The stars in the sky, broken shards of glass, beautiful in all their wicked glory. He wants to look away, but he can’t. They draw him in, closer, closer, yanking his breath from his chest, sweeping him off his feet, until he can’t see anything but the little pinpricks of light - dangerous, alluring, captivating. He reaches a trembling hand upwards, but the stars shrink back, as if his mere touch would be enough to extinguish their eternal flame. [I’m sorry, my son, but you have made your choice. There is no going back. You must finish what you have started.]

Carson sat up abruptly, breathing hard, a queer sort of tightness resting in his stomach. His eyes felt raw, as if he had cried himself to sleep, but he was sure he hadn’t. Yesterday was his 16th birthday after all, and boys with silver Honda Civics waiting outside in their garages and first driver’s licenses tucked carefully into brand-new leather wallets shouldn’t be crying themselves to sleep. The digital alarm clock resting on his bedside table read 3:39 a.m. in softly-glowing orange. He wondered why he had woken up. The sky was still dark, after all, and the neighborhood was as silent as a thick fog. As he rested his head back onto the pillow, he noticed that it was slightly damp and smelled of the sea.

["Why must you go, son? Is this world not enough for you? Do you long for adventure, or perhaps glory?"

"Father, you don’t understand. Earth needs me, the way a plant needs sunlight to grow and bear fruit, the way Lilia needs Mother to hold her and feed her, the way our people need you to survive and prosper."

"Don’t be silly, my child. Do not think so much - otherwise, you will soon think yourself to be more important than the universe itself"

"I have been having a dream, Father. The same dream, night after night. Earth, heading towards certain destruction. Flames, explosions, acres and acres of death; the green forests reduced to burnt char, the deep blue water poisoned with murky brown. Maybe this is a calling. Maybe I can save them."

"But are you willing to give up your home, your family, your identity for a ‘maybe?’ Once you go down to Earth, your memories will leave you. Perhaps your purpose will too. Then what good would that be? 200 years ago, my brother believed he had a calling - 6,382 light-years away. He never came back. Think wisely, son. Don’t be rash. Whatever you decide, I...I will support you."]
For the second time that morning, Carson woke up. The alarm clock buzzed cheerfully and morning light fluttered over his bedsheets, forming rippling patterns across the clean, white linen. Although that awful tightness in his stomach was gone, there was now a hollow feeling - as if something was missing. Carson had gotten so used to this feeling that he barely noticed its presence. It was always there - this chronic ache, throbbing against his ribcage. Even the thought of driving himself to school in his new car wasn’t enough to wash it away.

First period was English.

“Carson Lee, can you please come up here? I need to speak with you.” Mrs. Langer pushed up her wire-rimmed glasses. There was an annoyed edge to her voice that Carson had never heard before.

“Yes, Mrs. Langer?” In response, she held up a sheet of notebook paper, covered in Carson’s distinct blue-inked scrawl that bled through the page. Then, she pointed to the name, cramped into the right-hand corner. Emmett Castor. Not again.

“This is yours, I presume?” Carson nodded wordlessly. Mrs. Langer’s cheeks flared bright red. “It was hilarious the first time, funny the second time, amusing the third time, but this is getting old. How many times must I tell you to put your own name on your own assignment?” Carson swallowed the indignant anger building in his throat. How was he supposed to explain to her that he could have sworn the name written down on that paper was his own: Carson Lee?

“I - I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

“Next time, you get a referral,” Mrs. Langer said, and handed Carson the sheet with a dull finality.

“Dude, what was that about?” Quentin hissed at him from across the aisle. Carson twisted the edges of his mouth into a smile and forced a chuckle.

“Nothing. She thought I was being a smart-aleck.”

“You, smart? Nah,” Quentin shot back with a smirk. Carson squeezed out another laugh and turned away. Mrs. Langer started to pass out the vocabulary quizzes. Carson took out his pen, scribbled his name in the right-hand corner, and started to write. As he checked over his answers a final time, two words caught his eye. Emmett Castor. Gritting his teeth, he scribbled the name out, and wrote his own name above, spelling out each letter under his breath. C. A. R. S. O. N. Carson. Not Emmett. Carson.

[“I wanna see! I wanna see!”]
“Patience now, my boy.” The man lifts the boy up onto his shoulders, and the boy presses two pudgy hands against the telescope lens, which is easily the size of his face.

“Here’s my favorite.” The man fiddles with a panel of knobs at the base of the telescope. The boy gasps and presses his face even closer to the glass.

“It’s beautiful!” he exclaims, eyes shining like stars. “Does it have a name?”

“Earth,” the man says with a small smile. “Its name is Earth.”

That night, Carson was awake. He didn’t wake up, because he couldn’t fall asleep. Emmett Castor. Carson Lee. Emmett. Carson. He got out of bed, and walked barefoot across his room, to the lone window on the right wall. The night was strangely clear, the stars startlingly bright. Carson felt a strange urge to cry. For what, he did not know.

[Remember, my son. Emmett. Remember.]