

Colorado to Woodstock and Back

LAXLEYVAL SAGASTA

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Chapter One

“**N**ow son, in three months you will be thirteen.” said my dad to me one crisp late spring day. “And it’s time for you to go and see what the outside world is like. I can’t stand it any longer to have you here where the only thing from the outside that you see is the occasional military jet that flies sixty thousand feet overhead. I’ve been preparing you all these years and this is the best time for you to go. I am sorry that I cannot go with you, and it breaks my heart to see you go, but before you do go I will have to teach you a few things to increase your chance of survival. It’s a jungle out there.”

“Dad,” I said. “Lately I’ve been thinking about the same thing, and I know that you do not want to leave here, and it will break my heart to leave you. Dad, I know you’ve told me our story many times over since the time I was old enough to listen, but could you please tell it to me from the beginning one more time?”

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“Okay,” he replied. “It’s not pleasant, but since you want to hear it in one piece, and I think that I owe it to you, here it is:

I was raised as an orphan, and at eighteen I was drafted into the United States Army. I was deployed for some time to Korea and was discharged in nineteen-fifty. I attended college on the GI bill. While I was in college I met a girl, a classmate by the name of Alma Bond. We were madly in love, and within a few months of us meeting she became pregnant. Her father was the manager of a local bank. He forced us to do what is referred to as a shotgun marriage, threatening to disinherit her if we didn’t.

To keep an eye on me, and to save me for his daughter, old man Bond employed me at his bank. I was very bright, and moved up the ranks quickly. On graduation from college, I was promoted the assistant manager. In the meantime, Alma had dropped out of college--- and worse yet, she miscarried the baby. Things went downhill with her and me, and finally, we got divorced. After the divorce I remained in my post at the bank for three years until old man Bond died of a heart attack, and I was appointed as interim manager.

The work load was heavy, and many Friday nights I would be in the office until past midnight. About three years after the divorce, I met your mother through a mutual friend. I loved her dearly, but we

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did not spend much time together, as my work was so demanding of my time. In fact, I had known her for less than a year when it happened.

One Friday night I was working late as usual. It was the end of the month, and the end of the quarter. The Monday following would be a holiday. Your mother and I had planned to leave town early Saturday morning for Las Vegas and to return on Monday night. Whenever I worked late, I always ordered pizza from a pizza shop down the street. The same man who had always delivered pizzas to me whenever I worked late took the order. I knew him well, or so I thought. The security guard, an old man named Harry, was there at the bank with me. Normally the pizza delivery man would come to the back door and ring the bell, and Harry would collect the pizza and pay for it.

The call was made for the pizza, and the delivery was late. I looked at Harry and saw that he was at his desk taking a nap. He had been at work since 7:45 that morning. Not wanting to wake him, I tiptoed to the back door to wait for my pizza. A van drove up that was not the regular pizza van, but it was the same delivery man, so I unlocked the door to collect the pizza, and to pay for it.

As I opened the door, a man rushed in. I recognized him to be your mother's brother. We had

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met only once; his name was Russell, and he lived in Chicago. He had two pistols, one in each hand. He stuck the muzzles of both guns into my sides and told me to shut up while he marched me to Harry's desk. He and the pizza man blindfolded and hog-tied him and left him lying on the floor, and then they blindfolded and gagged me. They tied my hands behind my back. The sound of stacks of bills being loaded into sacks was unmistakably coming from the vault. I tried to get to the silent alarm that would turn on a revolving red light at the front of the building for the cops or anyone passing to see that something amiss was going on inside, but one of them hit me in the back of my head, preventing me from getting to it. I remembered falling to the floor.

When I came around, I realized that I was hog-tied on the floor in the back of a speeding vehicle. I also realized that there was someone else on the floor in close proximity to me. It wasn't until she spoke that I recognized the voice to be your mother. She too was tied up and blindfolded, but she was not gagged."

"Honey," she said. "I am sorry. I tried to stop them. They took me along for fear that I would call the police."

"We tried to maneuver ourselves to untie each other, but we were tied to rails, and our movements were severely restricted.

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We travelled all night and most of the next day, while I kept hoping that we would at least stop at a service station for fuel, where we might have been able to attract some attention. As it turned out, they had two five-gallon jugs of fuel tied to the back of the vehicle, from which they refueled on a stretch of infrequently travelled road. I guessed it was about 4:00 in the afternoon when they pulled off the asphalt road to a very bumpy and bushy path. Branches of trees and bushes scraped along the side surface of the vehicle's exterior, and rocks hit against the underside as we slowly moved along for what seemed like hours.

Finally, we stopped and they untied your mother and me. I looked around and discovered that we were in a forest on the side of a hill, and under some tall trees. The pizza man took out a small transistor radio, and I heard the screeching sounds as he tried to dial in on a station. He did not have much success.

Your mother and your uncle started to quarrel. She was most concerned that the authorities would have caught up with us and charged me with accessory after the fact. In the meantime the pizza man demanded that I help him to unload the van to an area about a hundred feet up the hill. They had so many things in that van, one would think that they must have been planning this caper for at least a year.

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They had two small tents, two Army cots, blankets, lanterns, kerosene, flashlight, pots and pans, an axe, hatchets, a shovel, knives, canned food, and changes of clothes for each of them.

We erected the tents and bedded down to sleep. Your mother stayed awake most of the night. When she wasn't arguing with her brother, she was crying. I had no idea where we were. In the morning, though, I noticed that there was frost on the windshield of the van, and based on a rough calculation of time and speed from the bank in Kansas City to where we were, and the time of year that it was, we could be somewhere in Utah, or Minnesota, Colorado, or even in the hills of Pennsylvania. I wasn't allowed to talk to your mother, but she kept up a heated running argument with your uncle.

The sun's rays were coming through the tops of the trees when we had some canned food and biscuits, before the pizza man divided the entire load into four, including the two sacks of money that they stole from the bank. The idiots had forgotten to include water in their load, and we were all thirsty.

We proceeded up the hill, each of us with our apportioned load, with the pizza man in front. We walked over rocks, through shrubs, and under tall trees for hours without anyone speaking. At sundown your mother stopped and refused to go any further

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until she had some water to drink. Her brother begged and begged, but she flatly refused to move. Finally, they set up the tents, and we rested while the pizza man walked around the area. That's when your uncle told us that the plan was for them to hold up in the mountain for about three months, and then one of them would go to Mexico and the other to Canada.

'What about your sister and me?' I asked.

'Neither of you were part of the plan,' he said. 'Now if they find you, they find us, so you are stuck. I blame myself for telling it to her in the first place. She tried to stop us. You both go where we go.'

'I loved your mother dearly, and I couldn't think of trying to escape without her. The pizza man's walk around the area did not result in the finding of any water, but he did report that he had seen bear dung. He cut some small trees from which he made two poles, each about ten feet long to look like spears. At one end of each he tied some part of a pair of pants he ripped into two equal parts. That night after we had canned food and biscuits, we made a small fire, and took turns to watch.

My watch was first, and what I saw almost caused me to pee on myself. Coming toward me was the reflection of the fire from the eyes of the biggest black-bear in the mountain. They were like dimmed

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automobile headlights. I did not see the shape or form clearly in the darkness, only the eyes, six feet from the ground. I called out loudly, and Russell and the pizza man rushed to my side. They poured kerosene on the pieces of torn trousers that were tied to the ends of the poles, set them on fire, and as the bear approached, they pushed the torches toward its face. Forcefully the bear knocked one of the poles away, but the flames of the other pole had such a burning effect on it that it hurriedly turned around and ran. The pizza man followed it with the flames right up its behind. It howled as it ran down the hill.

The night passed without further incident, and I was surprised that your mother slept so soundly, but as the sun was coming up on the horizon she made a scream. She and her brother were in one tent, and the pizza man and I were in the other. Upon hearing her scream, I rushed to her side. Her brother was kneeling over her feet and looking at her ankles and her knees, which had swollen as big as basketballs. She could not stand, and complained of excruciating pains in her joints.

The pizza man and your uncle conferred. I did not hear what any of them said. Abruptly the pizza man went to the tent and tried to force your mother to walk. This infuriated your uncle, and the two got into a fight. Both of these men were six feet plus in

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height and weighed about the same - two hundred plus - and were well - matched for a fight. They were wrestling on the ground when the pizza man said, 'I am going to blow your m----- brains out.'

Your uncle had the last night-watch, and had the two guns in his tent. Your mother flung both guns down a precipice. I listened, and in the silence of the forest I heard them ricocheted off rocks hundreds of feet below.

On seeing that, the pizza man let go of your uncle and rushed toward your mother. Your uncle and I overpowered him and beat him to a pulp. He limped to where the money was, grabbed a sack of it and a machete, and headed down the hill in a westward direction. We stayed at that camp for the next two days and two nights while your uncle searched the surroundings for water, and waited for the swelling of your mother's joints to reduce.

On day three, your uncle had wandered out, and stayed longer than he had on prior days, and on his return he announced that we should make an effort to travel at least one more day. He said that he had been to a place where he had a look-out of the entire mountain, and best of all there was a clearing of the trees where the dew fell heavily on the grass, heavy enough for us to collect it with one of our canvas tents spread as catchment.

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It was a long and arduous journey. Although your mother was a petite 27 year - old woman, not weighing more than about 130 pounds, my five-foot-eight, 150 pound frame struggled to carry her on my back. This was partly due to the state of dehydration that I was in, because normally I'm in good physical shape. Your uncle had to move all the supplies by himself, two or three hundred feet at a time. You should have seen the big man running back and forth, and up and down the hill. It took us all the daylight hours to get to the designated area. We were almost there, when your mother said to me, 'Honey, I have a secret.'

My heart skipped a beat or two. "*Oh no.*" I said to myself. '*You were not in on this from Jump Street.*'

"What is it honey?" I asked.

"Well, I was waiting until we got to Vegas to tell you that I am four months pregnant."

"I was glad to hear this, and I told her so, but I was sorry for us for where we were.

"I have a secret myself," I told her.

"Do tell, honey,' she said. 'I know it has to be good.'"

"Well, I was waiting until we got to Vegas to make you Mrs. Cyril Morgan."

For a moment she forgot that her joints were swollen and in pain. She hugged me, and jumped.

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We both fell to the ground. Her brother noticed us in embrace and called out.

'You kids all right?' He got no response.

That night your uncle and I took turns to watch. We had made a small fire. It was agreed on before the pizza man left that no fires should be made in the daytime for fear that someone would see the smoke and track it to us. The following day he and I started to cut logs to build a house. He suggested that we build it in the trees, above the standing height of the bears, that way we wouldn't have to build fires and stand watch every night. The next day we had water from the dew, and we all enjoyed it even more than the food.

By the end of the second day in that area, we had the floor of the tree house completed, and moved our tent to cover it. No sooner had we made a ladder and your mother gingerly climbed it to the tent than it started to rain. It came down without warning, and poured torrentially for hours. Darkness set in before it was over, and the next morning we saw broken and uprooted trees all around us. The only thing that kept us safe was that the floor of our house was tied to four trees that grew in the shape of a square.

Your mother remained in her cot while Russell and I descended to find whichever of our supplies hadn't washed away. We followed the water trenches

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and recovered most of the canned food. All the biscuits were gone, but we found a twenty-pound bag of rice, the tin with kerosene oil, and some pans where they had washed up on a rock. The axe and the shovel were in a pool of water two hundred feet away. The duffel bag that had the box of matches, the first-aid kit, salt and some other essentials was nowhere to be found.

After the rain, your mother's joints again had swollen, and it was impossible for her to climb up and down the ladder, so we had to convert one of our pots to a chamber vessel for her to pee and defecate. She asked for hot water to bathe her swollen joints. Everything around us was wet. Making a fire seemed impossible. I watch closely as your uncle went to work. First he removed the bulb from the flashlight and carefully broke the glass that shaded the filament, and then, he replaced it and removed the glass from the reflector. Next he cut the cotton cloth lining from his spare trousers into small bits and pieces, poured some kerosene on it. He then momentarily pushed the flashlight switch on and off. Instantly, we had a torch, which we used to light a piece of pitch-pine wood, and that was enough to heat water.

The rain had washed out a lot of roots from under the rotted leaves. We did not know what was edible. So we picked up some and put them in a heap.

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The next day we examined the heap and picked out those that wild animals had nibbled on. Some of it we roasted, and some we boiled. I was pleasantly surprised how good the tastes were. Roots as you know, have been the main-stay of our diet, especially in the winters.

Your uncle was a pretty good hunter. In one day he flung stones and killed two rabbits and a deer. We had fresh meat for a few days, but he said that that wouldn't work all the time, so we dug a hole and covered it with trash to trap animals. That was when I took off my shirt and pants, so that I could help him to dig, and I've been wearing just these boxers ever since. As you know, when it's cold I wear deer skins. Over the years that hole trapped dozens of animals, and the only things that got out on their own, were the black-bear and some mountain lions.

By my memory of the days, along with rough calculations, it was about the middle of August. I could not depend on the date my wrist-watch was showing, because I had neglected to wind it up for about three or four days. We'd had long days for more than a month. I sensed that Russell was restless. He had not been told of his sister's pregnancy, and because she was not able to stand or to walk, her pregnancy was not obvious. The tree house had been completed, but we were just living from day to day. There was no

effort to prepare for the upcoming seasons. Russell spent a lot of time gathering pine sap. I had no idea what it was for, except for making a fire flame, but that would emit a lot of smoke, not to mention how pungent the smoke smell was.

On or about the fourteenth of August, everything was as normal as normal was for us until about midday Russell announced that he would be leaving the next morning with or without your mother and myself. It was the night before that your mother and I talked about the two of us going back down the hill and mingle with people, in preparation for your expected birth, two months away. We had one problem: Russell had the money. He used the sack as his pillow at nights, and during the day he kept it in his sight.

Well, right after he made the announcement, he took some stacks of bills out and handed them to your mother; then he stuffed some into his pockets. I watched him as he used some melted pine gum and daubed the sack until it looked completely water-proofed. The gum might have also made the sack air-tight and insect-and animal-deterrent.

"Can we go home now?" your mother asked her brother.

"You can do whatever you want," he replied. "In the morning I am leaving, and I won't stop until I get to Canadian soil."

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“I am going back down the hill if I have to slide on my backside,” said your mother.

“We went to sleep that night, just like all the previous nights, except with the thoughts that the following night your uncle would not be there. At about 4:00 in the morning, your mother let out a scream. My first thought was that her joint pains had reappeared. Those pains were always so excruciating that I wished I could have borne them for her. It wasn't until she told me to put some water on the fire that I realized that her cry was for giving birth. You were born two months early. She was on one of the cots. Your uncle was on the other. There was no bed linen other than the blankets. Luckily, the pizza man had left his one change of clothes. I used his trousers to soak up the blood and water from the cot, and when you came out I wrapped you into the shirt.

Your mother was real calm during the whole ordeal. I was very frightened. Before that, I was very sure that in two months when you were due, that you would've been born in a hospital, but that was not to be, so I simply followed the directions given by your mother, and I was really surprised at the results. She later told me that she had been trained as a paramedic, but quit the job in her rookie year because she would not go along with the antics of her supervisor.

With the appearance of day-light, your uncle

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took the sack of money and a hatchet, and bade us goodbye.”

“Hang in there, Sis,” he said. “I am going to get you help. It might take a couple of days, or even a couple of weeks. When they arrive, just tell them that you were both camping. Nothing more”.

“I gathered some pine barks and some eucalyptus leaves, on which I poured hot water as your mother directed, to use as antiseptic and detergent.

I think it was a Monday morning, and as I tended the fire I watched your uncle disappeared into the bushes toward the north. I made rice porridge mixed with deer’s milk. Your mother ate the grains and fed you with the liquid.

With your uncle gone, I couldn’t think how to get the three of us to civilization. I began to focus on food, and sometimes I caught myself praying aloud for our good health. Fortunately, the hole trap that your uncle and I dug was catching so many animals that I had to let some of them loose. However, because it was the mating season for the deer population, there was very little milk in the udders of those that were mothers.

The rain I told you about that washed away a lot of our supplies, including some dried beans, they surprised me when I noticed some bean sprouts about a hundred feet from our tree - house, but there was

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a problem. Herbivorous animals found the sprouts before I did, and had eaten quite a few, so I spent some daylight scaring them away. I had some help in keeping them away, though. That big black bear that we had encountered a few weeks earlier, and burned its' behind, stayed away, but just barely out of sight somewhere between the sprouts and the deer herd.

The deer meat and bean sprout soup in the first one month of your life did wonders for all of us. You went from about five pounds at birth to about ten pounds, your mother's joint pains and swelling had subsided, and I was happy.

I started planning for our escape down the hill back to civilization, but every time I brought up the subject, your mother had opposition to it, saying that your uncle said he'd send rescue. There was one time we had an extended conversation about how we would or could integrate into society. None of the possibilities were kind to me. One scenario had me being arrested for bank robbery and kidnapping. Another had her arrested also as an accomplice. She did not wish to implicate your uncle. I told her that I would take the fall, which would send me to prison for a long, long time. She said that she would rather die than live without me.

Late in December, my wrist-watch had stopped working, because I had forgotten again to wind it, so

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I lost track of the day and the exact date, but somehow your mother was using her eyebrow pencil to make marks on her cot to count the days. Early one morning she woke me up. "Honey, honey-wake up," she said. "Its' Robert's first Christmas."

That was the first time you had been called a name. We always before that refer to you as the surprise. I love the name Robert. She said that that was her father's name and that he signed his signature was R.A.M., short for Robert Anthony Marshall, and that was the reason why his friends affectionately called him 'Rammy.' I did not wish for our son to be called Rammy, so I told her to call you Bob.

We sang two Christmas carols. I did not quite know the words, but she knew them perfectly. After that she retrieved this little book from her pocket-book. It was black, and about two and a half inches by four inches. When she opened it I noticed that it was a copy of the New Testament Bible. 'Ever since Robert was born I've been reading this on a daily basis,' she said. 'I have to give God thanks for you both in my life.'

Since that day and for about a year, I used the hatchet to make marks in Roman numerals on the trunks of the trees that were the supports for our house. So although I did not know the day of the

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week, or the exact time of a given day, I knew the month and date of the month.

On the night of January thirty-first it was the warmest night in two months. It was so warm that I had to remove the blanket that was hanging in the doorway. All three of us had eaten and were very comfortable. I heard your mother say a prayer. She had you in her arms and prayed longer than I had ever heard her prayed before. She then put you in one cot and she went to sleep on the other. As usual, I slept on the floor.

It was the most peaceful sleep I'd had since I left Kansas City. The sun was way up in the sky when I awoke. Silently I climbed down the ladder and went straight to the hole trap. When I looked in I saw nothing, but as I was about to walk away a movement caught my sight. It was a young jack-rabbit. Finally, I said to myself, you would have a toy. Gingerly, I picked it up and climbed back to the house. You were awake, but your mother, I thought she was still sleeping. I knew that sometimes she'd be awake, but pretended to be still asleep while she listened to me speaking baby language to you. I sat you up beside her expecting that she would hold on to you so as not to let you fall, but there was no movement from her. You were falling off the cot when I caught you and shook her to wake her. At first I thought she

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was pretending, but after shaking her for almost five minutes I realized that she had passed.

For the next three days nothing passed the throats of you, me, or the little rabbit except air. I had decided that if she did not wake up, then we should all die. Two nights had passed, and I just lay there falling in and out of sleep. On the morning of the third day I was dreaming that your mother was shaking me and saying. You can wake up now. I have arrived. When I opened my eyes it was you with both hands on my face, shaking me. It was a puzzle to me how you came off that cot. You had never done that before. I got up, cleaned you up, and fed you. The little rabbit was dead and your mother's body was as cold as ice. I dug her grave next to the animal trap and buried her. I then took you into my arms and started to walk down the hill. I had no idea where we were going. An hour or so later it started to snow, and I realized that if I continued I would be committing your murder and my suicide, so I turned around back to the tree-house.

It was early afternoon when we got back to the house, and I did some house-cleaning, using the pine and eucalyptus solution as disinfectant. I was in the process of throwing out some things that belonged to your mother that I thought we'd have no use for, and decided to go through her pocketbook before I threw it out. Up until this day, I do not know if I should

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attribute this to providence or luck, but in that thing, which was no more in size than twelve inches by six inches was a treasure trove of seeds and other useful items that served us tremendously well over the years.

That pocket-book had more compartments than a Navy submarine. First of all there was that little book: the New Testament Bible. It is the only printed material here, and it is from that that I taught you to read. Then in the compartments I found a small spool of sewing thread and needles, her lipstick and eyebrow pencils, a fingernail clipper, a wristwatch that did not work, the two letters I had written to her more than a year before, an elastic belt, a handwritten list of names and telephone numbers, a family photograph of herself and her brother Russell as kids with her parents, a pair of scissors, talcum powder and powder puff, a small round mirror, two bottles of perfume, earrings and beads, a comb and a hairbrush, and probably most valuable to us were some seeds. The seed assortment was not more than a couple of any in particular, but they included pumpkin, melon, squash, sunflower, citrus, apple and some others that I did not recognize.

That same day I decided that we could live here indefinitely; or at least until you were grown enough to be on your own in the real world. My first task was to prepare to plant a garden in the spring which was

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two months away. To do that required me to build a fence and to gather leaves from the forest floor and compost them for mulch. The leaves I gathered whenever the snow melted enough to expose them, and the fence wood I cut every day until I had enough to build a 24x24 foot area.

Spring came early; based on my count of notches representing the day count that I made on the trees. I set about half the seeds in a container with soil on the tree house platform, and they sprouted nicely. The forest floor became a carpet of greenery with shrubs and tree seedlings.

One night it seemed as if a herd of mountain goats were passing through, and five of them were caught in our hole trap. The lot consisted of two mothers, and three kiddies, but only one of the kiddies survived the six foot fall. I built a pen about 6x6 inside the garden patch for the two mothers and the one kiddie, and it was fun to watch that kiddie feed from the udders of both mothers, one at a time.

Luckily, I had jammed some spikes into the ground all around the outer side of the garden fence, to deter prey animals, because the smell of the goats attracted some mountain lions, and one night as they approached the fence and stepped on the spikes, I heard them screamed as they retreated.

With the fresh and plentiful vegetables from the

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garden, the goats' milk, and the constant supply of meat from the trap, by the end of spring both you and I was getting a bit chubby. You had just started to walk, and at times you were actually staggering when you tried to walk.

By the time of your first birthday; you were running like a two --- or three-year-old, and I had to make sure you stayed within the garden area. The young animals that got caught in our trap provided great playmates for you all through your toddler years, and sometimes you got so emotionally attached to them that I had a hard time separating you from them when it was time to butcher them, particularly the rabbits.

As the years went by, you grew so rapidly that you always looked a year, maybe two years bigger than your age, especially after your tenth birthday. I was teaching you to read and write from the moment you uttered your first sentence. You were always a fast learner, although the writing was limited to the use of your mother's eyebrow pencils and the undersides of the cots. I tried to tell you everything I knew about the outside world. That was very difficult, because there was nothing to compare anything to, and I used up a lot of the canvas to draw things, and I am not much of an artist, but I did my best.

Over the last year or so I've tried to engage you

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in more of the things you will need to survive on the streets. I was a karate champ in the military, so I taught you the skills I knew, just in case you have to physically defend yourself. I taught you how to be aware of people who befriend you only to hurt you in one way or another. I will regret that your first teenage birthday will be spent away from me, but it will be worth it for you to go now.

As for me, I've become part of this forest. I cannot go and leave your mother here. Besides, once I show my face to society I'll probably be thrown in prison, and we would be separated anyway. This is prison enough for me. Here I'm free. I can eat what I have, I can sleep when I want, and when it's time for me to go I'll dig my own grave right next to your mother. When I am too weak to get around, I'll just sit in it and wait for the rains to cover me with water and debris. You do not have to worry about me. You are young and smart. You deserve to be out there. The good Lord will take care of you, goodbye"