I crouch behind a wall, squeezing my eyes shut. Please don’t let anyone be there, I beg silently. I start to stand up but then I hear a rustle. I curse inside my head. It’s too early for this. The sun is barely up in the sky. Whose bright idea was it to scope out the area for Eaters? Oh, right. It was mine.

Peeping from behind the wall, I see nothing, and I dash under the shelter of a pool umbrella.

I hear a thud. I freeze. I hear shuffling sounds. Footsteps.

I slap myself mentally for leaving my stick behind, but there’s no turning back now.

I glance up at the sky quickly.

Please don’t let anyone be there, I say in my head to whoever’s watching over us.

I look around. The pool is still empty, except for the broken bones of dead Eaters. Everyone had refused to clear it, so we’d just left them there. I swear I can still smell the rotting bone marrow and remaining flesh and I struggle not to gag. I hear a clatter and start to panic. My heart is beating so fast, and this time, there is no one to save me.

I look around again and see nothing.

“Don’t be silly,” I mutter to myself. “It’s just your imagination. There’s no one there.”

Feeling a little better, I stand up tall and walk to the foyer of the condo, where I’m supposed to meet Kyl, Dyanne, Lily, Dev and Shulin.
I'm about to cross a deserted path behind the condo that we have been staying in when I hear a low moan come from behind me. It's an Eater, no doubt about it. I start to sprint, not even bothering to look back. I feel a hand brush my neck and I scream and run into the foyer where everyone is already gathered. I whip my head around, expecting to be faced by an Eater. But there's nothing there.

Lily comes up to me. “What’s wrong? It looks like you’ve seen a ghost.”

I force a laugh. “No, it’s nothing, I just didn’t want to be late.”

Kyl gives me a look that I pointedly ignore and I tell them that I haven’t seen anything.

We all report that there are no Eaters and that we should be safe. We think that the horde of Eaters that chased Connor’s group here must have moved on, unable to catch the scent of the young kids up on the eighth floor. Heaving a sigh of relief now that I’m surrounded by people, I allow myself to relax a little.

We were all out on a task to make sure the building is safe. Meaning no Eaters, safe alleys. We’ve left Brion, Jae and Connor with the kids back in our apartment and I’m really hoping that they haven’t broken into an argument.

I rub my eyes wearily. I can’t believe it’s only been two days since Connor joined us. And already, the tension between Jae and Connor is so strong it couldn’t be cut by a chainsaw. It’s been draining me, keeping me from sleeping. It’s making me as jittery as a mouse being stalked by a dozen cats. Oh wait, there are no more mice. Nor cats.

Lily walks next to me and she tries to start a conversation.

“Kay, you really don’t remember anything?”

She looks so hopeful I feel really bad lying to her, but I just shake my head, trying to look sad.

“I’m sorry, I’ve been trying but I really can’t seem to remember anything at all.”

She believes me and reaches over to give me a hug. I pat her back awkwardly.

“It’s okay, you’ll remember some day.”

She doesn’t realise. I already remember.
I remember everything. My past, Camp Zero, being kicked out of Camp Zero, the blind terror of having to fend for ourselves on the outside.

My group that had been kicked out was made up of: Dev (aged 16), Connor and myself (both aged 15), Lily (aged 14), Farrah and Min (both aged 12), Yuri (aged 10) and Sammy and Rose (both aged 8).

Like the clueless kids that we were, we had just started to run around and search for food. The fact that we were all good skateboarders meant that we travelled pretty far. We were pretty pleased with ourselves for being able to move so fast. We only stopped when Dev pointed out we needed a plan. He was the oldest and we appreciated him taking charge.

It looked like we might have actually been okay until we came across Tattoo Guy and his gang. They accused us of taking “their food” and threatened to kill us. They freaked us out so much that we started fleeing in panic again.

Then the fire happened and we got separated. That was when I met Jae and his group. Jae, Kyl, Brion, Dyanne, Shulin, Eryn, little Nicky and the other younger ones. Confused and without my memory, this group of 14 had become my family.
And that is the problem. I had been with Jae’s group for a week, and had created new memories with them. And all my past memories are now jumbled up with my new memories, jostling for space and attention in my tired brain. My mind is a swirling mess, and in that maelstrom Jae’s perplexing green eyes are all confused with Connor’s soft dark green eyes.

That’s another reason I haven’t been sleeping. Knowing who I am has only made things more complicated. I remember who I am. I remember Connor. I also remember what I have to do.

My mom had given me a mission. Yep, my mom. I remember her too. She is a genetic engineer – a pioneer in her field, I always heard people say.

Days before I was due to leave Camp Zero with Connor, Lily, Dev and the rest of the group, she told me, “Kayla, we’re all in danger. Sooner or later, all the food will eventually run out. Then we will be in trouble. What will the government do then? But I was prepared. You know how I’m always assuming the worst.”

Remembering my mother makes me smile. I do remember what she’s like. The ultimate control freak.

My mom had tried to smile as she always did, but her deep brown eyes had started to glisten. I looked at her intently, unsure if it was a trick of the light. Was she tearing up? She seldom cried.

“You know what is happening, right?” she said softly.

I nodded. We were being kicked out.

“There is something you need to do. Something very important.”

“What is it?”

“You need to find a way to get to safe.”

“What?”

“Yes, I need you to get to safe. No matter how hard it is, you must try,” she said cryptically. Her eyes flashed to the tiny blinking light in the corner of our room.

I understood immediately. Our conversation – in fact, every interaction that took place within Camp Zero – was recorded. I nodded, eyes wide. I had a hundred questions, the first being, “Get to safe? What does that mean?”

Then it clicked. She wanted me to go home. Our home had always been our safe place.

“I’ll try to be safe, Mom,” I said, so that whoever listened wouldn’t catch her meaning.
“Remember what I wrote in my notebook. Remember the code we live by,” she said.

I frowned, wracking my brain. What? When had she ever let me read what’s in her notebook? Did we live by a code? What was she talking about? But I couldn’t ask her in case anyone heard us.

She pulled me close and squeezed me till I could barely breathe. “Be careful, Kayla,” she whispered urgently into my hair. “You mustn’t fail.”

The task is simple, really. I have to go home. And since she’s never once let me read what’s in her notebook, she must want me to find it.

The thing is – she never made it clear why it is so important. But she is a genetic scientist so I figure it has something to do with her work. Maybe her notebook contains something about her research that will help this global crisis.

Food is running out. There has been no sight of anything alive – animal or plant. Believe me, everyone has looked. Scientists all over the world have been using satellite images to try to track down anything alive, but so far, all they’ve received are image after image of barren nothingness. All that’s left are wilted plants and selfish humans who’d do anything to keep themselves alive.

But hope only lasts for so long, then fear starts to set in.

Things are hopeless. That’s what everyone assumes now. But some scientists in Singapore and around the world have not given up. Including my mother.

Maybe she discovered something. And for some reason, she doesn’t want certain people at Camp Zero to know about it.

Then something she often said pops into my head: “Knowledge is power, Kayla. And power in the wrong hands can be very, very bad.”
The answer is hidden in me?
I am the key to everything?

What could my mom possibly mean? How can I be the key to everything?

More cryptic words for me to decipher. More people to run from. More reasons to hide...

But there is hope. There is an entire community of people on the outside of Camp Zero looking out for me. And together, we will seek the truth.