything, that would be a perfectly well-oiled machine that would never need to be fixed. Everyone has his or her place in the machine, and obedience to the rules is mandatory for the good of civilization. Isn't this what you learned in history?" Dewi was familiar with the story: society was built upon the notions of equality and the value of hard work, but especially survival of the species. "I'll offer you an exchange, friend, a little trade, if you will. I will tell you what really happened, and you will finally tell me where that girl went. This is my last nice offer, take it or lose it." Dewi was shaking; "I am going to die here, there's no way I'll get out of here alive." But then an idea came to him: he needed to stall for time. He braced himself, then muttered "Deal." The steps resumed their pacing, a bit quicker this time. "Excellent choice, friend! I'm glad we're finally being reasonable." "As I was saying, we're told there was a great war: Earth could not sustain the amount of people on the planet, and tension

was growing. Every major country was looking for room to expand, but the smaller countries on one side of the globe allied themselves with the major countries on the other side, so any expansion would have been met with grave consequences. It was the biggest stalemate, and it was unbroken for years.” “Something needed to be done, but nobody could budge. That was when the plan began to be conceived: the power-hungry people of the world met together, and planned a planet-wide coup. They were going to-“ He was interrupted by the sound of running footsteps approaching. “Sir, sir, we have intruders in area B, we need to leave now. We’ve already evacuated the data and are relocating to sector 5-8. They will be here in the minute.” “Damn it!” the historian voice exclaimed. Dewi felt someone tugging at his bonds, but they held tight. The voice cursed again, then Dewi heard the two men’s footsteps echoing into the distance. He was alone again. Then he heard a group of footsteps running towards him from another direction, and someone grabbed at the bag on his head and soon he was back into the dim light of a cave-like room. He was dazed and was slowly falling out of consciousness, but he saw blurry shapes walking around him, then heard a loud voice “Well Mr. Whit, what a pleasant surprise! Oh God, he’s in bad shape, we need to get him to a hospital quick. Um, the one on First Street won’t do, we’ll bring him to Second Street. You, untie his feet...” That was the last Dewi heard, as everything went dark. He woke up to the bright light of a hospital room. He opened his eyes gradually, blinking out the powerful light,

and looked around: he was alone in a relatively large room that contained his bed, a small white nightstand, a table and three chairs in another corner, and... a man was sitting beside the door, reading a newspaper. As Dewi stirred, the man dropped the paper on the floor and stood up; it was Glas, and he was beaming. "Welcome back among the living, young friend! I must say, you had us worried back there. The doctor said that your jaw would take a few weeks to feel normal again, but other than a nasty bruise in your side you'll be okay, as long as you eat and drink enough to regain your strength. Was there anything else... Nope, that's all. Oh! Actually, Mr. Marris sends his get-well wishes, and says that you can wait until you're ready to start writing the article." He leaned in as if he were saying a secret, holding the back of his hand to his mouth: "He says that, but I wouldn't keep him waiting too long. He likes you, but business is business! Oh, we had to bring you over to Second Street for adequate medical assistance, so when you're ready to leave you'll have to call me and I'll escort you back. I've got to get back to work, all this running around has gotten me behind in my paperwork..." He let out a long sigh, "Well, in any case, you'll have stuff to write home about!" he chuckled before he opened the door and left. A nurse walked in after him with the meal cart. "Sir, you are very undernourished, so we'll have to ease you back into eating regularly. Sorry for the soft food, but anything too solid would probably come right back out... Anyways, there's a small buzzer on the nightstand, if you need anything just press it and we'll send somebody."

She placed the plate on the table and rolled the cart back out. Dewi stretched, and sat up slowly, his abdominals still hurting. He tested his legs, got up and walked to the table, which tired him much more than he would have thought. He plopped down on the chair with a “Oof!” and looked at the grey-ish mush. He wouldn’t normally have touched it, but his burning stomach had taken control of his hands. He ate his first meal in days, then slowly walked back to the bed and went straight back to sleep. — “Did you get anything out of him?” “Nothing. I really think that he doesn’t know where she went. There’s no way that a skinny kid like that could endure that much if he really did know.” “Damn it! We really lost her this time... Well, it doesn’t matter; I don’t think he’ll forget what happened anytime soon, and I plan to use this newfound trust to good cause. I swear, there’s something about that kid, I just feel it.” “Well, you better start giving us some solid results soon. We trust your feeling, but there’s a limit to the resources we’re ready to invest without seeing any results. Time is of the essence, Mr. Barum.”

Chapter 5

Dewi swiped his card in the slot of his building, and headed towards the phone booth. The yellow light had stopped blinking during the night, meaning that his suspension was over. He had left the hospital this morning, escorted by Glas through Second Street. Dewi felt that he needed to talk to someone; he wanted to talk to Sarah, but at the same time he felt that it was her fault that he had gone through so many terrible experiences recently. So he decided to call his dad. “Whit residence, how may I help you?” “Hey dad, it’s me.” Dewi’s voice was extremely tired, and he had begun to return to his natural colours but was still quite pale. He hoped that his father wouldn’t notice, but knew that it wasn’t very likely. As a matter of fact, his father worriedly answered: “Dewi? Oh goodness, what happened? Did you lose your job? Are you out of credit? Do you need to come home for a while? Do you need us to come visit you?” Dewi sighed. “I don’t really want to talk about it, dad.” “Oh. Well, what do you want to talk about?” Dewi didn’t know why he was calling. “Just... tell me about the farm.” As he listened to his father recount the diverse events of the happenings of the farm, he felt like crying. He felt as if he were trapped in this foreign, ugly city, and he longed for the simpler life of the countryside. Most painful was how alone he felt; he was used to meeting friendly faces whenever he left the house, seeing old schoolmates during

the weekend, going to parties and get-togethers more often than not... he realized that he didn't know anyone here in the city. The only person that he had shared something with was probably a dangerous criminal or something, and she was nowhere to be found anyways. As he stood with the receiver to his ear, he felt a deep anger creeping up from within, directed as much at the city as towards those who had taken him captive. With this anger came resolve, and he interrupted his dad "Okay, thanks dad, I'll talk to you later ok?" with tightened fists, he stormed out of the building and walked into the nearest alley. He didn't know what he was doing or what he planned to do, but just doing something gave his anger a focus and soothed his anxiety. The alleys, perpendicular to the street, connected with a back alley on both sides; this alley was used for waste disposal, deliveries and many other services. The alleys were slightly slanted towards the outside, and giant drains were placed along the buildings to guide water into the sewers. The back alley was very dark, surrounded on one side by the buildings of the district, and on the other side a giant wall towered over the alley. There were a few people huddled up in the corners of buildings, the more fortunate ones wearing oversized coats and large boots to protect against the cold November days, while the others huddled together in old shirts to try to keep warm. Most of these people had been stripped of their keycards, which removed any access they had to buildings and purchasing. Suddenly remembering his keycard, he patted down his pockets; by some miracle (or curse, he wasn't sure which),

he still had Jade Bardier's keycard. An idea popped into his head as he looked down the empty alley. "I wonder where this will lead me..." he spun around and walk quickly towards the checkpoint. Out on the wharf, he noticed that people had begun setting up large tent-like structures over the stalls and tables, probably to keep the coming snow away. Without a second glance, he walked straight over to the checkpoint for Third Street. He was scared, but determined, and convinced that he had nothing to lose. The checkpoint for First Street was usually quite busy, but those from Third were hardly ever seen outside of their district, and even when they came out it was never without a bodyguard. He walked up to the checkpoint, and reached into his pocket for Jade's card. "Let's hope you work, missus" and he swiped the card, slightly flinching at the same time. To his great surprise, the gate swung open and allowed him to enter. He cautiously crossed the gate, and was instantly amazed at the view. Instead of the unending, straight street he was used to, Third Street wasn't really a street, but more of a small town in itself. Roads crisscrossed here and there, and most of the streets had a small line of trees that split the lanes. Instead of pedestrians, there were vehicles on the streets. Buildings weren't square and dull, but were of different shapes and sizes, colours standing out. Blue houses, red houses, houses and not cramped dormitories. Some houses had balconies, porches, but all of them had grassy lawns. None of them had the small gray keycard slots that Dewi had gotten so used to seeing. Some had put out birdhouses, to which

sparrows and robins flocked and tweeted happily. Dewi just stood there, trying to take in the beauty of the scene. He started walking, still dazed, until he saw a building that was much taller than the others. It had some kind of symbol on it, but Dewi had never seen it before. He walked towards the tall, glassy building, passing in front of houses and small stores that sold a variety of products: cheeses, wines, breads, meats. He wasn't sure, but it even felt warmer than in the other areas. He stopped a few streets away from the building. "What am I doing?" The total change of area had made him forget his anger, and he stood at a street corner, looking around, amazed and confused. Then he saw two people walk down a parallel street two corners further. He looked closer... it was Glas, and someone else! Dewi was about to wave, but remembered that he was extremely illegal. Not only was he in a district that he didn't belong to, he had used someone else's card! The two slipped out of sight behind a building, but Dewi walked quickly towards where they had been. He followed them from a distance, trying his best not to look suspicious, but he felt extremely out of place and self-conscious; his shirt was dusty and his pants were too long. He hadn't groomed since the events with the kidnappers, and while passing by a window realized that he looked absolutely horrid. He stood out among the clean, colourful area like a small cloud in a blue sky. He looked around worriedly, but didn't see any officers, to his great surprise. His gaze met with that of a woman who had been speaking with one of the shopowners, and she looked at him curiously,

but he spun around and turned the corner quickly. He kept his head lowered, but he knew it was futile, and he felt as if everyone was staring at him. He glanced ahead, and saw Glas and the other man still two streets ahead, talking as they walked at a leisurely pace. As Dewi was about to cross a street, he crashed into a young woman who had just turned the same corner as he. She had been carrying a bag of groceries, and the contents had spilled onto the sidewalk. "Oh no, I'm so sorry, here I'll pick this up" Dewi frantically tried to put the contents back into the bags. When he had filled up the bag, he looked up at the young woman. She had short reddish-brown hair that was pushed to the side, and her piercing green eyes were looking at him suspiciously. She looked up and down at his clothes and face, frowning. Even in the chaos of the moment, Dewi realized that she was beautiful, and had a strange feeling that he had seen her before. She was wearing a red cardigan and black pants, and a gold necklace. She picked herself up, dusted her hands off, and took the bag from Dewi. She whispered "You don't belong here." Dewi took that as his cue to leave. He had lost Glas, but it didn't matter anymore; he had been caught, and needed to hide. He walked quickly, trying to get back to the checkpoint, but he had never been in a part of the city that wasn't a single street, and was totally lost. Driven by fear and the mounting panic, he accelerated to a jog. He looked around frantically trying to recognize something, but everything looked completely unfamiliar. He felt the gazes of the people on the streets as they watched him. He ran a little faster. Then he looked to

the side and saw the tall building. "I can retrace my steps from there." He thought. As he ran, he nearly crashed into passersby, who yelled at him "Hey, slow down buddy!" and the such. He almost got hit by a car as he ran onto a street, and he heard the screech of tires beside him but never turned to look. He looked left and right, hoping desperately to find the checkpoint at the end of one of the streets, but still no luck. Then he saw it, the concrete wall broke open to reveal the metallic doors four street corners away. He was full-on running now. He looked behind him, but nobody was following him. The way to the checkpoint was wide open. He ran up to it, swiped the card, and squeezed through the door without waiting for it to fully open. He ducked under the giant tent and merged into a particularly busy line of people in front of a stall. He was panting and sweating, but safe. He looked towards the checkpoint; nobody had followed him. Then someone pushed him from behind "Hey come on, get moving!". Dewi ducked through the mass of people and slowly walked towards First Street, trying to catch his breath. There were police officers standing at the checkpoint. Dewi saw them, and awkwardly turned around and returned under the tent. The air was warm, humid and suffocating, but he felt safe in the mass of people. He had discovered one thing at least: Jade Bardier's card had clearance to access Third Street, which meant that she probably had access anywhere else as well. With a twinge of fear, he also realized that it meant that the authorities were probably looking for her card; lost cards, especially high-authorization ones, sometimes

had entire squads sent out to look for them. He decided not to use the card again. "How did Sarah even get this card?" His jaw dropped as he realized: "This is why they were looking for her!" Now Dewi wanted to find her. He had questions that he needed to ask her. He just needed to find a place to start looking... "Wait... Glas was looking for her too. Maybe he knows something more about her!" He had to contact him. Dewi waited until suppertime was finished at the wharf, and joined the masses returning to First Street. He did his best to blend in with the crowd, and passed in front of the officers without a problem. He hurried to his building, noticing just how many officers there were on First compared to the apparently zero officers on Third. There seemed to be officers in their black vests with the black caps at every corner. "Were there always this many?" He wondered absent-mindedly as he reached 40 and navigated to the phone room. He took out the paper with Glas' number that he had left in the hospital and dialed. After a few rings, he heard Glas' voice sound into the receiver. "Hello, who is this?" "Glas, it's Dewi. I need help, it's about Sarah." "I'll be right there. Wait for me in your office." The office building was dark, everyone had left for the day. The only light came from under a door leading to a small room in a corner, Dewi's office. In the cramped office, Glas tried to make himself comfortable, but it was just too small. Dewi was sitting in a corner, and even he was cramped between the useless furniture. Glas broke the silence. "You called?" "Uh, yeah. You were, uh, looking for that Sarah girl, right?" "Right. You have any info?" "No,

well, not about her, but that time in the sewers... The people who captured me were looking for her. I think she might be in trouble, and I need to help her. I thought you might have a lead, since you seem to be her friend... right?" Glas smiled. "Yeah, we go way back. We actually used to date back in school, but that didn't really work out. Anyways, I think I may have a lead, as you say. I couldn't follow it myself, but I think you could get something out of it." He tore a piece of paper out of Dewi's typewriter, wrote something down, folded it up and handed it to Dewi. "Follow this address, but don't mention me. Some people's trust is misplaced... but you'll be fine. Oh and take this as well." He pulled a small block-shaped object out of his coat pocket. "This will allow me to track your position, in case you get caught in an... unfortunate situation. But hey, what are the chances of that happening, right?" he laughed at his joke, but Dewi didn't find it funny. He was reconsidering his involvement in the search, but felt as if he needed to do this. Not necessarily for Glas or even for Sarah, but for him.