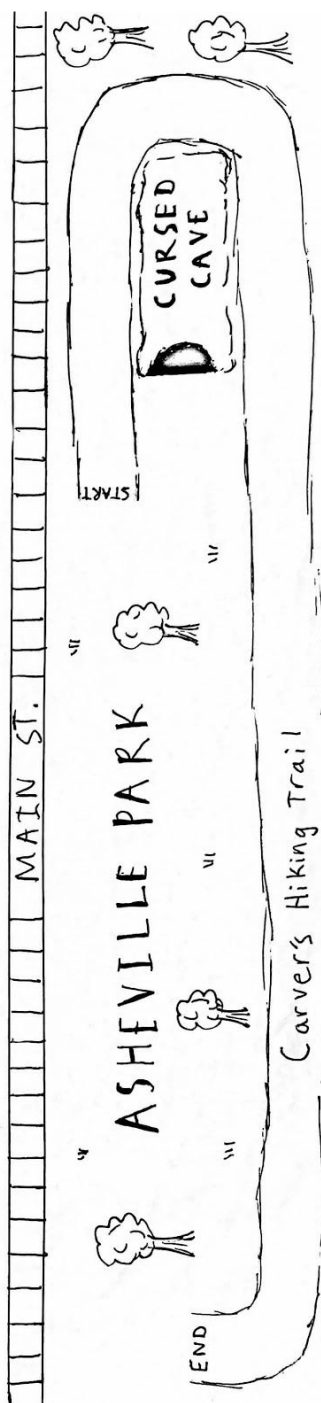
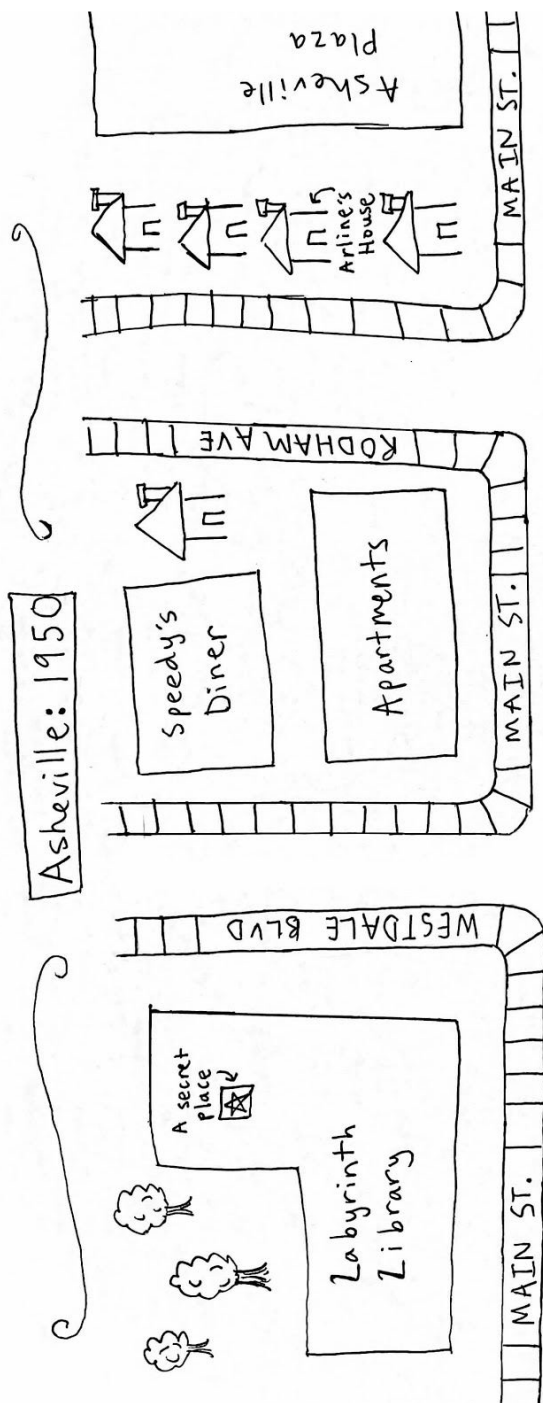


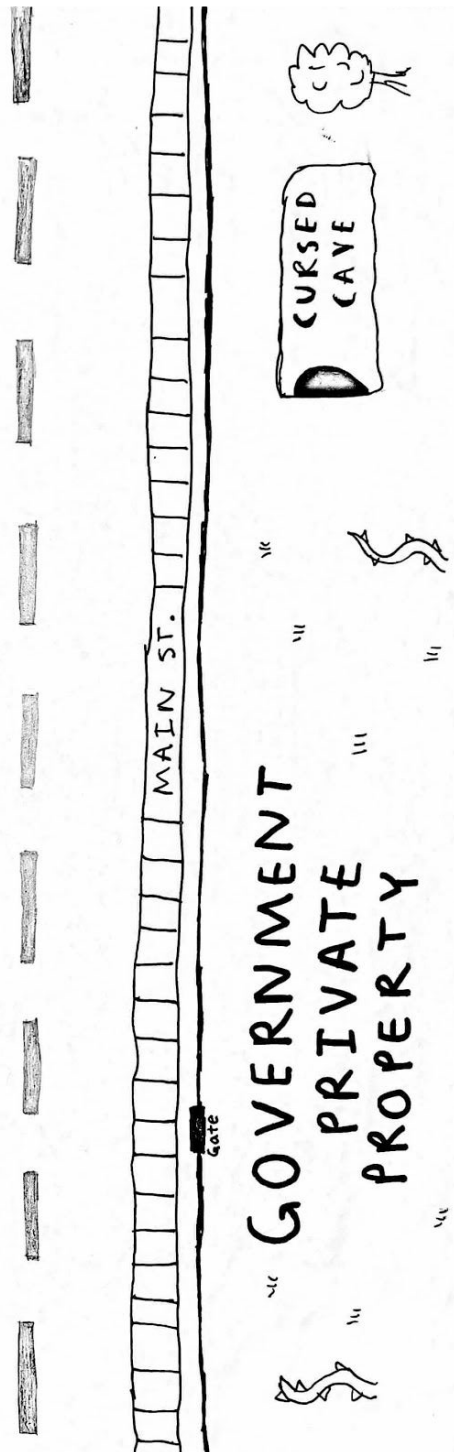
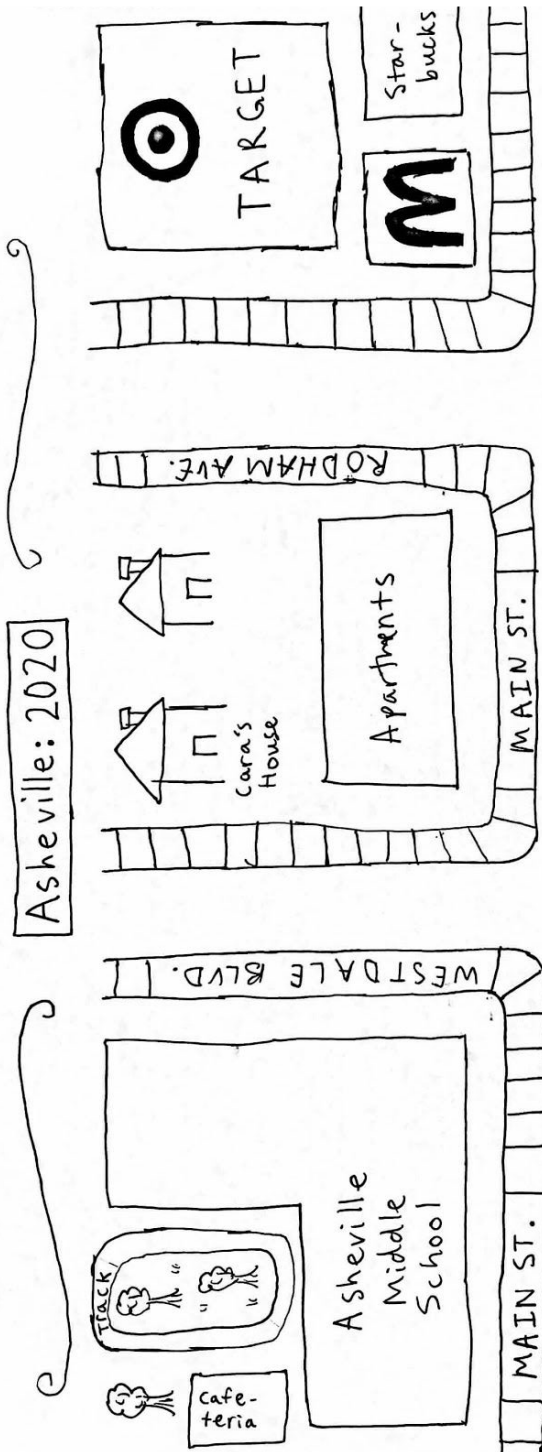


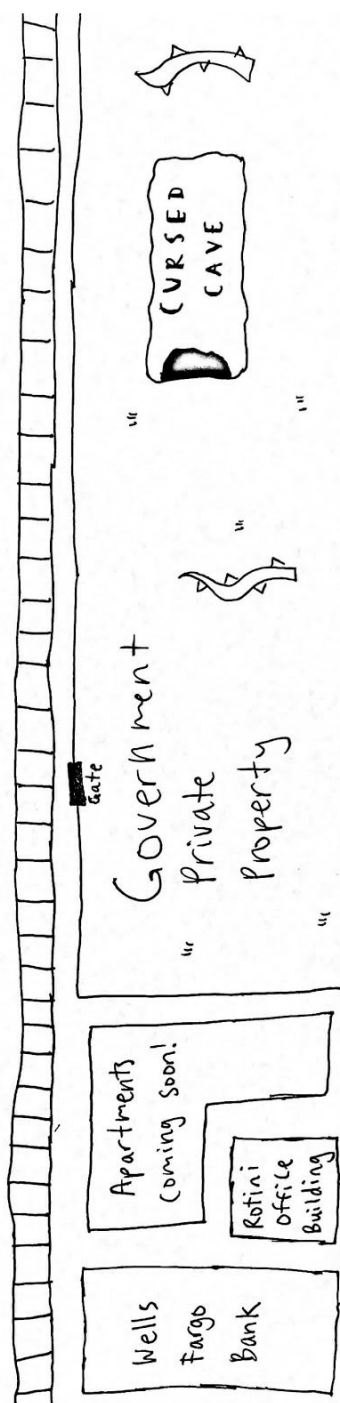
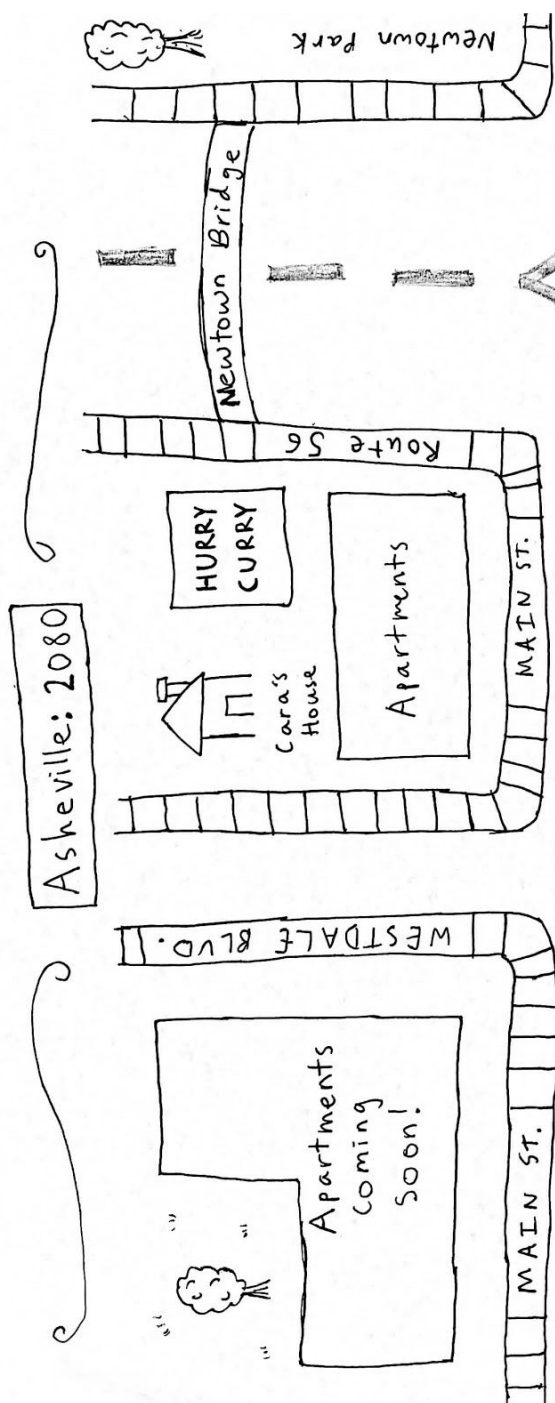
A CAVE IN TIME

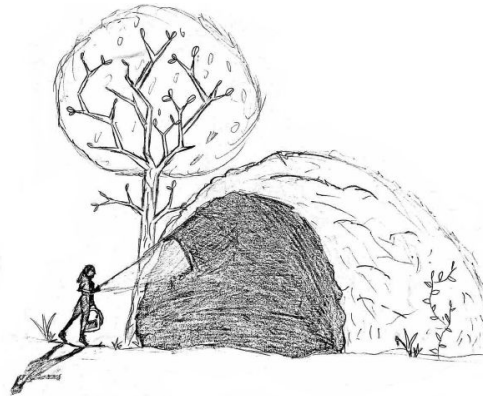
Written by **Yonna**
Illustrated by **Seyla**











Approaching

I know I shouldn't have done it, but I just *had* to. Nobody *ever* calls me scared. *Nobody*. And if somebody, even if it's my best friend Jordan, calls me scared and dares me to do something absurdly stupid like waltz into the abandoned cave on Sunday (at 10 PM according to my watch) that no one's ever come back from on the far side of Asheville, I'm going to do it.

I was actually quite curious about the cave. Where had those people gone who had disappeared in the cave so long ago? Would I discover something incredible? My curiosity didn't mean I wasn't scared as I pushed through the thick and thorny bushes on my way there. It seemed to get darker and darker as I moved through. I wondered if I should've taken the main road, but I shook my head, thinking about how everyone would look out their windows if I did and see that crazy 12-year-old girl that lives next door with a backpack and a bulky flashlight that was slipping through her fingers trekking off somewhere late at night, when she wasn't even supposed to be up.

I switched my heavy flashlight to power mode with a *click*, and suddenly I could see much more. Some slithery thing was moving on the ground next to me so I stepped carefully away from it. I turned around and the huge cave loomed over me, the inside just a huge dark pit. I had made it! Not a single shred of light penetrated the deep darkness. I gulped. I would *definitely* need my flashlight for this.

My backpack had a thick rope inside that I had used to escape from my second-floor bedroom. I remembered there was about \$20 inside of it, so thinking quickly I put it in my right pocket just in case, and so it wouldn't be stolen. I dropped the backpack outside the cave so it wouldn't slow me down. I watched as a little cloud of tan dust rose from where I dropped it. After thinking, I flipped it upside down so it showed the little name tag reading *Cara* in blocky sharpie. The tag had a phone number written on it. I figured if I went missing in the cave, someone could see the phone number and be able to call my mom with some information about where I was. I shuddered thinking about it. What if I did go missing?

I reminded myself that I was fine and that I was just going to walk around inside and then go home. I would tell Jordan the next day that I had gone and she would give me the \$20 she promised me. I closed my eyes, at once realizing how foolish *and* brave I was, and stepped inside.



Inside

The air was damp and musty, and there was about as much sound as there was light, which was absolutely none. It was so quiet that I could hear my own heart thump around fast in my chest. I wondered why there wasn't light. My flashlight was on, wasn't it? And I had put new batteries in before I left. It was like it had shut off right upon entering the cave. *Click*. No light. *Click*. *Click*. *Click*. Still no light! That was strange. *What was going on?* I remembered that my watch lit up so I nervously fumbled around until I found and pushed the little black button for the light. The extremely dim light on my watch flickered and went out almost

immediately. That was *really* strange. I decided to put my flashlight down, because it was both extremely heavy *and* extremely useless.

I somehow managed to convince myself to keep moving, even in the pitch-black darkness. I groped around with my hands, touching the hard stone with that strangely cold feel to it.

I suddenly grasped the realization of the situation. I was in a pitch-black cave late at night by myself, without a working flashlight, and with no means of contact to anyone! I made up my mind to go back.

I sharply turned around 180 degrees and stepped forwards. I was met with a nasty surprise - I hit my head on a thick, ice cold rock. There was no rock there before! I felt around in front of me. There was a rock wall blocking my way!

I started panicking and headed forward in a random direction. I don't know how long I walked. It didn't feel long, but didn't feel short. It was like the cave had *no time* inside of it... Suddenly I noticed a bright light ahead. It wasn't artificial, or bright white. It felt natural, like it was just daytime outside the cave. There were three holes, a little bit apart from each other.

I excitedly ran forwards and scrambled up the steep dirt path to the first hole. I ran through the exit. I looked down at my watch. It said 10:17. I sighed with relief, glad I had only spent 17 minutes inside. I looked around, and it was sunny outside! *Wait...* I looked back down at my watch. It said 10:17 AM!



Strangers

It was warm outside the cave, and I had that strange feeling of being cold one second and warm the next. There were no people around yet. I heard footsteps on the path from behind the cave and heard a dog bark shrilly. I was certainly lost, and the only way back home was to back-track. There was no way I was going back through the cave again, so I decided I would just have to go around it when I headed back. I decided to stay and look around a little more, because I had already made it over here and there was no immediate hurry. A few minutes more wouldn't make a difference.

I had to adjust my eyes to the sunlight a little before noticing the hiking trail behind the cave, dusty and filled with that kind of fine dirt that looks like sand because of its color. The trail was looped closely around the cave, and seemed to end on the other side and start on the other side.

The thing that was strange was that it was a *hiking trail*. There was no hiking trail here before! The cave was abandoned, and the things that were around it were gnarled and twisted black plants, not pleasant hiking trails. And there was also the fact that it was mysteriously 10:17 AM.

The people around the corner strolled out happily, on their morning walk. There were four of them; a family, who didn't seem to mind their dog yapping at everything that moved, mostly birds and squirrels. They were dressed funny, almost like something I had seen in an old-fashioned book. The dad and son looked like they were wearing some kind of suit, and the mom and daughter were wearing nice dresses, certainly not fit for a hike. They must've come out of a costume shop or something... I had no time to think of a better explanation because as soon as I was in view they called out to me.

"Hello!" the dad said. He talked a bit strangely, maybe with some kind of a slight accent.

"Hi," I spoke. "Um, I think I'm sort of lost. Do you have a phone with you that I can call my parents on?"

He looked incredibly confused. "A telephone?" he said. "With me?" He glanced at me as if I was crazy. We were both confused.

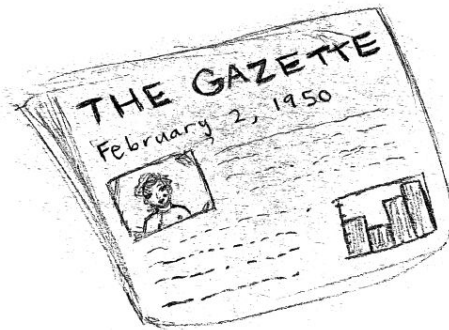
"Yeah, a phone. That I can call my parents on?"

He was still confused. I decided to back away, wondering if these people were insane.

"We have a telephone at home, darling. Do you need help?" the mom finally spoke out, breaking the awkward silence.

“That’s okay. Thank you!” I said.

I rushed away quickly, trying to get away from the really strange strangers. I went down the path they had come from, at the same time wondering why he had called the phone a *telephone*. I could faintly hear the man commenting to his wife that *I* was dressed strangely right before I was out of earshot.



Newspaper

I eventually came upon an odd bunch of paper lazily floating around in the slight wind at my feet. I picked it up and was extremely shocked at what the front cover said.

“The Gazette: February 2, 1950” was the title. 1950? This certainly wasn’t an old newspaper. Aside from the sandy dirt on it, it looked clean and fresh, the paper white and the ink dark black and new. Also, who used newspapers anymore? I tore off a small scrap of the newspaper with the date on it and shoved it into the left pocket of my camo jacket, in case I needed to prove that all of this really did happen.

All of these things happening to me only persuaded me to get home faster. I was now sprinting down the path, my feet a blur of dust and converse shoes.



Inside Again

The first thing I did when I arrived back at the start of the cave was to sit down and think. If I went in again, I could risk getting lost and getting stuck in the cave. I hadn't considered how lucky I was to have even found the exit! I eventually resolved myself to heading back in soon, because what else could I do?

I sighed and plotted all my thoughts out in my head. I was still hesitant to believe it, but apparently, I was in the past, according to the newspaper. (That explained the strange people.) *70 years* in the past. I had entered into the left hole and came out in the past. There should be a future hole, according to some sci-fi time-traveling books I've read before, and it was probably on the right, because the past is on the left and the future is on the right. I think. That only left the middle hole. The middle hole most likely would send me back to 2020. *Most likely*. "Most likely" wasn't enough!

I decided to go back into the cave immediately, wasting no time. After my incident with the newspaper, I was determined to make it back home, and to not waste time talking with strange 1950's people who couldn't help me. I was in such a rush I forgot to even ask around for some kind of flashlight, but I had a feeling it wouldn't work anyway.

To my surprise, I saw people in the entrance to the cave in front of me. They were talking excitedly and were dressed just as strangely as the first family. It was then that I noticed the big wooden signpost at the entrance, reading:

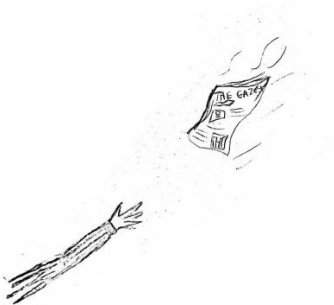
“CURSED CAVE” - ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK

OPEN FROM 10 AM TO 7 PM FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY

DOUGLAS PARK IS NOT LIABLE FOR ANY PERSONAL INJURIES SUSTAINED HERE

So this was some kind of tourist location! I knew that something was strange, because many people must find the exit with the three holes, and that meant that anyone could travel through time, which is impossible. I'm sure I would've heard about a time-traveling cave in my own city... A sense of worry and dread grew in the pit of my stomach. What if it didn't work? What if I was stuck here?

I pushed past the people and darted straight forward through the eerie and unnatural darkness in the cave. The noise of the people behind me eventually faded away like the light and sound, and I was in the cave and walking once more.

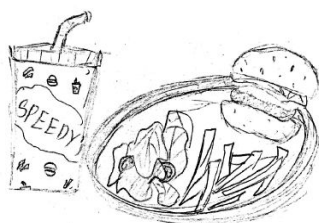


Failure

There they were. The three, small dim holes just wide enough to squeeze through in front of me. The light slowly bled into the cave like ink spreading through a thin sheet of paper. I was almost certain that going through an exit wouldn't work now, but I had to try. I took a meek step towards the right hole, because I wasn't sure what the center hole would do, and I was pretty certain that the hole on the right was the future. If I was lucky, maybe the hole actually went forward around 70 years, and it

could possibly take me back to my time. Filled with a feeling of hope and a desire to see my family, (and even Jordan!) I stepped through the future hole at 11:15 AM.

I opened my eyes and was disappointed, but not surprised. The hiking trail was the same. I was still stuck in 1950. I felt something brush against my foot. It was the newspaper, which had floated from where it was before and had met me here, only to remind me just how stuck I was. Impatiently, I threw the newspaper as hard as I could away from me. I watched it float away in the wind.



Lunch and Familiar Faces

I was quite hungry. Traveling through time was messing with my stomach. I had only gone 4 hours and 17 minutes without food, which wasn't bad at all, but I was still hungry. I don't know why, I guess it was just my body getting confused. It was then that I realized that I hadn't had any sleep. It was now 11:20 AM, and I was 12 hours back in 2020, which meant it was 11:20 PM in 2020. It was pretty late, but not late enough for me to be really tired.

I had the idea to visit where my house was, and to see what was there before. I made my way back through the abandoned overgrown area, which was actually a quaint park in 1950. I ignored the curious stares from people who didn't recognize my strange clothing and quickly crossed the wide street and made it home. Or, should I say: *Speedy's Diner!*

I couldn't believe my house used to be a restaurant! I wondered how I was going to pay for any food, but I was hungry, so I quickly entered the restaurant and stepped through onto the clean checkered floor.

The huge diner had red and white striped chairs and neon cursive lighting, spelling out "Speedy's Diner" big on the wall, right next to the jukebox. I think it was a jukebox. I'm not really sure what jukeboxes look like. It was blasting out... was that... Elvis? There were waitresses in light pink dresses and rollerskates, gliding smoothly over the floor, effortlessly balancing trays and trays of food. There were records attached all over the bright red walls, and a counter topped with people enjoying tall milkshakes with cherries perched on top of the mounds of whipped cream. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed.

I sat down on one of the only empty chairs in the whole place, eyeing the menu, and then looking back curiously at where my bed was supposed to be, right about where the cash register was. I yawned. It wasn't like I could sleep, though, not with the rock-and-roll/doo-wop music pouring out of the jukebox.

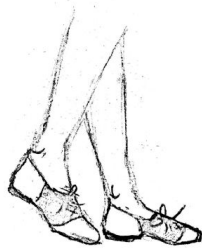
I felt cold despite the lack of air conditioning, and put my hands in my pocket. I felt a piece of paper in my left pocket, and a piece in my right. The left one was the newspaper scrap, but what was the right one? I pulled out something green and thin. It was \$20! I had completely forgotten about putting it in my pocket when I had entered the cave. Now I could pay for my food!

I hoped it would last me, but fortunately my fears were abolished when I saw the menu. A "Speedy's Combination Plate" (The fabulous Speedy's Hamburger served with Golden Brown French Fried Idaho Potatoes, Hearts of Chilled Lettuce which is topped with our own Thousand Island Dressing) was \$0.45. I was shocked, especially when I discovered that the most expensive item on the menu was \$1.50 (Speedy's Special Spencer Steak.)

A waitress came over and I ordered a Speedy's Combo Plate. It was deliciously fried to perfection.

I was wondering what my next step would be when I saw a girl sitting at the counter. She was older than me, and looked about 13 or 14 years old. She was wearing a long gingham dress, with white and black vintage-looking flats and a headband, which was unnecessary because her curly hair was cut short already, but it was stylish nonetheless. When she

turned her face a bit to order a milkshake, I was shocked. I recognized her face immediately, but I had *no idea* who she was. She had an elegant face, with a pointed nose and piercing eyes. Where did I recognize her from?



Arline Sax

I called her over and asked her what her name was.

“Arline!” She responded brightly, before sitting down across from me.

“Arline Sax. Say, you look strange! You're not from Asheville, are you?” Hearing her name just worsened the burning feeling of recognizing her and her name and yet not knowing who she was!

“Well, yeah, something like that.” I responded. I technically *was* from Asheville, just not 1950's Asheville.

“Your clothes sure look funny, too. Say, I should give you a tour! Well, you've already seen Speedy's, so half the tour's over!” She laughed lightly. “The food sure is great, huh?” I had no time to answer, because she quickly asked, “Have you paid already?”

“Oh no, I haven't,” I said, standing up to wait in line. I paid at the counter (the lady was surprised at my \$20 bill) and I went back to Arline.

“This tour might take a little bit. I'll go call my parents and tell them I'll be gone for a while more!” She led me outside the diner to a big clunky box on the street.

“Why, you act like you've never seen a payphone before!”

I laughed awkwardly. I guess it was more common for kids to be out on their own in 1950. Arline dug deep into her gingham pocket and pulled out a dime. She slid it into a little slot next to a big black

old-fashioned telephone connected to the wall. There was a dial, which she expertly flicked and turned to call her parents.

“Hello, Mom! ... Yeah, I’ll be gone a bit more. I’m going to give a tour to my friend-” She put the telephone to her hand. “What’s your name?”

“Cara,” I answered.

“To my friend from out of town Cara here... Yeah I know it’s a *bit* of a strange name-” She apologetically shrugged to me, I mouthed, *it’s fine*. “... Okay, mom! I’ll see you at 3:00!” She hung the phone up again, and said, “Where are your parents at?”

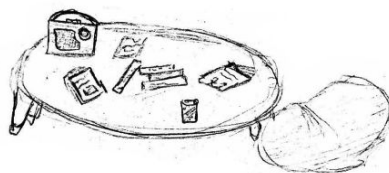
“Oh...” I replied, thinking quickly, “They’re staying at a hotel. They let me go out on my own. I have to be back by 10:00.”

“Wow! Really? You’re lucky,” Arline said. “How old are you?”

“I’m almost 14,” I lied. “I’m just short.”

Arline chuckled, before stating: “I’m 14 too.” She led me across the street, pulling harder after noticing me slowing down and goggling at the vintage-looking mint-colored and red-colored Fords.

“Come on! We’re going to the Labyrinth Library!”



The Labyrinth Library

No wonder it was called Labyrinth Library! The huge stone steeples and the massive gargoyles impressively outlined the outside of the colossal library. I could only imagine what it looked like on the inside. Luckily, I got to see! Arline pushed the huge wooden doors open, and gestured for me to come in with her arm branched out towards the books. The books! Books smothering the tons and tons of shelves, some even falling out onto the floor. The ceiling was so high I almost couldn’t see it.

The architecture was amazing, with more stone arches and curves, and slidable wooden ladders to get to the top shelves.

“There are three other floors, you know.” She said, smiling, clearly enjoying my amazement of the library.

The shelves and books went on and on. It was like a maze. You could really get lost in there. Arline was moving so fast, it was hard to keep up with her.

“So anyway, this is the library!” She gabbled on ahead. “Me and my friends come here after school sometimes. It’s the perfect hang-out spot!” She continued leading me to some place up ahead. It was quite amazing that she memorized how to get there.

We approached a space in between four shelves of books, comfortably nestled away from view. Arline had to roll a shelf back so we could squeeze through.

The space reminded me of being in a forest, the bookshelves around us being tall trees and the secret place being a peaceful grassy clearing. There were bean bags situated across the floor, and a small circular table in the center, covered with empty soda bottles and a few books. In the center of the table, there was a little portable maroon radio.

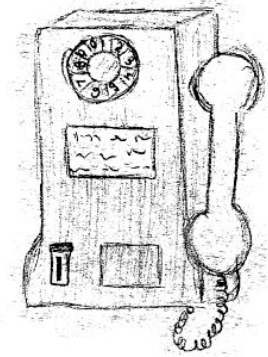
I sat down at a bean bag and grabbed a book. Arline listened to music on the radio. I pretended to read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (a new release) but secretly, I was thinking. How was I supposed to get back? I finally understood why those people never came back. They must’ve gotten stuck and never figured out how to get back, or they just preferred life in another time.

Wait... I had struck upon a thought. Why hadn’t I thought of it earlier? I exited the cave at 10:17 PM, and emerged in 1950 at 10:17 AM. I tried again at 11:15 AM (in 1950,) but it didn’t work... Some kind of time portal must open at 10:17 PM! That explained why some people traveled and some didn’t, because the people who *didn’t* travel didn’t exit a hole at *exactly* 11:17 PM! It also explained why it didn’t work when I tried again at 11:15. I would have to try again tonight at 10:17!

I glanced down at my watch. It was 1:00 PM. That explained why I was exhausted. My bedtime was at 9:00, and I was (technically) up until 1:00 AM!

“You know what? This library is where my school is in 2020,” I said, right before I flopped down on my bean bag and heard Arline say,

“2020? What the heck are you talking about? You must be tired. Must be jet lag,” before I drifted into dreamland.



Discussion

“Wake up! Cara, WAKE UP!” I squinted up at Arline’s frantic face. I rubbed my eyes, waking up from my dreams about a big mint-colored payphone blasting out Elvis from the telephone.

“What time is it?”

“It’s 8:45 PM, according to your watch!”

“8:45?” I said groggily.

“Yes! Wake up!”

I had slept 8 hours, and was now fully rested. I sat up and looked over at Arline as she began to talk.

“You missed the rest of the tour!” She said, upset. “I had to leave to call my parents. It sure was hard to explain to them that you were *sleeping* in the library! I only didn’t wake you up because your parents only need you home at 10.”

“Yeah... about that. Has anyone ever come here before, saying they were from the future or the past?”

“Actually? Yeah! When I was 9, some old kook came into town somehow, and *insisted* he was from 1820, with the top hat and everything. Crazy, huh? He must’ve left town or something, because I never saw him again.”

This information was startling. I decided to be bold with Arline.

“What if I told you... I was from 2020?”

“No way! Are you pulling my leg? Because I hate when-”

“I’m not. I promise. I’ll prove it to you.” I’ve never seen someone look as skeptical as Arline did in that moment. “You’ll just have to... leave here for a while. In fact, I don’t even know if it’ll work.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll explain it on the way.”

“The way?”

“Yes. Are you okay with leaving here for a day? You can tell your parents you’re leaving, but you can’t tell them where. Or rather, you can’t tell them *when* you are.”

“*When* I am?”

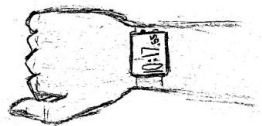
“Mm-hmm,” I nodded my head. “In fact, I don’t even know if I should bring you along...”

“No! I want to go... well... wherever you’re talking about. Or... *whenever* you’re talking about. Don’t leave me out,” she spoke. “Actually, we have to leave now anyway,” she continued. “The library closes in 15 minutes.”

We weaved through the endless shelves and ran out of the library, heading towards another payphone, where Arline gave her worried parents a shaky excuse as to why she would be gone until the next morning. “This better be good,” she said.

“Oh, it will. Come with me,” I said.

This time *I* was leading her as we walked together towards the cave.



Inside Again, Again

I grasped Arline's clammy hand in mine. She was pale in the moonlight outside the cave. It took much longer to get there than last time, because it was so dark.

"I know this holding-hands thing is a bit awkward, but we *cannot* afford to get lost."

I noticed the *Cursed Cave* sign again, saying:

OPEN FROM 10 AM TO 7 PM FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY

Well, too bad. We would have to sneak in. Also, in my time, it was 10 AM exactly, so oh well!

We walked into the cave. As we moved along, I tried to touch as much area of the ground as possible, just in case I came across my flashlight and could pick it up and use it if it ended up working.

The cave led us to the three holes just in time, at 10:10. I paced around the area before the three holes, Arline having daintily perched herself on a nice rock near the exit.

We had a choice: the middle hole or the right hole. The right hole was probably going to send us to the future, but by how much? It's possible that it might send us 70 years forward, which would even out to 2020. But then how would Arline get back? It probably wouldn't be worth it to bring Arline- "And don't you think about abandoning me!" Arline said as if on cue, interrupting my thoughts.

The middle exit might do the same thing (send me to my original time,) but what would happen to Arline? Would she come to 2020 with me? Or would she just stay in 1950, since that was *her* original time? Or what if the middle hole didn't even do anything? Or what if it led to some other place, one we could never get out of? At least the right exit most likely led to the future. But I could be wasting lots of time going into the right exit, where my parents (and Arline's!) would be panicking, and calling the police. Was it even right to bring Arline into this?

Arline ran over and grabbed my wrist, looking at my watch.

"It's 10:16, Cara! Didn't you say the thingamajiggy opened at 10:17?"

I frantically looked down at my watch and then up at Arline's face, a panicked expression on my own.

“We’ve got to leave at 10:17 exactly. But through where?” I asked both myself *and* Arline.

“I already told you, if these holes actually lead where you say they lead, I vote the right hole,” she said. “We don’t know what the middle hole does!”

“We don’t know what the RIGHT HOLE does EITHER!” I shouted, sweating.

“Cara!” Arline shouted. She pointed to my watch. It was five seconds until 10:18! *10:18!*

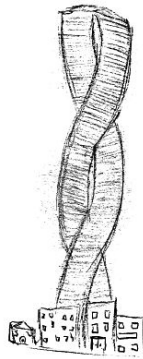
Arline suddenly pushed me forward. She lunged forward herself as well. We both tripped on each other, and one of my hands was gripped on Arline’s dress, and the other was stretched towards the exits. I picked myself and Arline up, and looked down at my watch again. It was 10:18! We had missed it!

But then... why was there sunlight coming out of the holes? I crept out into the sunshine with Arline.

“It worked! I think...” Arline said.

“My hand must’ve slipped just outside the hole... and I guess it transported you too, because I was touching your dress!”

“Well... where are we now? Or *when?*”



The Future?

Arline was muttering “I don’t believe it” the whole way back to town. “There’s no way we’re in the future! What kind of prank is this?”

“It’s not a prank! I just need to figure out what year we’re in.” I replied. I knew we weren’t in 2020, because the plants were even more overgrown, and they looked dead. At least in 2020 when they were black and dark green they looked living, but now they just looked grey and lifeless.

Arline kept pinching herself and yelling “Ow!” from behind me to make sure she wasn’t dreaming. There were less trees, and I could see the tops of strange buildings hanging over the few tall trees that were left. The buildings were shiny and twisted upwards, almost like a piece of upright rotini.

“What are those things?” Arline asked. “This is bogus.”

“Bogus?”

“Yeah, bogus! You’re telling me you don’t know the word *bogus*?”

“Well, I am from 2020.”

“It does explain your watch... Tell me, Cara. How did you set all of this up? Are you working with some set decorating team from Hollywood? Are you a *magician*?” She looked like that could genuinely be the answer, as it was more believable than a time-traveling cave.

“I’m telling you, Arline! *I’m just as confused with this as you are.* Now, we need to find someone who will tell us what year we’re in.”

I stubbornly pushed through the abandoned area, while Arline said, “What happened to Asheville Park? It was right here.”

“Asheville Park isn’t here anymore. They’re probably going to use it to build more apartments. The Labyrinth Library isn’t here anymore either,” I remarked sadly. “Not even in 2020.”

Arline whimpered. “I want to go home, Cara.”

“I know... I feel terrible. I shouldn’t have brought you. We’ll have to wait for tonight at 10:17 to travel, though.”

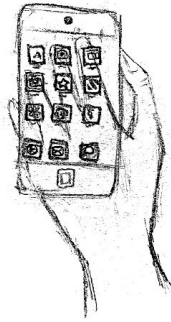
We came upon people walking on Main Street.

“What are they holding?”

“They’re probably the newest version of the iPhone.”

“They’re... clear!” Arline exclaimed.

I was surprised to see that the phones were see-through and thin, with little apps standing out with their bright colors. Arline suddenly stepped forward, deciding to bravely approach someone.



Excuse Me, Sir

“Excuse me, sir?” Arline questioned the man politely. He was young but big and wearing a strange outfit, with tight spandex-looking pants and a jacket. He was playing with something on his strange phone.

“Hm?” He answered in a gruff voice.

“Do you know what year it is?”

“I don’t appreciate you bothering me with stupid questions.”

Arline was affronted.

“Excuse me, sir! I did nothing wrong to you! Please answer my question,” she said promptly, in her bright and polite voice.

“Where are your parents? Why are you talking so strangely?”

“What year is it?” she said persistently.

“It’s 2080! Obviously!”

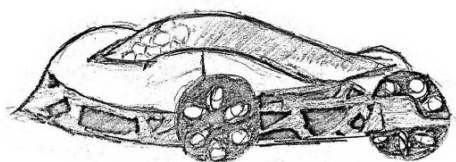
“2080?” Arline and I said at precisely the same time.

“Go away!” He yelled. He had had enough. He then proceeded to bring up his phone again.

“2080!” Arline muttered to herself. “That man’s insane!”

“I’m afraid not. It probably is 2080,” I replied.

Arline sighed.



Hyperloops and Rimac Scalatans

“Let’s go over to where the Labyrinth Library used to be!” Arline said. She was trying hard to cheer herself up over the whole affair. I doubted visiting a set of apartments would do her any good, but she was asking for it.

On the way, we saw lots of billboards and posters. Everything was digital, including the posters taped to the walls. Me along with Arline marveled at them. I couldn’t imagine how they were created. They were paper-thin, and yet they flickered to a new advertisement every so often.

We came upon a billboard advertising a “hyperloop.” It was a sleek metal tube which apparently was the new common form of transportation. The hyperloop sped through almost airless tubes at high speeds. The ad was for the Virgin Hyperloop, which could safely transport people at 760 miles per hour. So that explains why we hadn’t seen an airplane! We were so mesmerized by it that we waited another round of ads for it to pop up again so we could look at it again.

And the cars! And the traffic lights! The cars literally *screamed* futuristic. I could tell they were self driving by the way they turned as smoothly as possible, and how they stopped precisely at the right time. The busy street was absolutely silent, with the sleek cars having no sound. A car pulled up to the sidewalk, and the back doors opened like a beetle’s wings when it was about to fly.

“What are they wearing?” Arline said suddenly.

It was a family of four with a brother and sister, exactly like the family in 1950, except they lived in 2080. And they looked *extremely* different. The son was really young, maybe 2 or 3 years old. He was

wearing this black stretchy top and pants, with relatively normal (to my time) shoes. The girl was wearing a white dress that went just above her knees. She wore silver knee-high boots. The mom wore a silver metallic-looking dress with a matching silver triangular purse. The dad wore a completely black suit with a sleek silver zipper going straight down, all the way. Arline was gaping at them like they were aliens. They admittedly *did* look like aliens... I had to push Arline a bit to get her moving again, and we were on our way.



Labyrinth Library: 2080

Looking at the Labyrinth Library was depressing. Labyrinth Library was where my school was in 2020. Now it was a huge empty lot, weeds and dirt galore. It wasn't even being used! There was a sign saying "Apartments Coming Soon," but I could tell by the extremely thick layer of dust and grime on the sign that they weren't.

Arline was shocked to see her beloved library torn apart only to be replaced by a big empty lot. I signaled to her for us to leave, and I tried to cheer her and myself up.

"Come on, dude! We're in the future! Let's go explore!"

"*Dude?*" Arline questioned. I sighed. I kept forgetting that she wasn't used to modern slang. "But I agree with you. I'm really tired *and* hungry," she said.

I told her that I couldn't even remember if I was supposed to be tired, but I could definitely go for some food. I checked my right pocket for the precious \$19.55 which was probably not worth much anymore.

"Do you have any money one you?" I asked.

"Nope."



Hurry Curry

We quickly scouted out a restaurant called "Hurry Curry." It was the best that we could find that was hopefully cheap enough to keep us full with our now-practically-worthless \$19.55.

It certainly was a very evolved and advanced fast food restaurant. There were touch screen ordering stations equipped with facial recognition technology, I noticed by watching a person save their order for the next time with the face recognition. The restaurant had ingeniously saved space by moving the actual kitchen space upstairs. Arline was amazed with the new technology, and I was too, impressed with the amazing quality of the ordering screens. There was no need for fast food workers anymore, because the computers did the job.

I ordered the Small Karahi Chicken, and Arline ordered the Small Chicken Vindaloo. Our \$20 turned out to be worth about \$4, which was *barely* enough to get food for Arline. I would have to go without food.



Billboard

We wandered around aimlessly, enjoying the calm and quiet. The future was very relaxing. It was sort of like walking around in a giant theme park, because it was so different from what we were both used to that it felt fake. We walked on a bridge over a highway, leading to a park. The bridge was unbelievably futuristic. It was wide and white, with beautiful curves and glass panes. Yes, glass panes! The bridge had a garden on both sides of the walkway, and the sides of the bridge were completely made of pure glass. It was nice to see a splash of nature on a bridge like this, and it added to the atmosphere. There were even little benches situated on parts of the bridge, where you could sit and look out on the magnificent town.

As we were walking through the bridge, Arline suddenly stopped. She gazed out through the side of the bridge. Her eyes were fixed on a digital billboard close by. I wondered why she had stopped here. I looked out at the ad displayed on the billboard. It was some kind of video advertisement about a contest.

“Oh yeah, I know. Those things are pretty cool. In 2020, video ads are not allowed because they’re too distracting for drivers. I guess now, with self-driving cars, you don’t really need to keep focus in the car.” Arline hadn’t responded yet, which was strange. “Arline? Are you-”

“Cara?” She blurted out.

“Yeah?”

“Do you think I would make a good actress?”

I looked across at the billboard, this time taking in the advertisement. It was a video of a celebrity hosting an acting competition. There was a big prize and a trophy.

“Sure! I didn’t know you liked acting. You should totally be an actress!”

She looked once more at the billboard and slowly turned away.

“Maybe,” she said, softly. We turned away, heading towards the park.



A Nap in the Park

We strolled into the park when Arline yawned (extra-hard this time) and collapsed onto my arm. It was definitely enough to convince me to let her take a nap. It was 3:00 PM, the perfect time for an afternoon nap. We found a tall oak tree, it’s branches shading us from the sun, the

smooth green grass slipping under our tired feet. For Arline, it was 3:00 in the morning, and for me, (since I had traveled twice,) it had evened back out to 2020 time. That didn't mean I wasn't tired by my whole journey, and I longed to just lay down and let my dreams take me away. But I knew I had to stay awake, in case we missed 10:17. Arline was already snoring relentlessly, and as I looked out at all the peaceful trees and the calming sun, my eyelids slowly drooped and I fell asleep too...



An Idea

“Wake up! Cara, WAKE UP!” I squinted up at Arline’s frantic face. I rubbed my eyes.

“What time is it?” I suddenly had a strong feeling of déjà vu.

“It’s 9:40!”

Phew. “I thought we had missed it!”

“Me too! I woke up and it was so dark... I checked your watch, but I still wanted to wake you up.”

“Hey!” I said!

“What?”

“I have an idea! We should see my house in the future! Why didn’t we think of that before?”

“Ohhhh-no-no-no-no-no!” Arline let out in a single breath. “Those things always end up bad! You’re going to see yourself and something terrible will happen. Who knows? You might start disappearing!”

“That’s Back to the Future.”

“That’s *what?*”

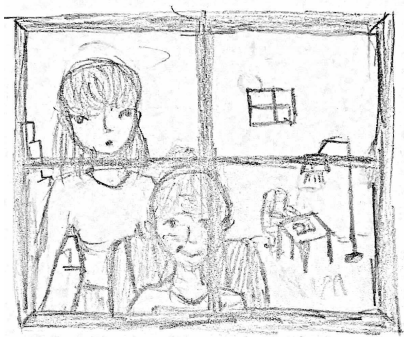
“Oh, never mind. But I really want to see! Also, I have a feeling that we’re in the kind of time travel where no matter what we do, we can’t change the future, because the future happens *because* of the past we make here. You know?”

“What?”

Sigh. I hadn’t told her about her probably becoming an actress, and that her becoming an actress actually depended on her seeing that billboard, and yet that just *happened*. That probably meant we didn’t have free will, and that what we do here will create the future that we’ve already seen, so it’s sort of impossible to mess things up, because you literally can’t. I think... But I knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity I *couldn’t* miss. “Come on. Let’s go. I’m just really curious.”

“Alright, if you want to. It’s your call.”

We weren’t in Asheville Park, we were in Newtown Park, so we had a bit of trouble finding out where we were going. I eventually found the way to my house, through all the strange new buildings and additions. And there it was. My little house, sitting at the end of the street.



All Grown Up

My house had been repainted to a nice shade of blue, complete with clean white highlights. I looked up at where my bedroom is, (or where it used to be,) and I decided to look through the front window of the house. Was someone else living there? I was surprised to see a woman sitting down in a chair near the window, looking out. A much younger woman stood behind her, her hand on the older woman’s shoulders. The

older woman's face was so familiar. It took my brain a second to process that she was *me*.

Arline interrupted my thoughts by tapping me on the shoulder, whispering loudly, "It's 10:03!"

10:03? *Already*? I guess it had taken longer to get there than I thought it would.

"We've got to leave, or we'll miss it!"

"Shhh! Hang on..." My daughter and I were talking in the house to each other hurriedly. It felt weird just to say that sentence.

"She'll be here soon! In fact, she already is here! It's 10:05 on February the 4th, 2080! She's here!" My voice was deeper and rougher.

I heard the voice of my daughter, "Mom, let's go to bed, okay? I'll make you some tea. You can read a nice book." It looked like they had been waiting a while.

"She's here! I know she's here!"

Arline tapped me on the shoulder again. "It's 10:05! We won't make it! We've got to leave! *We've got to leave!*" She was practically screaming now.

"Look! Look! They're out there! Look! There's Arline!" 72-year-old me was jumping out of her chair in ecstasy. "See? See?"

My future daughter peered out the window with unsure eyes.

"WE'VE GOT TO LEAVE!" Arline yelled. "It's 10:07!" I didn't know what to do. I stepped forwards, giving my future self and daughter a little smile, and hoping they saw me by the light of the street lamps, I ran like mad with Arline to the cave.



Heading Back Home

It was 10:16. Me and Arline were sitting on the floor of the cave, panting, clutching... well... everything! It was the hardest I had run in my life. The cave could sense we were in a hurry and led us to the exits fast. We had no choice but to use the middle hole, because if we used the past hole, we would end up in 2010. We just prayed it would send us to the time period we belonged to, and not some time-vortex-black-hole thing.

“Goodbye,” I said to Arline. Arline looked sad and yet happy. It was very bittersweet.

“Goodbye,” she responded. My watch hit 10:17.

“Maybe I’ll see you soon. I can travel back 70 years anytime I want and see you!”

Arline smiled.

“But maybe I’ll wait until I’m as old as you to travel back, and then we’ll be the same age.”

“But I thought we were both 14!”

“Well... I’m 12.”

Arline just sighed. “You know, this isn’t even surprising compared to everything else.”

“Well, goodbye!”

“Goodbye.”

It was five seconds until 10:18 again, but this time, there was no panic.

The last thing I saw was Arline’s smiling face as we stepped through the hole together.



Home Again

I can't even describe how happy I was to see those old weeds and twisted plants, with the overgrown yellow grass everywhere. I first ran to the front of the cave, hurriedly heaving my backpack onto my shoulder. I dashed home, pushing through the plants and trees like it was nothing. I ran past the McDonalds on the corner, and Asheville Middle, and I knew I was close.

I could see police cars and bright flashes of red and blue light. Before I knew it, I was picked up and squeezed so tight I could barely breathe.

"Cara!"

"Cara, where were you?"

"Cara, don't do that EVER AGAIN!"

"WHERE WERE YOU???"

"Were you kidnapped?"

"Did you get lost?"

"Herbert, she couldn't get lost, she was in bed!"

I figured out that the muddled cries were coming from my parents when I opened my eyes after I was let down. My mom was crying, my dad holding back tears of his own.

"Where were you?" My mom eventually said, as we moved into the living room. "We had the whole police force looking for you! They couldn't find you! They checked everywhere!"

"It's a *long* story," I said. I wasn't even exaggerating.

After I related the whole story to them, they immediately said,

"We need to get her to bed."

"Call the doctor!"

"Herbert, she's not insane, she's just... a little delusional. She must've got out of bed, and went near this cave, because of that *Jordan*!" My mom said her name like it was some hated thing she wanted to avoid. "I'm talking to her parents. She must've fallen asleep, had a nice long dream, and then thought it was reality. But then why was she gone for two days?" It was like they were oblivious to the fact that I was sitting there right next to them. And only *two days*? It felt much longer than that.

The more I thought about it, the possibility that it was a dream became more and more likely. It was like waking up from a dream. When you're sleeping, you feel that your dream is perfectly normal, but you wake up and your head clears a bit and the dream is strange and unrealistic.

After my dad called the police off and we settled down for a day (and had a decent meal or two), my adventure was still the only thing I could think about. My dad decided to ease my mind a little by watching TV. And of course, if my dad was watching TV, he was watching Star Trek. He turned to the next episode, "Amok Time." As soon as the part when T'Pring came in, I froze. T'Pring had an elegant face, with a pointed nose and piercing eyes. My eyes got wider and wider and my mouth hung open.

"Dad?"

"Yes, honey?"

"That's Arline." *She really did become an actress!*

"Yup. She's the actress."

"That's Arline! She's my friend! That's Arline!"

"I'm sorry, honey. In real life, Arline Sax died 4 years ago."

"Oh."

"I am *so sorry* you had to go through that terrible dream, honey. You *will* recover, I promise," said my dad, like I was recovering from some kind of disease. He was trying to make me feel better and failing miserably.

"But it happened! It really did! It happened! I... I think it happened... I..." I sighed. It was the fourth time today I had *insisted* it had happened but not really believed that it happened myself.

I excused myself up to my bedroom, and gloomily sat down on my soft bed. I moodily dropped my hands in my pockets. I had refused to take that jacket off, because it was the *only thing* that had been on the journey with me that was still here. I was pulling my left hand out of its pocket, (preparing to go downstairs again,) when I felt something small brush against my finger. I pulled whatever it was out of my pocket and looked at it in my hand. It was the scrap of newspaper from 1950! I just stared at it for a second, gripping it tightly in my hand, afraid I would lose it.

I looked out my bedroom window where I had escaped oh so long ago. It was facing where the cave was. I just sat there, staring out the

window towards the inky night and the bright stars, thinking about how there are so many wonderful things out there just waiting to be discovered.