



## CHAPTER I: EXCITEMENT

As they pressed onward through the storm, their vision was greatly hindered. The world around them was shrouded in a brilliant white veil, blurring the boundaries between earth and sky.

**“The weather is harsh today!”** The Guide shouted over the howling wind. Only she knew the way towards the town, using a special compass that detected powerful, unnatural forces.

**“I see a house!”** A boy in the group shouted.

A girl with red hair shouted back, **“Good spot, Kulip!”** As the group trudged wearily on through the tempestuous storm, their spirits were suddenly lifted at the sight of multiple windows glowing with cosy light in the distance. With the last bits of their energy, they hastened towards the town, seeking refuge from the tempest in the warmth and safety of a hotel room. Curiously, as they crossed the town’s border, the storm suddenly stopped. As the group marveled at the town’s dark yet inviting architecture, they walked along a pathway of old solid bricks, lightly dusted with snow. Through the windows of the houses, they glimpsed the homely scenes of families that gathered together for their meals.

At last, the group arrived at a grand hotel situated at the heart of the town square. The tall building stood proudly, its balconies and windows adding to its grandeur. It had a classic charm that hinted at a time long past.

**“Here we are folks, I will make sure everyone has a bed tonight.**



**You guys just wait in the lobby,”** said the Guide. The six members of the group waited patiently, biding their time in the warmth and safety of the hotel’s bright reception room. Sarah, a girl with blonde hair and freckles on her face, settled gracefully into a regal couch of royal blue, adorned with delicate hints of shimmering gold. Denise and Mateus, meanwhile, huddled together in a large armchair, draping themselves in their cloaks to stave off the lingering chill of the storm. By the fireplace, Ruckus played with an intricate puzzle wrought of cold metal, whilst Meera looked on, fascinated by his efforts to solve the intricate riddle. Kulip, nestled beside Denise and Mateus, found himself mildly irritated by their affectionate cuddling. Each member of the group was garbed in heavy jackets and backpacks, bearing testament to their long and arduous journey.

**“It’s strange that the storm stopped when we entered the town,”** remarked Sarah, her voice echoing in the cosy ambiance of the room.

Kulip sighed, **“Well, we’re just that unlucky.”**

**“Or we’re very lucky,”** She squinted her eyes towards him. **“because now we can see this town and all its beauty in the detail.”** her enthusiasm couldn’t be halted by his grumpiness.

Kulip couldn’t help but crack a wry smile while rolling his eyes at her optimism. **“Not at night though.”**

**“Look Meera, I am onto something here!”** Ruckus played with his puzzles. **“If I move this part over here, and then this part over there, I can grab this part and pull it like this. Look, it almost comes off!”** Meera looked at him, attempting to understand his actions, but she couldn’t help bursting into laughter.

**“You said that like thirty times in the last five minutes. I’m still amazed by how determined you are.”** The two shared a hearty laugh. Their laughter was soon interrupted by the return of their



Guide, who strode confidently into the room.

“The rooms are settled. Sarah and Meera, room 304. Ruckus and Kulip, room 309. Denise and Mateus, who asked me multiple times if they could share a room, room 302. Is everyone content with this arrangement?” Ruckus lifted his arm, showing that he wanted to ask a question. “Ruckus, I really don’t care if you’re not happy with the distribution, I asked the question ironically. We’re not changing anything. I’m way too tired and going to sleep. If something happens, you guys can find me in room 305, “The Guide answered coldly as she left and climbed the stairs.

“I only wanted to ask if we have a balcony, she didn’t have to be so rude,” He complained, voicing his displeasure to Meera.

“She’s probably just tired, it’s kind of a dumb question anyway.”

“What, how so?”

“Looks like you’ll be seeing it for yourself in just a few minutes, so why the need to ask now?” her words laced with a playful tone as she teased Ruckus.

“Okay, okay you’re right. Well, let’s find out then.” As they conversed with one another, the group made their way up the stairs.

“This hotel may be small, but they certainly don’t skimp on the stairs,” remarked Kulip, his breath slightly laboured from the climb.

Ruckus let out a weary sigh, clearly feeling the strain of the ascent. “At least we’re all on the same floor.” He added, still out of breath. One by one, they opened their rooms.

Before entering her own, Meera turned to the group, “See you all tomorrow, guys!” The rest bid their farewells in a somewhat disorganized manner and the corridor was empty again.

Ruckus eagerly rushed into his room, tossing his backpack carelessly onto the ground as he entered. “Holy crap Kulip, we got a balcony!”