

secrets from the whisper dome (the story)

On the black marble staircase that leads to the beautiful golden dome of the Centre Building, a blossoming young artist, Jason Lockwood, sketches the crows cawing at the rain as he waits for his friend to get out of a training session. While entranced in his sketchbook he's suddenly startled to hear someone whisper, "Amuleta", but no one is around him, except for two of the Centre's most powerful men, who are talking with a police officer clear across the room. "Could it be that their voices are carrying all the way over to me, because they're standing under the dome," he wonders. Listening intently, he overhears that they're talking about his friend Amuleta, who they've locked up in an underground corridor for knowing too much about the SEARIE Program (Society for the Education and Advancement of Remote Internet Exploration). With no one to turn to, not even the police, Jason decides

to go to the library and search through the blueprints of the cities abandoned underground tunnels, finding that there's a secret stairwell that leads to the tunnels under the Centre.

In the early morning hours of the following day, Jason uncovers the secret stairwell and makes his way through the pitch-black halls and maze of tunnels, eventually coming to a dimly lit opening, where he sees a man guarding an old wood and iron door. He lures him away by throwing popping stones into the far corridor, but as he tries to open the door two guards come back, and he narrowly escapes back into the tunnels. While hiding in a darkened corner, all the lights turn on, along with a loud alarm, and soon he finds himself surrounded. The ill-tempered guards bring him back to the wood and iron door and he sees Amuleta sitting on the floor crying. They throw him to the ground next to her and she looks at him with such surprise wondering how he ever found her. Amuleta tells

Jason that she found out about the SEARIE Program's secret Cambot Virus that would enable computer cameras and web cams to be activated from remote locations, allowing the controller to monitor activity and take pictures of the computer's files and surroundings. "I thought our research would be used for remote wilderness locations and GPS tracking technology, not for spying on people," she explained. As Jason listens in amazement he notices a hole in the ceiling that they can lift each other up into to escape and tells Amuleta to give him a boost. Jason makes it up quickly but just as Amuleta's feet are clearing the hole a part of the ceiling crashes down and she narrowly escapes the hands of the guard. After many dead-end hallways and locked doors they manage to find an open window that leads to an inside courtyard with a passage to the street. Running in great fear, they make their way to the Hedgehawk Bridge to hide, but with no one on the streets so early in the morning they're easily discovered and find themselves backed up against

the bridge railing with nowhere to go. The two men from earlier that day under the dome appear out of a black limo and start pushing Amuleta around saying, "Look what you've done." As Jason is yelling at them to stop, he's knocked up against Amuleta, which causes her to lose her balance and fall over the railing into the cold and rocky river. "Looks like she won't be a problem after all," one man says, as Jason shouts after her. "All I wanted to do was help you, and now my involvement has cost you your life," Jason laments, slumped onto the ground in despair.

Back in the underground cell sitting on the musty, damp floor, where only hours before he had sat with his dear friend, he takes in the nights events to realize that he may never see daylight again, unless he tries to escape once more. Jason calls out for the guard and with every last bit of energy manages to overpower him, escaping down the corridor and up the stairwell, back into the night. While running through the streets again he hears a

train whistle in the distance and decides to catch it and take shelter in a box car. With barely enough strength to pull himself up, he collapses with exhaustion, not even concerned where the train is headed.

From out of a deep sleep a sudden bang awakens Jason to a flood of sunshine entering the boxcar. He can't believe he slept through the night and is surprised to now find himself in Goldenfield, the town where Amuleta was from. He recalls the previous night's events and even though he's filled with sadness at losing his dear friend, he realizes that he must go to her family's house and tell them what had happened. As he eases himself down off the train he hears a crowd of people shouting down by the edge of the river, where they are gathered around in a circle. He makes his way down to the crowd to get a better look and sees a wet and bloody body lying on the ground. As he makes his way around to an opening in the crowd he's shocked

at the sight of Amuleta's ghostly face. She is lifeless and barely breathing, but somehow alive. Just then her eyes open directly into his and she beams with the greatest smile. Jason kneels down at her side, supports her head on his lap, gives her a tender kiss on the forehead and whispers in her ear, "The river has brought you home."

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