

To put it briefly, Junior was sick and tired of living in complete secrecy. He hated it more than anything else in the world. The feeling of being trapped in both his own home as well as his own skin had started to slowly eat him away, starting from the inside and slowly making its way to his skin like a parasite and eventually, there would be but a shell of who the boy called Junior once was.

For all of the nineteen years of his life, no one besides his parents and older sister had known of Junior's existence and those who he had called family were the ones to make his life the way it was and had been for as long as the boy could remember.

He would often find himself just staring at the same walls he had stared at for all of his nineteen years of life. Junior had never been allowed outside of the building he bitterly called home. It felt more like a prison to him despite him never having been in one. The walls of his so-called home were suffocating him but they also felt safe in a way, no matter how much he hated the building, it was all he had grown to know.

The young boy, despite being off age, felt like a child due to being so sheltered from everything but Junior knew there was a good reason behind the actions his parents were taking and he knew they meant well despite their doings causing their son to feel more guilty than anything.

While his situation was far from being his own fault, Junior couldn't help but to feel guilty for the trouble his mere existence was causing his family but the worse would come only if someone was to find out about Junior.

You see, Junior was the second born child to a family who happened to live in a country where each household was legally allowed to have only one child.

The worst-case scenario for anyone finding out about Junior would be death for each member of the family, which was the reason Junior was drowning in guilt. His family could die just because he's alive and while giving birth to a second child, meaning giving birth to Junior, was far from his own decision and he often wondered why his mother had decided to keep him as the woman had known that she was only allowed to have one child.

To say Junior felt like a burden would be an understatement. Hell, his family would be much better off without him and there was no arguing about it. It was a fact, and even his parents seemed to know that. Of course, they loved their son but despite wanting to keep their son, this was far from the life they had wanted to give their son but it was the best they could offer and Junior appreciated, kind of.

For a year now, Junior had been planning to leave.

Not because he hated his parents or sister but because his departure would ensure both their and his own safety and much like his family had been protecting him for all of his life, he wanted to give something in return. He wanted to protect them too, it would make him feel far less burdensome than he was currently feeling.

But leaving when you were someone like Junior would be dangerous and could even cost him his life but as long as no one would make the connection from him to his family, Junior thought he would be fine with facing death in order to keep his family safe. That way at

least someone could avoid death, not that Junior actually *wanted* to die, he just thought it'd be better if as few people were to suffer from his existence as possible.

Junior needed to leave the country, but he couldn't use public transportation, no busses, no trains or planes. The boy couldn't risk being caught, he needed to go through unnoticed and even if that meant that he would have to make a long journey on foot of even commit crimes, he was willing to risk it. After all, his life was a crime as is.

It had been rather difficult to keep his plans from his family as those were the only people he had ever known and he had to see them each and every day with little to no time at all to truly be alone with his thoughts. Junior even thought that he would go insane soon, with all of the thoughts running through his head.

Tonight would be the day, he had decided. Tonight he would leave the moment shadows would engulf the ground and the moon and stars would rise to guide him. The boy couldn't take a phone with him, such a device could put him in danger as those could be tracked down and he needed to be sure that absolutely no one, not a single soul, were to know of his departure.

So during his time at home, when his older sister was out and parents at work, Junior had learned how to read and navigate with the help of stars as well as learned the directions he needed to go in order to get to the closest border.

Although Junior had planned his escape rather carefully, there were things beyond his control that could easily make things much more complicated than the boy hoped. If the nights were to be cloudy, he wouldn't be able to see the stars, which then meant he would have nothing to guide him at night.

He had been packing for roughly a week, making sure he carried no unnecessary items on him and nothing too heavy that would tire him out. Alas, he still needed food and that was what most of his bag's contents were, food and water. He did find a compass, which much to his surprised seemed to be working despite appearing seemingly ancient to the young boy.

To say Junior wasn't scared of what he was about to do would be a blatant lie. In fact, he had never felt more terrified in his life, having always been indoors and hidden, this journey would be very much everything Junior had never thought of doing few years ago. But now, he had to. For both his own and his family's sake.

There had been times where Junior had doubted his plans to leave. He had been safe at home so far, so why wouldn't he be safe in the future? After a lot of thinking, the boy had come to the conclusion that it was merely a matter of time before the government were to discover him.

Junior needed to be brave, now more than ever. He wanted to feel free and the only way to experience that was leaving. After nineteen years of being locked in the same house, Junior needed to open his cage and fly free. He wanted to feel human, not that his parents would really understand. They had never been in their son's situation.

When the sun started its' descent, Junior rose. And the moment his father's snores broke the silence that had come with the veil of darkness, the boy was gone, and he didn't know if he'd ever be back.

He had left nothing behind. No note, nothing.

He didn't want them to try to look for him, not that his parents would be able to with Junior's whole existence being unknown, they wouldn't be able to seek help from officials.

Freedom felt scary and cold.

Junior was alone for the first time ever, there would be no one to help him from now on. The nineteen-year-old had always imagined that being outside would be the best thing he would ever experience in his whole life, but it was quite the opposite. His body shook, whether it be from the icy breeze of the night wind that embraced his figure or the fear paralyzing his body as he eyes his surroundings in the dark, it didn't really matter in that exact moment.

Junior needed to push forward if he ever wanted to make it out of here.

The steps he took felt heavy, as if he was still chained to the building he called home, as if it was pulling him back to safety but the boy knew he needed to go. So, he forced his feet to move further and further away from his home and the further he got, the lighter his steps felt. The chains of his home couldn't reach him anymore. He had wandered too far to even see the building.

Junior was in luck. The sky was clear and stars seemed to shine much brighter now that there was no glass pane between his eyes and the sight of the endless sea of dark blue that was littered with small specks of shining lights. The boy would've stopped to gaze for longer had he not been in a potentially life-threatening situation.

While he walked, Junior's mind wandered. He thought about people, more specifically people like him. He wondered if there were others like him and if those others also wanted to be set free from their personal prisons like Junior had. The boy thought he would never get answers, solely because he knew what it was like to be someone like he was. People like him couldn't afford to get close to anyone because each and every person could be a threat to their lives. People like Junior were meant to hide and never come out. They were meant to never even be born.

Junior thought about what life would be like in another country, he didn't know if it would be much better nor did he know if he would be accepted but he decided to stay hopeful. Hope seemed to be one of the things that motivated him to keep going. Hope for safety and hope for a better life.

His mind wandered to his family. The boy didn't know if he would ever get to see them again, he didn't know if they would want to see him again after he left with no words. Never seeing his family again scared Junior, the three people that made up his family had been the only people he had ever known and he knew they had wanted nothing but the best for him, he knew they only wanted to keep him safe and he doubted they would ever understand why Junior left home.

A sharp noise made Junior come back to reality. It made him stop dead in his tracks and observe.

No one was there and no other sound followed the one he had just heard. Everything was new to Junior and quite honestly, it was terrifying. Being in an area you had never been in or even seen would be scary for anyone, Junior thought, trying to comfort himself and to find a reason for the looming feeling of fear that had never quite left Junior alone from the moment he had left home.

The word home made Junior think. Did he even really know what home felt like, he thought. He thought of the house he lived in as home because it was all he had ever known. Would he ever find a new home? Junior didn't quite know what a home was. Was it just a place that you had known and grown up in, a place that your family was at or was it more, he didn't know but he wanted to think he'd be home again, whether that home be the same building he had just left behind approximately an hour ago or some new place he would find when he made it out.

Maybe his home didn't have to be a building. Maybe Junior's home would be made of people, not that he'd kill people and build a home out of the corpses, no. His home could be a feeling he'd find with people who understood him, people who cared and loved him, not to say that his family didn't because they did, but Junior felt a longing for other people, people that were like him if those even existed.

Junior moved in the shadows of the night, he had a destination in mind that he would hopefully reach before sunrise. A place that was far from a populated area like the town Junior had grown up in, a place where he could finally stop and look at his surroundings.

If he had calculated right, he should reach the closest shared border within four nights and five days on foot, even less if he were to find a car of some sort, not that he knew to drive one but it wouldn't hurt to try.

Junior had been lucky that his town was located relatively close to the western borders of his country which made his journey a lot shorter than it would have been if he had lived in a city that was at a more central location.

He felt tired, both from walking and the hurricane of different feelings and emotions his departure had stirred awake within him. Junior was exhausted from fear and nervousness but also excitement, after all, the boy had always dreamt of going outside of the house. His feet hurt, as if he had been walking on needles that had their sharp end pointed up at the bottom of his foot. As much as he wanted to stop, Junior knew he couldn't, not while he was still in his town.

Just an hour or so more, he thought. Then he should be far away enough in the middle of nowhere for no one to really find him.

The boy pushed forward despite his hurting feet and exhausted mind. Junior found it rather hard to stay focused as his mind kept wandering to different thoughts, he thought it was because he was finally completely alone with his thoughts with seemingly no one else around.

He remembered asking his parents about his name when he was fourteen, Junior had never thought his name was really a proper name, he'd never heard his parents mention anyone with the same name as Junior had. He'd heard of names like Harry, John, Matthew, even Marcel but never Junior. Even his sister, Aubree, seemed to have a more name-like name than Junior did.

Despite fourteen-year-old Junior thinking that his name didn't sound like a name for whatever odd reason, the boy had not expected his parents to tell him that he was only named the way he was because he was their second child and therefore a junior to his sister.

It had hurt Junior, even if he hadn't shown it. His parents' oddly honest answer had made the then young teen feel unimportant to his parents. They hadn't even cared enough to name their son after something else than him being the younger of the two.

But now, five years later, Junior thought he understood why his parents had named him in such a way. He thought they were scared of losing him, they were scared of their son being brought to the government and scared of never being able to see him again, so they just didn't give him a meaningful name. That way, maybe he would be easier to forget.

Junior shook his head as if it would get rid of the memories eating away at his brain and concentration. He had much bigger things to worry about than his name at the moment, Junior couldn't dwell on painful memories as those would only slow the boy down.

The lower part of the sky had started to turn a lighter shade of blue while Junior had been lost in his own thoughts and the lighter colour was slowly bleeding in, devouring the darker colour of the dark night sky.

It took a moment for Junior to realise that he had already made it out of the town he had started his journey in. In fact, the buildings that made up the mentioned town were nothing but small dark spots decorating the lower part of the slowly lightening skyline.

He could finally let himself relax for a short while, he was far away enough. For now.

Junior allowed himself to inhale deeply before letting the air out of his system slowly. This was much more what he initially had thought freedom to be like. There was nothing around him, he was alone and there was quite literally nothing holding him in one place. He finally felt free, but he knew it wouldn't last long. No, Junior would only be actually free once he was settled down in another country.

Junior's feet gave up on his the second he allowed himself to be still. Falling to the ground, an inaudible sigh of relief escaped his lips. The hardest part of his journey was now done, he thought. Leaving the place you'd known all your life with no other reason than hope for a better life somewhere else was frightening to the nineteen-year-old. The journey that had taken him only a few hours on foot felt like he'd been walking for a year. It was emotionally draining.

He wished he could just fall asleep right at the same moment his back hit the damp blanket of grass and hay underneath his body, but it would be nearly impossible no matter how tired he felt.

Junior found himself staring at the slowly rising sun that was trying to drown out the darkness of the night with its' rays of light. He'd never been under direct sunlight before. Everything was so new to him, from the smell of the air and the feeling of warmth the light of the sun gave him to the cold touch of the ground beneath him.

It made him feel more alive than he'd ever felt before.

Junior's weariness took over him much quicker than he had initially thought and much to his delight, he found himself getting lost in the depths of his mind as soon as he became unconscious of his surroundings. Dreams weren't something Junior experienced often and he quite preferred sleeping in the comfort of nothingness. It was far better than dreaming in his opinion, he didn't like it when his memories plagued his mind while he slept. Not

seeing anything during his sleep made him feel much more well-rested than he did after nights of bizarre dreams.

But this night Junior didn't get to enjoy the dreamless sleep he had hoped if he were to fall asleep. His mind had been all around the place for the last few days prior to his departure from home as well as the night he had finally gathered the courage to put his plan of leaving into action.

*Junior was running. He was being chased by roughly about five men, but he wasn't sure as he couldn't really stop to look behind. He was so close to his goal of crossing the border while simultaneously being seconds away from losing his chance of freedom.*

*He couldn't stop, he wouldn't let himself to do so. No matter the pain he felt, no matter how much his feet ached each time they hit the hard ground, he could not stop.*

*His parents stood in front of him with his sister behind them. They looked so crushed, so hurt that their son had left them. As if Junior had taken their hearts in his hand, squeezed them until they exploded in the hard grip of his fist before throwing them onto the ground and stepping on them for the final crush. It made him feel broken. Junior had left to keep them safe, but they couldn't see it.*

*Junior stopped, despite practically promising himself he would not stop when he was so close to making it, he did it. He had no other choice but to stop and stare at the three people he had loved the most, the three people who he had known all his life and the three people who had risked it all to ensure he could live.*

*He felt guilty, it was eating him alive again. That same feeling he'd felt when he was at home, knowing he could be the reason that would eventually get his family killed. Junior had never felt as devastated in his life as he did in that particular moment when he saw his family looking at him in such a painful way, burning holes into his body with just their gazes.*

*Someone grabbed him, pulling his hands behind his back before pushing him forcefully to the cold ground but Junior could barely feel it, he was numb. His eyes still lingering on the fading figures of his family until he no longer could see them. Junior was dragged away by someone, or maybe multiple people, he didn't know and he didn't care.*

*What seemed like just a few seconds later, he was pushed into a cold room which Junior could only assume to be a jail room of sorts but he couldn't tell for sure. His eyes were clouded by tears that silently fell from his eyes and glided down the hot skin of his cheeks.*

Junior's body shot up at the speed of light, or that's what it had felt like to him. He was cold and drenched in a sea of sweat, as if he had drained whatever moisture the ground underneath his tense body had harboured into his own system.

It had been a dream. A horrible one at that but Junior was relieved to learn that the events he had just witnessed himself in had not been real.

Junior hesitantly pushed himself off of the ground and up onto his feet, which felt extremely unstable as if someone had driven a knife deep into his legs and pulled it out to make him bleed to weaken his stance. Junior refused to be weak, he needed to be strong and push on without caring about whatever obstacles he was to face on his journey to freedom and safety. He couldn't stop even if it were for his family, he didn't want his dream to become reality.

The sun had risen to its' highest point by the time Junior found himself on the move again. He had eaten something and gained some energy to keep going on, not that the lack of nutrition would be the first thing to stop him but Junior felt that it would be important to eat while he could as there was no way of knowing what was ahead of him.

He moved swiftly, his feet felt much lighter compared to how they had been last night when he had initially left. Junior was no longer held down by any chains, he was free to go his own way despite his current way being rather dangerous.

This time around his head seemed rather empty, as if the dream he had experienced had drained all thoughts out of his brain. It was better that way, he thought. Nothing would bother or distract him as he trudged forward.

Junior made sure to avoid larger roads as those were the most likely places for other people to be at. Despite being curious of others and wanting to make contact with people, Junior couldn't afford to take a risk that could, in the worst-case scenario, cost him his life. The life his parents had tried so hard to protect only for their son to run off on his own in hopes of saving everyone from the inevitable fate filled with grief.

The boy could only imagine what his parents' reactions would've been like upon discovering his absence. They must feel scared too, he thought but he hoped he was wrong. He hoped his parents wouldn't feel scared for him, he hoped they believed he could do what he had set himself out to do, not that they really knew as Junior hadn't told them or even hinted at his plan in any way.

And he was right, his parents and even his sister were scared. The three had no idea if Junior had gone off on his own or someone had found him and figured out a way to take him away without being noticed.

Aubree, his sister, who had been Junior's only friend for the younger's whole life was hurt by the actions of her brother. She knew that he'd left on his own will. While Junior hadn't told his sister of his plans, the girl knew her brother better than the boy would like to admit.

However, Aubree knew that his brother would have nothing but good intentions and she wanted nothing more than to understand his decision despite how hard that seemed to be for her. Her brother had never really experienced anything evil or malicious to know how to act in such a way. He was a good boy and would always be so.

While the atmosphere in his home was rather chaotic, Junior found himself to be surprisingly calm as he made his way past a small wood that had both birch and spruce trees. It was quite a pleasant sight, he'd never seen a forest, not even through the windows of his home. Nature was truly beautiful and full of small details that left the young boy in awe. He wished he'd have more time to appreciate the finer details he noticed while walking. Maybe once he made it out, he would spend some time in nature and admiring its' wonders.

It had been roughly five hours since he had left his previous resting spot and Junior didn't plan on stopping for long breaks until he reached the next destination he had looked up on the map. There would be a small town in between him and his desired destination, which meant he would have to go back to hiding in the darkest of shadows in order to pass by unnoticed.

For some reason, Junior felt even more determined to make it out of his home country than he had been before and he was willing to bet that the reason for this had to be the dream he had had previously. It had plagued his mind from the moment he had shakily woken up from it even though he tried to push the thought of it away from the corners of his mind. The dream seemed to haunt him like a ghost that he couldn't get rid of no matter what he tried, so he decided to let it be. He could use it as a source of motivation to succeed.

The travel to the next town over was oddly uneventful and it made the hairs at the back of Junior's neck stand up. Nothing had happened and everything just seemed far too easy for his liking, surely there would be at least some obstacles he'd have to face, right? Of course, he was glad of the fact that his journey was going by much easier than expected but it was too good to be true.

And he was right. The moment the town entered Junior's field of vision, he could see masses of people. The large crowds ahead made the boy stop and think, he'd need to find another way through, something more discreet than walking through a mass of people where he could be caught.

Junior was quick to make a turn to his right, quickly walking into an alley between two tall buildings that would be more than enough to cover his movements. Though despite being hidden from the crowd, Junior still had to remain cautious as he couldn't know if there were other people hiding in the same location as he was.

Everything was quiet, the only sound coming from his sneakers hitting the pavement that he walked on. Every now and then he could hear noise from the crowd that he'd seen earlier, making him think that there was a gathering of some sorts.

A sudden feeling of shock spread through Junior's body the second he was pushed against the brick wall of one of the two buildings that shielded the alley from prying eyes of passer-by's. His eyes shot as wide as they could and for a moment, he was sure they would've fallen out by the force from the shove the boy had become the target of.

Junior's eyes shut tightly just fast soon as they had opened, not wanting to face whatever or whoever was pinning him against the rough wall of bricks. He couldn't defend himself, not having a weapon of any kind on him was one thing but also having your arms held off against your will was far worse. He couldn't move, he didn't dare to.

"What's your business here", the voice that presented the question was rough, as if the person hadn't drunk anything for a whole day. Junior was sure that the person was a man but didn't open his eyes to check, he didn't want to come face to face with the barrel of a gun that might have been pointed straight at his head.

When the stranger wasn't given an answer, he pushed the young boy against the wall again. "Answer my question, god damnit!" The stranger spoke again but with more force, as if his own life depended on what Junior would answer.

Junior's voice was extremely quiet when he finally spoke up, "I'm just passing by", he had managed to inform the stranger. Junior's voice was neither a lie nor the complete truth but it seemed to make the stranger audibly relieved, which in turn caused the feeling of confusion erupt within Junior.



The young boy dared to open his eyes slowly while looking down at his feet, only to be staring at another pair of feet as well. Junior raised his head little by little, not wanting to startle the person as that could lead to hasty actions." Who are you?" Junior asked the man in front of him once his eyes were at the same level as the stranger's were.

The question seemed to make the stranger panic, as if he couldn't tell Junior who he was and it made something click in the younger's mind. The man was most likely like Junior. "I, I'm Junior", the boy spoke calmly despite his slight stutter, which surprised both the boy himself as well as the panicked man. How he managed to stay calm and somewhat collected in such a scary situation was far beyond Junior's own understanding, but he had little to no time to dwell on it.

" Theodore", The man spoke hesitantly. Junior took notice of the man's, now known as Theodore, actions. Theodore's eyes seemed to look at everything but Junior, as if the man was now afraid of the younger despite being far from it just moments ago when he'd first approached the boy.

A wave of confidence washed over Junior, making him act in a way he would've never done before. He roughly pulled his sleeve up to show the underside of his wrist, which was bare. There was nothing on the place where his identification code should be and it made Theodore stare in shock, whether it was because of the lack of code or at the bold actions of the younger was a mystery to Junior.

Junior's eyes were set on Theodore, watching his every move like a predator stalking its' prey. He watched intently as the man stared at his exposed wrist then looking at his own covered one before looking at Junior's wrist again. Theodore seemed to be in a state of uncertainty, his thoughts seemed to be fighting each other in order to find the right things to do in the moment.

Then he moved. Theodore slowly peeled his sleeve up as well only to reveal the exact thing Junior had first assumed. The man had no code either and the two seemed to share a mutual understanding of each other. They were in the same boat, even if it was a sinking one.

" Come with me", Theodore spoke. His voice was rushed, and he didn't stick around to wait for Junior to answer him as he grabbed the younger's arm and pulled the boy after him. The two were silent on their way to wherever Theodore was taking them and although Junior found himself rather sceptical of the seemingly older man's intentions, he had no other choice but to go with him.

The pair entered a small building, it looked abandoned, as if no one had lived there for many years but Junior was sure it was the other man's home. It was a great place to hide, really. No one would look into an old shed that was slowly falling apart. Maybe that was why Theodore had picked it to be his hideout in the first place.

They spoke nothing of what had happened during their initial encounter, well they barely spoke of anything at all until Theodore had made sure no one else was with them.

" Do you live here?" Junior was the first of the two to speak up, presenting his rather unimportant question to Theodore, who seemed much more relaxed than he had been before.

" Yes", the answer Theodore gave was short and rather unfriendly, but it answered everything Junior had wanted to know. Silence fell upon the two once again, neither of them knowing how to start a discussion of the most important topic at hand. Leaving. It seemed as if Theodore already knew of Junior's plans, knowing there'd be no other reason for the boy to pass through this town.

" You're heading to the border, right?" Theodore spoke up, asking a question he was more than sure he already knew the answer to. Junior offered a small nod as an answer, urging the older man to continue with whatever he wanted to speak of, not quite knowing what to say himself.

" Are you going?" Junior asked Theodore, both because he simply wanted to know if the other was planning an escape similarly to himself and because if Theodore was going too, the two could travel together. It seemed much safer to be with someone else in this situation, especially to Junior who had never been alone in his entire life.

Theodore seemed to ponder on the question for a short while despite knowing his answer already." I am", his reply was, much like all the other ones he had given, very short and straight to the point. It was all he needed to say.

The answer made Junior happy, he now had hope of not having to do all of this alone anymore despite it being what he had prepared for." Would you...would you like to come with me?" The younger asked with a hint of hope in his faint voice. For some reason, Junior felt himself trusting Theodore despite only having met him barely a few hours ago.

Junior's proposition made Theodore halt, as if he hadn't expected to hear it. His eyes lingered on Junior's small figure as he pondered his answer. A few minutes later, Theodore exhaled soundly. He had made up his mind." Yes", the reply was once again short but it was more than enough for Junior, who now felt as if a large burden had been lifted off of his chest. Theodore would come with him.

Junior offered a small smile, which Theodore returned to appear friendly. The two had no choice but to rely on each other from now on as they shared the same burden, the same secret and both of them had the same need for freedom and safety somewhere else.

It was late and the pair had decided to reside at Theodore's hideout for the night even if it was a few hours away from where Junior had planned to reach that day. It felt safer than sleeping outside where quite literally anything could happen.

That night Junior didn't dream, his mind was entirely blank and his brain seemed to be too tired to mix and match his memories and thoughts in order to form a dream. Junior was grateful for it though, he didn't either need or want another dream like the one he had seen the night before.

Theodore on the other hand found it hard to fall asleep. He was no longer alone, it wasn't something he was used to, having been on his own for as long as he could or wanted to remember but he, much like Junior, was grateful to have found someone like him that was still alive. Things never tended to end up great for anyone without a code in Theodore's experience.

Theodore hadn't slept even for a minute by the time Junior woke up from his dreamless sleep. They shared brief good mornings for the sake of being nice to one another even though neither of them were used to socializing, with Junior having ever only known and

spoken to his family and Theodore having spoken to barely anyone for the last ten years of his life.

Junior and Theodore were quick to leave, both of them knowing that there would be less people out when it was early. It was around six in the morning when the pair managed to depart from Theodore's hideout.

Junior spoke of his plan to Theodore, telling him about all the points on the map he had learned and picked out in order to have the safest possible route to the border but Theodore was quite out of it, while he was still listening, the older man found it hard to focus on the words leaving Junior's mouth and the younger was quick to notice.

Junior stopped to dig something out of his bag, something to give Theodore in order to give him some more energy. The younger boy didn't want to ask about the older's tiredness, thinking it was none of his business. His hand gripped onto a small bottle before pulling it out and closing the bag once again, throwing it back on his back. He offered the drink to Theodore, who eyed the product suspiciously. Coffee. The older reached out to grab it from the younger, giving him a small nod as a thanks before opening the bottle and drinking it.

They remained silent even though Junior's head was full of questions he wanted to ask Theodore about, the younger found it better to be silent in case the older had no desire to talk at the moment. It was only natural for the nineteen-year-old to be curious, having never spoken to anyone outside of his family had made him to be that way towards other people. People were alien to Junior.

They were about two days away from the border, well two days if they were to go on foot but Theodore seemed to have another plan as he took a sharp turn to his left, forcing Junior to follow him despite being confused at the sudden change of direction.

But it all became clear to Junior once he saw Theodore approach an old looking car.

Driving would cut the time spent on traveling in half but it also meant they'd have to follow the roads which would put them at risk for being seen. Not that the average person would care but they couldn't just assume there wouldn't be any government officials on the lookout for people like Junior and Theodore.

"Is this a good idea?" Junior asked, breaking the long silence that had surrounded the pair before. Theodore didn't turn to look at Junior, he was too busy checking the car to do so but he still answered, "We'll go some of the way with this", the reply was the most Theodore had spoken to Junior at once and it made the younger feel warm inside.

Junior didn't have the heart to argue although he found driving far more dangerous than traveling on foot, Theodore seemed so excited to drive a car as if he hadn't done so in a long time. The younger didn't want to be the one to ruin the older's joy so quickly.

Junior hurried to Theodore's side, who was done inspecting the car. Not that he'd tell Junior but Theodore knew the car was here because he had driven it before and left it here for when he'd need it and today seemed like the time that he would need it. It's not like Theodore planned on coming back to it ever again, he'd be living a new good life in another country with his new friend soon.

Theodore gestured Junior to get into the car and the younger was quick to follow the orders, throwing his bag to the backseat of the car while seating himself on the passenger

seat of the vehicle. Theodore would be the driver as Junior had no prior experience with driving and neither of the two were planning to get killed in a car crash.

It took a few minutes before the car started, its' engine coming back to life for the first time in what felt like forever to Theodore who had left the car at its current location about a year or two ago, he wasn't quite sure as he hadn't kept track of time.

Junior jumped in surprise as the car turned on, not expecting it to make such a loud noise. He could almost swear that he'd seen Theodore smile at his reaction from the corner of his eye but ultimately decided not to point it out.

Junior found himself to be immensely curious about the man sat before the steering wheel of their vehicle and as they started moving, the young boy found himself drifting away into his thoughts that were filled with questions he wanted to ask Theodore. Starting from his age, despite knowing that the man was in fact older than Junior was himself, he had no idea of Theodore's exact age. Junior was also curious about Theodore's family, or more about if he had any and if he did, where were they but the subject seemed a little too personal to bring up on their second day of knowing each other.

They drove on smaller roads to stay unnoticed by others and it worked. For the entire day, until the sun started its' descent to give the moon space, the two had been driving.

Though their drive was mostly filled with comfortable silence, the pair had found themselves discussing just about everything that came to their minds, allowing Junior to ask a few of the millions of questions that were swirling around in his head.

Junior had learned that Theodore was only three years older than him, meaning the older was twenty-two and that he'd been on his own for ten years and didn't really know what his family was upto. They hadn't discussed Theodore's family for much more after that, Junior seemed to notice that the subject wasn't a light one and Theodore didn't look like he wanted to go into detail about it, so Junior spoke of his family.

Theodore was surprised to learn how different their lives had been despite the pair being in the same situation at the moment. While Junior's life had been rather safe and his family held nothing but love for their son, Theodore had had it much different which had led to him running away at the age of thirteen.

In fact, Theodore had no idea why his parents had decided to have another child when they seemed to despise their second son so much, as if he was the worst thing to ever happen to him while his older brother had been treated like a blessing. Theodore had to admit that his older brother was one of the greatest people he had ever known, with the older being the one taking care of him when they were younger. His parents had often let him to fend for himself, sometimes locking their younger son out of their home as if they wanted him to be found and taken away.

Theodore had been much better off without them, though he sometimes missed his older brother and wondered where he was now, he knew he had made the right decision when he had left home.

The car came to a stop as Theodore drove it into a small forest. It was a good place to hide for the night and they could sleep in the car, which would offer the two some shelter. They would continue on foot the next day as there was no way they could get closer to the border with the car without being stopped and checked by officials or by the border security at the very least.

They had come much further than Junior could've ever imagined, they should be able to reach the border by the end of the next day if they were to leave early.

Both of the boys were able to sleep that night, even if it wasn't continuous sleep. The rest was much needed as they had a big day ahead of them, the final part of their journey within this country. It was both exciting and terrifying at the same time and Junior couldn't help but think of his dream from two nights ago.

Theodore on the other hand only felt relief, he had finally made it after ten years, he would finally make it to the border but more importantly, he had found someone who he cared about. Junior. The younger felt like a brother, a younger brother that Theodore had never had before. Junior was someone Theodore felt he would look after in the same way his own older brother had looked after himself.

The older of the two had woken up when the sun was just starting rise back up from its' slumber, it was five in the morning, Theodore checked his wristwatch. While he would've loved to go back to sleep, he found himself unable to, so he turned to look at Junior who seemed peaceful in his sleep. He'd need to wake the younger up soon, they needed to keep moving to reach their final destination.

For about an hour, Theodore did close to nothing but staring at his surrounding, looking at them and trying to memorize each tree as if he would never be able to see them again, which he thought was highly probable. He would most likely never return to this country ever again, he didn't want to.

Junior stirred in his sleep, making Theodore snap out of his thoughts. It was almost six and the sun was higher than it had been when Theodore had first woken up. Time seemed to fly by far too fast for the older's liking, he had found time to pass by so slowly for almost all of his life, why was it going by so quickly now? To be honest, Theodore had no idea.

The older shook Junior awake and informed him that they needed to go, though he did give the younger boy some time to gather his things and to eat something to fill his stomach that audibly demanded for sustenance.

After a small breakfast that consisted of some fruit, the two were on the move once again, now closer to their freedom than ever thanks to Theodore's car, on top of that, their feet weren't tired from walking the previous day which allowed them to move with ease.

It was silent again, with nothing but the sound of both Theodore and Junior's shoes making contact with the grassy ground of the forest they were walking through and the occasional blow of the wind rustling the trees that surrounded the pair. It was peaceful and Junior seemed to be entranced by the beauty of his surroundings while Theodore seemed to be much more familiar with nature and paid far less attention to the smaller details.

The hours seemed to slip past their fingers like fine sand and it was nerve-wrecking. They were getting closer and closer to the border, which they would need to cross unnoticed despite its' heavy security. Junior hadn't really planned that part of his escape, and now he was regretting that he hadn't as he felt unprepared for what was about to come.

Much different to Junior, Theodore felt rather calm. He knew that his fate was uncertain as he'd never been to the border and well, he had never even heard of anyone making it through the border so he was mentally preparing himself for the worst. Theodore had

never really felt like he had anything to lose until now. Despite not having known the younger boy, who walked beside him, Theodore now had Junior who, while not much younger than Theodore himself was, seemed like a small child to him. To the older, Junior was someone who seemed to need to be protected from the world and the feeling scared Theodore, he hadn't felt anything like it in a long time.

Junior could feel his heartbeat in his throat, as if the organ was trying to escape his body with all its' might and he needed to dig it out to feel at peace once more. Maybe his heart felt just as trapped as Junior himself had felt at home, where he could only stare at the same walls for days on end. But even then, his heart didn't feel physically trapped like the boy himself had felt at his home but it was instead trapped by his feelings and emotions that seemed to be jumping all over the place as the pair neared the border.

To be honest, Junior had little to no idea what to expect. He had never even seen a picture of the border and therefore didn't know what it was like. The nineteen-year-old wondered if the border would be made up of fence or walls that you had to climb over or if it was simply patrolled by guards with no fencing to separate the two colliding countries from each other. While his curiosity did nibble around the edges of his mind, surfacing to his active thoughts every now and then, he knew he would get to see it with his own eyes that very night.

The silence surrounding the two boys suddenly felt heavy and suffocating, much different to the comfortable one that they were used to, but neither of the two travellers seemed to be brave enough to break free from its' tight grasp to speak out loud despite the raging storm of thoughts within both of their heads. The two could only spare singular glances towards each other as if to make sure the other was still there, to make sure they were both safe and sound, to make sure all of this was truly real instead of a fragment of their imaginations.

It was very much real, and neither of the boys knew whether that was actually a good thing rather than a bad one. This was both of their make it or break it situation, a situation where they'd either finally get their chance at having a normal life or a situation where they would lose it all.

Junior tried to remain hopeful despite the grim feeling of fear that seemed to have moved itself to permanently live within his head, its' presence lurking in the darkest corners of his subconscious mind, only coming forward when the boy least expected it, paralyzing all thought he had.

Fear was simultaneously a scary and useful feeling, it made Junior stay on his toes so that he could get away from danger if needed but it also obliterated all possibilities for rational thinking, leading to rather hasty actions. It was all natural, the younger boy thought but he didn't know for sure, no one had ever taught him such things.

But Junior was also engulfed with the joyous feeling of excitement, being excited to begin a new life somewhere else, especially now that he had Theodore with him to keep him company. The younger felt close to his new friend although they had not known each other for any longer than just about forty-eight hours. Junior found it rather easy to trust and care for someone so similar to himself, with both of the boys having no code and holding out hope for something better than they had already had.

The pair seemed to care for each other wordlessly, looking out for one another in more subtle ways. Neither of the two were affectionate or particularly good with words but just

being with one another seemed to be enough for both of them, as if they knew how they felt without words. Almost like they could read each other's thoughts.

It wasn't until the sky had turned dark, with the only source of light being the lingering rays of sunlight that were slowly being covered by the blanket of the dark night sky, when Theodore and Junior reached the border. Tall fences, what seemed to be made of iron, standing tall in front of the two. Besides the fences that separated the boys from their freedom, there seemed to be no one, it was quiet. Too quiet, the silence felt ominous and it made Junior shiver in fear.

Theodore's eyes scanned over the area the two were now in cautiously, ready for anything and everything to suddenly jump into his view but nothing came. There were no guards, or even a security system. Something seemed off to Theodore.

It shouldn't be this easy to cross a border of such a strictly controlled country.

They would need to climb over the fence. Theodore couldn't see a door or any gap that they could easily pass through and he informed Junior of this, his voice low and quiet as if he was scared someone could hear them.

Junior had never climbed anything excluding the staircase at his home, which was a far easier climb than a towering fence that was easily twice his own height if not taller. He could do it, Junior repeated in his head, he needed to do it and he would. This was the only obstacle that stood between him and freedom.

The two approached the iron fence slowly, both of them light on their feet, sneaking as if someone could hear the vibrations their steps caused.

Junior reached his hand to touch the fence but was suddenly stopped by Theodore, who grabbed the younger's arm roughly before scolding him, they didn't know if the fence had electricity running through it or not and Theodore wasn't too keen on being grilled to death.

The older took a thin twig from the ground and used it to poke the fence. Nothing happened, no spark from electricity, nothing. It seemed to be safe enough to climb over to Theodore, and the two got to work.

Since Junior wasn't the best at climbing, Theodore was there to help him up, hoisting the younger, who was surprisingly light, onto his arms to push him further up the fence, all the way until Junior's fingers could reach the top of the fence.

It was in that moment where Theodore thought he saw his life flash right before his eyes. The older was roughly rammed to the ground by something but he had no time to see what exactly had pushed him to the cold dirt. His body felt numb despite the constant aching he could feel, he felt as if he couldn't move.

Junior was left hanging onto the fence with only his hands and the little strength he had in his small body to keep himself up.

The younger tried hard to find a stable position, clumsily placing his feet in small gaps within the wiring of the fence. He looked down felt his heart stop for a few seconds as he realised Theodore was gone, he couldn't see the older anywhere and in that moment, he felt more terrified than ever before, he couldn't move despite knowing he needed to, it

was like Junior had become paralyzed at that very moment. His vision turned blurry as his eyes darted swiftly from one place to another, trying to locate Theodore.

Theodore crawled to Junior with all the strength he could find and grabbed the younger's legs with force, trying to get himself to stand up but his own legs were far too weak. He must've broken something during his fall. The sudden contact woke Junior from his paralyzed state, the younger looking down at his feet in hurry, his head spinning at the fast movement.

A wave of relief engulfed Junior as he saw Theodore, even if the older was clearly hurt from whatever had torn him away just moments ago, he was glad to see his friend.

Junior tried to lift Theodore up with his legs and it worked, for a short while. He didn't have enough strength to bring the older very high up along the fence with just his feet. If he wanted to help, Junior would need to go all the way down to push the older up the same way Junior had been pushed up but the younger doubted he would be able to make it back up again on his own.

"Come on", Junior found himself speaking for the first time in a long while, trying to encourage Theodore to climb up to his level and while his words weren't much, they helped Theodore remember that he wasn't alone.

With struggle, the older pushed himself further and further along the fence, using mainly his arm strength to move himself as his legs were far too weak to rely on.

He made it, Theodore lifted himself to the very top of the fence and although it took time, he had done it. They were almost free, they had almost made it but almost was never quite the same as actually making it. Neither of the two dared to think that they were in the clear when they had no idea of what had attacked Theodore.

Junior was the first to jump down, landing on his feet and falling to his knees shortly after from the pain the harsh impact had caused. His heart was beating fast enough for Junior to feel as if it would burst out through his ribcage and skin any minute now and it only became faster when the younger could see to the side of the fence he had previously been on.

Eyes. What seemed like thousands on shining eyes were staring straight at him from the shadows and Junior swore the sight would haunt him for the rest of his life. They were moving, coming closer to Theodore who had yet to jump down from the top of the fence.

They emerged seconds before Theodore jumped down, landing onto his feet with a painful grunt, the older swore that if his legs hadn't been broken already, they were now for sure. He limped to Junior, whose eyes were wide open and staring at the fence for a reason unknown to Theodore.

Junior stared as the pairs of eyes turned into figures, people. They were people but they seemed alien to the young boy, they looked evil and he knew they wanted nothing but to cause harm to both him as well as Theodore.

"We need to go", Junior spoke, his voice sounded strained and scared, making Theodore turn to look at exactly what Junior had been staring at without blinking. The older was quick to move despite his hurting legs, desperately pulling Junior to move too. They needed to get out and they needed to do it now if they wanted to make it.



Theodore had seen them before, those people or people like those people. They were the things his parents tried to scare him with, the people who would take him away from his family if anyone were to find out about him and more importantly, his bare wrist. These people already seemed to know that neither of the boys had a code. There was no other reason to escape through the border like this after all.

Everything seemed to be moving slow except for them. Junior and Theodore were too slow compared to them, they seemed to be moving ten times faster than the boys were and it was frightening.

How the people had managed to cross the fence so fast was beyond both Theodore and Junior's understanding, but they couldn't turn to look, they needed to keep their focus on moving forward.

They closed in much like the creeping feeling of fear in Junior's chest, as if they were the same as fear and maybe they were, Junior didn't know, nor did he really wish to find out. Junior pulled Theodore forward to keep the older at the same pace, he wouldn't go without him, he didn't want to.

The sea of people closed in, but Junior tried his best to ignore them, his focus staying firmly on making it out with Theodore. Everything seemed to stop once again when Junior felt Theodore being pulled back. They had reached them and had latched onto the weaker of the two boys as if they could only take one at a time.

They were pulling with force but so was Junior, who was set on not leaving Theodore behind no matter the situation, even if it was Theodore himself begging Junior to leave him behind so that even one of them could make it out.

Theodore's head spun and his body ached as he was being pulled from two different directions at once, by both Junior and the ghost-like people who they were running from and in that moment, Theodore was sure he wouldn't make it out alive, there was no chance for him and he seemed to accept the fact quickly. Begging for Junior to let him go and to run but the younger wouldn't budge.

After what seemed like hours of being pulled around, Theodore felt himself lose consciousness, his body was too weak to keep him awake and Theodore didn't fight back as sleep overtook his body and allowed himself to close his tired eyes. Hoping that when and if he woke up, everything would be alright for at least Junior, the young boy who had allowed Theodore to care for someone again even if the younger himself didn't know it.

The second Junior saw Theodore's eyes close, he felt a rush of adrenaline take over his body as he pulled and pulled, trying to free his friend from the grasp of those trying to take the older boy away from Junior. He wouldn't let them, not even if it meant he wouldn't make it away himself.

Junior soon found himself thanking whatever it was that had given him strength because he had pulled Theodore away from them and the younger was now running as fast as he could while carrying the older's unconscious body on his back and while it hurt Junior, he wouldn't stop. He wouldn't stop like he had done in his dream because he didn't want to lose this time, this time he would make it out and he knew it.

Hours and hours after running or that's what it had felt like to Junior, he allowed himself to stop. They weren't chasing him anymore, he was no longer on the ground of his home

country and they were safe. Every bone in the younger's body ached and he felt like giving up right then and there, he didn't need to run anymore and the thought of crashing down to the ground was tempting but he couldn't. Theodore was still unconscious, and Junior didn't know if the older was dying or not, which was why he couldn't afford to lay down.

Junior pushed forward despite the ache, despite the fear that was carving his chest into its' home. He needed to keep going for Theodore's sake.

Luckily for the younger, he was soon greeted by a group of strangers who were quick to approach the weary boy, bombarding with questions he didn't have the energy or knowledge to answer. He found himself whispering one word and one word only.

" Help".

And they did, the strangers walked the two to their car and quickly drove them to the nearest hospital. Their friendliness was new to Junior who was using all of his strength to stay awake, he had never met people like these strangers, people who were so helpful and caring towards strangers.

It was nice. Junior found his body fill with a warmth he couldn't quite explain but it felt good, he felt safe in that moment. The nineteen-year-old found his eyes slowly closing against his will and the last thing he could hear were the worried voices of the strangers, asking him to stay awake for just a little longer but Junior couldn't. He couldn't force his eyes open anymore.

When Junior found himself awake again, he was met with the sight of bright white walls. They looked unfamiliar but despite their unfamiliarity, he felt safe, as if his mind knew there was nothing dangerous surrounding him anymore.

A man in a white coat greeted Junior just moments after the boy had woken up. He was at a hospital and the man told the boy that he was a doctor, Junior decided to trust his word.

Once again, Junior was met with what seemed like a million different questions and he found himself able to only answer a select few of them, such as his age and where he'd come from and what had happened, though the details seemed to be rather vague to the boy himself.

The doctor was surprised to hear of Junior's origins, having never before met anyone from the country Junior himself was from. The doctor seemed to fit the puzzle pieces regarding Junior's departure from his home country together quite quickly and it left Junior himself surprised but thankful as the doctor seemed to understand why the younger had arrived.

The topic then changed to Theodore and his condition. Theodore had yet to wake up from his unconscious state and had suffered far greater injuries than Junior had. Theodore had fractured bones in both of his legs, as well as suffered severe bruising from being rammed to the ground but despite all of this, the doctor gave Junior the best news he thought he could ever receive.

Theodore was alright and he should wake up within the next few days.

The news made Junior's eyes blur with tears but unlike before, these tears were from happiness and relief rather than fear and pain. They were both alright, they both made it and were now on their way to starting normal lives in a country where they could be free.

The doctor had allowed Junior to stay at the hospital until Theodore woke up and the nineteen-year-old expressed his gratitude towards the doctor with words despite not being good with them. Everything seemed to be going well until Junior was presented with a question he hadn't thought of answering for a reason unknown to him.

The doctor asked him for his name.

It should've been simple, right? Junior knew his name, he knew his name was Junior but the question seemed far more complicated than just that. Junior didn't know if he wanted to be Junior anymore. He didn't know if he wanted to be that boy who was named after simply being the second child. Junior wanted to be something more, he wanted a name that meant something to him.

So, Junior decided to give himself a new name and he thought of no better person to name himself after than the one who he had found himself caring the most for, the person who had helped him and made him feel normal, the person who made him feel at home.

"Theo Junior", Junior told the doctor. While he hadn't given himself the same name as his friend had because Junior found that to be a little too much, he decided to name himself after a part of Theodore's name as well as his previous name. After all, Theodore was much like a sibling to Junior.

Theodore was Junior's new family. Theodore was the closest thing to home Junior had now and the younger boy was quite happy for it to be that way. Theodore was the only person who Junior knew would understand him.

The doctor seemed a little sceptical of the lack of a last name but didn't ask further questions as the man knew that the young boy might not be able to give him an answer. The doctor was right, Junior had never known a last name, he'd never asked because it had never been important to him. Junior had always been Junior, nothing more but now, Junior was everything but what he used to be.

Junior was no longer the boy locked up in the house of his biological family, he was no longer the boy who had to hide away from the world. No, the boy Junior had now become was quite the opposite. Theo Junior, as he now called himself, was free and brave but most importantly, he was safe and at home with his new friend and brother Theodore.

Junior allowed his thoughts to wander off to the topic of his family, his biological family. He wondered if they'd be proud of him or if they were just as disappointed and hurt as they had appeared to be in his dream. The young boy wanted to find a way to contact them, to let them know he was fine and safe, that they no longer needed to worry if they even had worried for him in the first place.

He'd never know, he thought. Junior didn't know the address of his old house so how could he contact them without going back to the country that would haunt the darkest corners of his mind for the rest of his years on this planet.

The Junior who had left on this journey would want nothing more than to go back home to his family one day but Theo Junior, the boy who had made it out alive would never go

back after seeing those eyes, he didn't want to go back to the place that had held him captive for nineteen long years.

Theo Junior had a new life ahead of him with Theodore, in the country they had come to, in a country where they could start over, in a country where they would both be free. In a country that felt safe.

Because Theo Junior was far from the boy he had been before. He was no longer just Junior, nor did he want to be, not after he'd been through so much. Theo Junior wanted nothing more than to live his new life and build a place he could call home with the one closest to him, Theodore. What surprised Theo Junior himself the most was how happy he felt being away from the three people who had taken care of him for as long as he could remember and for the first time in what felt like forever he no longer had the feeling of guilt that had once devoured his conscience, instead he was happy to build a new home on his own, away from his family.