

This is a story about a brother, Han and his sister Greta. When they were young, they grew up in a beautiful city. Well they thought it had been beautiful. It probably had once. Then the bombs had begun to fall, and it became harder and harder to call it beautiful. In the early days, they quickly lost their parents. Han told Greta that he was sure that they were still alive, because they never found any bodies.

What he didn't tell her is that there seldom were bodies when a bomb blew up. He didn't like thinking about that. He would scurry over a ruined wall here and a ruined wall there, digging through the rubble in search of food. On a good day, he would find a broken pipe jutting from the ground and gushing water.

Those were the days that he could fill up every container they had. Stretching out their survival a little bit farther than the day before. Even now the six buckets of water that he had tucked away were starting to run low, and he was hoping that he would be able to find more water soon enough.

As he sifted through the ash and rubble, he found a tin of food. It was beaten and tarnished but it clearly was still sealed. This meant that it probably contained food that he and his sister could eat. Mixed with water, he could probably stretch it out for a day or two.

He exhaled, and a tiny little puff of breath plumed from between his lips for just a second. Then he put the tin into his pack. He pulled out a marker, and made a note in his secret code language.

It really wasn't his code language, he had gotten it from a box of cereal, and it had taught him how to write messages that no one else could read. As long as he had his ring, he would definitely be able to leave clues without anyone else understanding them.

He jotted down, 'Food was here.' In his secret language, and smiled.

During the beginning of the conflict, people had been very nice to them. There had been a community of people that had looked out for them and made sure that they were never alone or in trouble. That had changed.

At first Han had thought that people were simply running away in the middle of the night, and then he had realized what was happening.

The idea that a human body could simply disappear was completely foreign to the kids. As well as many of the adults, based on what he had seen. There were many people that hadn't been able to understand this originally. He had remembered some of the conversations his neighbors had had.

They were the reason his sister thought that his parents had gotten lost, because they thought his mom and dad had run away.

The reality is that Han's parents had gone the same way that the neighbors had gone. There had been a night of explosions, and a different group had vanished.

Another night and then another group.

So on and so forth.

It had taken a long time, but eventually everyone had gone.

Just gone.

Han scrubbed the wetness in his eyes. It wouldn't help to think about this fact.

He had to focus on getting water, and he had tracked down the pipes that he had previously used, and none of them were putting out water anymore. He had to find water today or tomorrow. As he started along the slope, he spotted a piece of rubble with a black marking that looked different from all the gray.

He went over and confirmed that it had once been marked by a black marker, exactly like the one that he held in his hand. It wasn't an entirely intact note, but he was able to remember when he had made it.

That had been near the end of the first month, and the building had still stood, tall and imposing.

He had found quite a few pieces of food, and that is all that he had marked on the wall. Back then water had been plentiful and easy to find. Now he was wishing that he had been more interested in finding buckets. If he could remember right, this had been a store. The food had been fairly heavily cleaned out.

But there had been lots of other extremely useful items lying around. He had ignored them, because he had only cared about the food back then.

How foolish he had been.

Still, this meant that he was going to have a hard time finding a pipe of running water anywhere in the area. It would have to be one of the areas that got hit directly by a bomb, revealing the water mains beneath it.

If that happened there would have been a huge stagnant pool of water.

The idea of that much water made his dry mouth ache a little. It was amazing how eager he had become to drink water. He would have never accepted water as dirty and gross as what he was drinking now, but it was a thousand times better than the ache of no water.

He now understood the pain that came from that.

So he set out, roughly in the direction of where he thought the nearest source of water would be.

The day ended with him finding nothing of value. And he wandered back to the hole his sister and he had taken as their 'home'. She was inside, busily watching a pot of boiling water. They had quickly realized that it helped to boil the water, and he was happy to add the contents of the tin into the water.

This way they could call it soup.

The thought of soup just made him feel more hungry, and he resisted the urge to grumble and complain. It always caused his sister to burst into tears. He hated when she did that. They ate a little of the soup, and then turned into the rags they called a bed.

He had been happy to find this place, as it allowed him and his sister a lot of safety. The hole was small enough that most adults couldn't get in, and it had already been hit by a shell and didn't break.