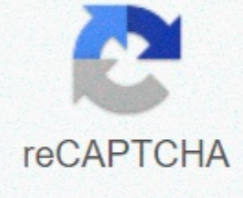




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Chapter one Kendra stared out the side window of the SUV, watching foliage blurred past. When the storm of movement started too much, he looked forward and pointed his gaze at a certain tree as he approached slowly, passed, and gradually leaned back. Is that what life was like? You can look ahead to the future or back to the past, but the present moved too fast to absorb it. Maybe sometimes. Not today. Today, they were driving on an endless two-lane highway through the wooded hills of Connecticut. Why didn't you tell me grandpa Sorenson lives in India? Seth complained. His brother was 11 and in sixth grade. He's tired of his handheld video game, which proves they were on a really epic drive. Mom twisted to face the back seat. It won't be long now. Enjoy the scenery. I'm hungry, Seth said. Mom started digging in a bag full of creaking snacks, Peanut butter and biscuits? Seth reached forward for the biscuits. Dad, driving, he asked for some Almond Roca. Last Christmas I decided that Almond Roca was my favourite candy and that it should have some handy all year round. Nearly six months later, he still respected his resolution. Would you like something, Kendra? I'm fine, I'm fine. Kendra returned to his attention to the frantic procession of trees. His parents went on a seventeen-day Scandinavian cruise, where aunts and uncles sided with his mother. They all went for free. It's not because they won a race. They went on a cruise because Kendra's grandparents drowned. Grandma Larsen and grandpa visited relatives in South Carolina. Relatives lived in a trailer. There was a glitch in the trailer that could have caused a gas leak, and they all died in their sleep. A long time ago, Gran and Grandpa Larsen stated that when they died, all their children and spouses had to use the money allocated to go on a Scandinavian cruise. The grandchildren weren't invited. Don't you get bored if you're stuck on a boat for 17 days? Kendra asked. Dad looked at her in the rearview mirror. The food is supposed to be incredible. Snails, fish eggs, everything. We're not that excited about the trip, mom said sadly. I don't think your grandparents imagined an accidental death when they asked for it. But we're going to make the best of it. The boat stops at the ports as it goes, dad said, deliberately redirecting the conversation. You can get out part of the time. Is this car ride going to take 17 days? Seth asked. Dad said we were almost there. Do we have to stay with Grandma and Grandpa Sorenson? asked Kendra. It's going to be fun, dad said. You should be honored. They almost never invite anyone to stay with them. Exactly. We barely know them. Herdings. They were my parents, Dad. Somehow I survived. The road stopped winding through wooded hills as it passed through the city. They were standing at a traffic light, and Kendra was staring at an overweight woman who was re-gassing her minivan. The front windshield of the van was dirty, but it looked like she had no intention of washing it. Kendra looked forward. The windshield of the SUV was filthy, smeared with bugs, even though dad spat it out the last time they stopped to refuel. They drove all the way from Rochester today. Kendra knew Grandma and Grandpa Sorenson didn't invite them. She heard mom approach Grandpa Sorenson to let the children stay with her. It happened at the funeral. The memory of the funeral shuddered from Kendra. There was a vigil in advance where grandma and grandpa Larsen were presented with the right coffins. Kendra didn't like grandpa Larsen wearing makeup. What crazy decided that when people die, they hire a taxidermer to capture them for one last look? He would much rather remember them alive than the grotesque display of Sunday's best. Larsen had grandparents who were part of his life. They had many holidays and long visits. Kendra could hardly remember being with Grandma and Grandpa. They inherited an estate in Connecticut when his parents got married. The Sorensons never invited them to visit, and rarely traveled to Rochester. When they came, it was usually one or the other. They only got together twice. The Sorensons were nice, but their visits came together too rarely and briefly. Kendra knew that grandma taught history at a college, and that Grandpa traveled a lot, running a small import business. That's it, that's it. Everyone was surprised when Grandpa Sorenson showed up at the funeral. It's been more than eighteen months since the Sorensons visited. He apologized that his wife couldn't make it because she felt bad. There always seemed to be an excuse. Sometimes Kendra wondered if they were secretly divorced. Towards the end of the vigil, Kendra heard mom cajoling grandpa Sorenson to watch the children. They were in a hallway around the corner from the auditorium. Kendra heard them talking before he got to the corner and stopped to eavesdrop. Why can't they stay with Marci? Normally, they would, but Marci's coming on the cruise. Kendra peeked around the corner. Grandpa Sorenson wore a brown jacket with stains on his elbows and bow ties. Where are Marci's kids going? Your father-in-law. What about the babysitter? Two and a half weeks is a long time for a babysitter. I remember you mentioning that you'd get them sore at some point. Yes, I remember. Should it be at the end of June? Why not in July? The cruise is within a time frame, the difference? Things were very busy then. I don't know, Kate. I'm out of practice with the kids. Stan, I don't want to go on this cruise. It was important to my parents, so we're leaving. I don't want to twist your arm. Mom was on the verge of tears. Grandpa Sorenson sighed. I think we can find a place to lock them up. Kendra then moved out of the room. Since then, he has been quietly worried about staying with Grandpa Sorenson. After leaving town, the SUV climbed a steep gear. Then the road swerved around a lake and got lost in the low, wooded hills. They passed a mailbox every so often. Sometimes a house was visible among the trees; Sometimes it was just a long driveway. They turned to a narrower road and continued to drive. Kendra leaned forward and checked the gas meter. Dad, he said you were under a quarter of a tank. We're almost there. We'll fill it up after we've dropped you off. Can't we go on the cruise? Seth asked. We could hide in the lifeboats. You could sneak us food. You kids are more fun with grandma and grandpa Sorenson, Mom said. Just wait. Give him a chance. We're here, Dad said. They pulled off the road into a gravel driveway. Kendra didn't see any trace of the house, just the driveway that slipped into the trees. Tires crunching on the gravel passed several signs proclaiming that they were privately owned. Other signals have averted the intruders. They came to a low metal gate that hung open, but could be closed to prevent access. It's the longest driveway in the world! Seth complained. The farther they get, the less conventional the signals become. Private Property and No Trespassing let me be. 12 Gauge and trespassers will be chasing you. These signs are funny, Seth said. It's creepy, he mumbled kendra. On another bend, the driveway reached a tall wrought-iron fence filled with fleurs-de-lis. The double gate was open. The fence stretched through the trees as far as Kendra could see in both directions. Near the fence stood the final sign: Certain death awaits. Is Grandpa Sorenson paranoid? Kendra asked. The signs are a joke, Dad said. He inherited this land. I'm sure the fence came with him. After they went through the gate, there was still no house in the sky. Just more trees and shrubs. They drove across a small bridge across a creek and climbed a shallow slope. There the trees suddenly ended, giving the house a view across the huge front lawn. The house was big but not huge, with lots of gables and even a tower. After the wrought iron gate, Kendra expected a castle or castle. Built out of dark wood and stone, the house looked old but good repair. The basics were more impressive. The bright flower garden bloomed in front of the house. Groomed and a fish pond added character to the yard. The house is backed by a huge brown barn at least five storeys high, topped with a weather paddle. I love it, mom said. I wish we'd all stay. You've never been here before? Kendra asked. Your father came here a couple of times before we got married. They go the extra mile to discourage visitors, Dad said. Me, Uncle Carl, Aunt Sophie, none of us spent much time here. I don't get it, I don't get it. You're lucky. It's going to be fine. If nothing else, you can play in the pool. They stopped outside the garage. The front door opened and Grandpa Sorenson appeared, then a tall, lanky man with big ears and a thin, older woman. Mom, Dad and Seth got out of the car. Kendra sat and watched. Grandpa was shaved at the funeral, but now he's wearing a brown beard. He wore faded jeans, work boots and a flannel shirt. Kendra studied the older woman. She wasn't Grandma Sorenson. Despite her white hair striped with some black strands, her face had an ageless quality. The almond's eyes were black as coffee, and its features suggested Asian ancestry. Short and slightly bent down, she retained her exotic beauty. Dad and the lanky man opened the back of the SUV and began removing suitcases and duffel bags. Are you coming, Kendra? Dad asked. Kendra opened the door and fell on the gravel. Just put things in, Grandpa told dad. Dale's taking them up to the bedroom. Where's mom? Dad asked. I'm going to see your Aunt Edna. Missouri? Edna's dying. Kendra barely heard from Aunt Edna, so the news didn't mean much. He looked up at the house. He noticed there was champagne glass on the windows. Bird's nests hung on the eja. They all wandered to the front door. Dad and Dale took the bigger bags. Seth had a smaller duffel bag and a cereal box. The cereal box

made two simple rules, you understood them, and you broke them. Just because I decided not to share all my reasons for creating the rules, do you think you should get away with punishment? Yes, Seth told me. Just this once. Grandpa says that doesn't sound fair. They don't carry out the punishments, the rules lose all their power. But we don't do it yet Thing. Thing, Said. We promise. Don't lock us in the house for two weeks. Don't blame me, Grandpa said. You locked yourself in by ignoring the rules. Kendra, what do you think would be fair? Maybe you could give us a reduced sentence as a warning. Then the total punishment is to screw it up again. Reduced sentence, grandpa blurts. So you still pay the price for your disobedience, but you get another chance. Maybe I can live with that. Seth? It's better than the whole punishment. That's settled. I'm reducing your sentence to one day. You're going to spend tomorrow in the attic. You can come down and eat and use the bathroom, but that's all. If you break my rules again, you won't leave the attic until your parents come for you. For your own safety. Understood? Yes, sir, Kendra told me. Seth nodded to his arrangement. Journal of Secrets Have you ever noticed the keyhole in the unicorn's belly? Seth asked. He lay on the ground next to the imaginative rocking horse, with his hands laced behind his head. Kendra looked up from her painting. He asked Lena to create a paint-by-numbers to help her endure her imprisonment. Kendra wanted to paint the pavilions around the lake, and Lena quickly drew on the scene with astonishing precision, as if the housekeeper had saddened the place. Seth refused to prepare another canvas. He got stuck in the attic or not, he was sick of painting. Keyhole? Weren't you looking for keyholes? Kendra got off her chair and squatted next to her brother. I'm sure there was a small keyhole in the lower part of the unicorn. He took his keys out of the nightstand drawer. The third key Grandpa Sorenson gave him made his impact. A small door opened. Who fell several rose-shaped chocolate wrapped in gold foil, the same one she found in the miniature armoire. What are they? Seth asked. Soap, Kendra said. Kendra reached into the slot and felt around inside the hollow rocking horse. He also found some rosebud chocolates and a tiny gold key like the one from the closet. The second key to the locked journal? They look like candy, Seth said, brought one of the ten chocolates. Have a drink. They're fragrant. You're going to smell nice. He unpacked it. Funny color for soap. It smells like chocolate. He sucked it all into his mouth. His eyebrows were blown off. Holy cow, that's good. Since you found the keyhole, why don't we split it 50/50. He was a little worried about eating them all. Sounds fair, he said, grabbing four more. Kendra put five chocolates in the nightstand drawer and brought the locked book. As he waited, the second gold key opened another buckle. Where's the third one? He hit her forehead. The first two were hidden in things that the other keys opened. A One of them has to be in the jewelry box. He opened the jewelry box and searched the compartments of glittering pendants, brooches and rings. Hidden on a charmed bracelet, he found a tiny gold key that matches the other two. Kendra eagerly went across the room and put the key in the last lock of the Diary of Secrets. The last buckle untied and opened the book. The first page was blank. So is the second. He quickly moved through the pages. The whole book was empty. It's just a blank journal. Did Grandpa Sorenson try to get him to keep a diary? But the whole game with the keys was so tresy. Maybe this one had a trick, too. It's a hidden message. Disappearing ink or something. What was the trick with the disappearing ink? Spray with lemon juice and hold it to the light? It's kind of like a I hat. And there was another trick where he gently rubbed it with a pencil and a message appeared. Or maybe something even more devious. Kendra made a closer assessment of the diary, looking for clues. He pressed a few pages against the window to see if the light would reveal hidden watermarks or other mysterious evidence. What are you doing? Seth asked. All he has left is a chocolate rosebud. He had to hide his chocolates in a safer place than the nightstand drawer. He held up one last page. The light didn't show anything. I was practicing for my hearing at the asylum. I bet you're going to win the first prize, he teased him. Unless they see your face, it's back. Seth went over there and shoved some seeds for Goldilocks. He laid another egg. He opened the gate to get it back and stroked his soft feathers. Kendra climbed down on the bed, went through the last pages. He suddenly stopped. There was writing on one of the last pages. It's not really hidden, it's just hidden in an unlikely place. Three words written close to the knitting, at the bottom of an otherwise blank page. Drink the milk. Folding in the corner, he flipped over the other sides. Then, from the start, he overlooked the other pages to make sure he didn't leave out similar messages. There was no other mysterious clue. Drink the milk. Maybe a sheet soaked in milk would bring words. He can soak one in the milk bag Dale took out. Or maybe the milk of the message was spoken! The challenge is to drink unprocessed cow's milk for what purpose could it serve? To cause diarrhea? Dale specifically warned him not to drink the milk. Of course, he was acting weird. Maybe he's hiding something. Drink the milk. All the hassles of finding holes for the keys Grandpa Sorenson gave him in order to unlock extra keys that fit into the closed log to get the strange message? Was there anything missing or overanalyzing? Maybe the hunt just had to take over. Do you think mom and dad will let us have a chicken? Seth asked, holding the hen. Probably after they get us some buffalo. Why don't you ever keep your goldied tresses? It's really good. Keeping a live chicken sounds disgusting. It's better than keeping a dead man. I'm going to pet him. Don't miss this. Seth held the hen to his face. You're a good chicken, aren't you, Goldied? The hen was quiet. He was going to catch your eye, Kendra warned me. No way, it's tame. Kendra put one of the rosebud chocolates in her mouth and replaced the Diary of Secrets in her bedside table drawer and returned to her painting. He was sullen. Among the pavilions, ponds, and swans, the image required more than thirty shades of white, gray, and silver. Using Lena's pattern shades, she created her next color. The next day, the sun was bright. There was no evidence that it ever rained or that it would ever rain again. Hummingbirds, butterflies and bumblebees have returned to the yard. Lena was gardening in the back under a big sun hat. Kendra sat in the shade on the back porch. No longer a prisoner in the attic, he felt better able to enjoy the fine weather. He wondered if the various butterflies seen in the yard were among the species imported by Grandpa Sorenson. How could you stop a butterfly from leaving your property? Maybe the milk? It was filled with a game he found in the attic, on a triangular board with fifteen holes and fourteen hooks. The goal was to jump pins like checkers until there was only one left, which sounded simple at first. The problem was that in the process of jumping, certain pins ended up stranded, unable to jump or jumped. The number of hooks left stranded on the board determines the score. His best effort so far was three, which was typically typical. It was nice to go with two. One was brilliant. I've been labeled hopeless by five or more. As he recovered from the hooks for another try, Kendra saw what he was waiting for. Dale was walking on a pie bowl on the edge of the yard. He put the peg game on the table and rushed to catch it. Dale seemed a little sad about his advances. I can't let Lena see you talking to me like that, and she was quiet. I have to put the milk out in secret. I thought no one knew you put the milk out. Right. Your grandfather doesn't know, but Lena does. We're trying to keep it a secret. I was wondering what milk tastes like. He seemed nervous. Didn't you hear what you heard the other day? You can have it. . . . Shingles. Scabies. Scurvey. Scurvey? This milk is a bacterial stew. That's why insects love it so well. I have friends who have tried milk fresh from the cow. Survived. I'm sure those were healthy cows, Dale said. These cows... It doesn't matter. It's not just any milk. It's very polluted. I wash my hands well after I've even handled them's. So you don't think I should try it. Not unless you're looking for an early burial. Can you at least take me to the barn and see the cows? See the cows? That would break your grandfather's rules! I thought the point was that we could get hurt, Kendra said. I'll be fine if you come with me. Chapter six Your grandfather's rules are your grandfather's rules. There's a reason. I'm not going to break them. Or bend them. Not? Maybe if I can look at the cows, I'll keep your secret of putting the milk out. See, it's blackmail. I won't stand for blackmail. I wonder what Grandpa's going to say to him if I tell him at dinner tonight. He's probably going to say you should mind your own business. Now that I'm leaving, I have to do my chores. He watched her walk away with the milk cow. He must have been defensive and acting strangely. There was definitely some mystery around the milk. But he was reluctant to try to become a speech about bacteria. He needed a guinea pig. Seth tried to throw a piece off the cliff into the pool, but it landed on his back. He could never make it. He surfaced and stroked the side to try again. Nice back-flop, Kendra said, standing next to the pool. This was one of the blooper rolls. Seth crawled out of the water. I'd like to see you do better. Where were you? I found out a secret. Page 7 Page 7 What? I can't explain it. But I can show you. Good as the lake? Not exactly. Hurry up. With a towel on his shoulder, Seth stepped into his sandals. Kendra led him from the pool through the garden to some flowering shrubs on the edge of the yard. Behind the plants lay a large pie tin filled with milk, where the mass of hummingbirds fed. Are they drinking milk? he asked. yes, but that's not the point. Try it. Why? You'll see. Have you tried it? Yes. Why is this such a big deal? I told you to try it, and you'll see. Kendra watched curiously as he knelt in front of the bazaa. Hummingbirds are scattered. Seth dipped his finger in the milk and put it on his tongue. I'm pretty good. Sweet. Sweet? He bowed his head and pressed his lips to the surface of the milk. He pulled back and wiped his mouth. yes, it's sweet and creamy. It's a little warm, though. Looking beyond Kendra, his eyes bulged. Seth jumped on his feet, screaming and pointing. What the hell are they? Kendra's turned. All he saw was a butterfly and some hummingbirds. He looked back at Seth. He turned in circles, his eyes swaying in the garden, seemingly confused and a little startled. They're everywhere, he said from your house. What are they? Take a look around. The fairies. Kendra was staring at her brother. Could the milk have completely dried his brain? Or it was him. Her? He didn't seem to be faking it. He stared over a rose bush at a butterfly in amazement. He tentatively reached for her hand, but flapped away. He turned back to Kendra. Was it the milk? This is so much cooler than the lake! His excitement seemed real. Kendra saw the milkshakes. Drink the milk. If Seth was playing a joke, his acting skills suddenly improved 10-times. He dipped his finger and put it in his mouth. Seth was right. It was sweet and warm. For a moment the sun shone in his eyes that he blinked. He glanced back at his brother, who was walking around a small group of floating fairies. Three had wings like butterflies, one like a dragonfly. He couldn't quell the scream of impossible sight. Kendra looked back at the milk. A hummingbird-winged fairy drank from her hands. Other than the wings, the fairy looked like a slender woman not quite five inches tall. He was wearing glittering turquoise sties, with long dark hair. When Kendra leaned closer, the fairy took off. There's no way you actually saw that, is there? There had to be an explanation. But the fairies were everywhere, near and far, glittering in bright colors. How could he deny what was in front of his eyes? As Kendra continued to survey the garden, the astounding disbelief melted away in amazement. Fairies of all imaginable varieties are sequined around, exploring flowers, siking the wind, and acrobatically avoiding their older brother. Kendra roamed the paths of the garden in a daazed way and saw that fairies represented all nationality. Some Asians, some Indians, some Africans, some Europeans. Many were less similar to mortal women, with blue skin or emerald green boots. Some of them had antennas. Their wings came in all varieties, mostly after butterflies, but they are much more elegant and brilliantly colourful. All the fairies shone brightly, the flowers of the garden as the sun lit up the moon. On a bend on a path, Kendra stopped. Grandpa Sorenson stood there, wearing a flannel shirt and work boots, folding his arms over his chest. We need to talk, he said. The grandfather clock tolls the clock, chiming three times after the introductory melody. Sitting in Grandpa Sorenson's study in a high-back leather armchair, Kendra wondered if grandfather watches had been given their names because they were owned only by grandparents. He looked at Seth, sitting in the same chair. It looked too big to him. These were chairs for adults. Why did they sit in a children's room? What is a fairy skull? Seth asked, pointing to the flat-bottomed pipe on the thumb-sized skull in grandpa desk. Probably Kendra told me. Even so, he couldn't stop worrying that what was hidden. Not only were the fairies real, they were grandfather's. There were hundreds in his garden. It was a fairy skull? Seth asked, pointing to the flat-bottomed pipe on the thumb-sized skull in grandpa desk. Probably Kendra told me. Even so, he couldn't stop worrying that what was hidden. Not only were the fairies real, they were grandfather's. There were hundreds in his garden. It was a fairy skull? 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loss better. Grandpa said the night would come when all the creatures went wild. . . Midsummer Night. It's festival night. How does it feel? It's better if I don't tell you. I don't think your grandfather wants you to worry about that until the time comes. He'd rather have scheduled his visit to avoid festival night. Kendra was trying to sound sloppy. Are we going to be in danger? You're worried now. You'll be fine if you follow your grandfather's instructions. What about the Evening Star Society? Maddox was worried about them. The Evening Star Society has always been a threat, Lena acknowledged. But these reservations have survived for centuries, some for millennia. Fablehaven is well protected, and your grandfather is no fool. You don't have to worry about speculative rumors. I'm not going to say any more about the subject. Cheese in your eggs? Yes, please. After Kendra left, Seth pulled out the towel, including his emergency equipment and the bottle he smuggled from the pantry. The glass was empty now, and it was cleaned in the sink. Seth pulled out his pocket mower and used the awl to punch holes in the lid. He twisted the top, collected pieces of grass, flower petals, twigs and gravel and put them in the bottle. Then I wandered through the garden from the pool, leaving the skimmer behind. If the ability fails, it's cunning. He found a good place not far from a fountain, then took the little mirror out of his cereal box and put it in the bottle. He placed the pot on a stone bench and settled in the grass nearby, with the lid in his hand. The fairies didn't last long. Several people were flying around the fountain. Some drifted through lazily the bottle. After a few minutes, a small one with wings, like a bee, landed on the edge of the glass, staring into it. Apparently pleased, he fell in and began to admire himself in the mirror. He was soon joined by another. And one more. Seth slowly moved closer until he reached the bottle. All the fairies are out of it. Expected. Some of them flew away. New ones are here. One entered the bottle, then quickly two more. Seth swooped in and slammed the lid on the glass. The fairies were so fast! He expected to catch all three, but two whizzed out before the lid covered the hatch. The other fairies pushed the lid with surprising force. Page 11 Page 11 He screwed in. The fairy inside was no higher than his little finger. She had fiery red hair and iridescent dragonfly wings. The indignant fairy beat her tiny fist against the glass wall without noise. Around him, Seth heard the tinkering of miniature bells. The other fairies showed and laughed. The fairy in the bottle beat the glass even harder, but to no avail. Seth got his winnings. Grandpa dipped the wand in the bottle and lifted it to his mouth. As he gently blew, several bubbles flowed from the plastic circle. The bubbles were sning through the porch. You never know what's going to charm them, he said. But bubbles usually do the trick. Grandpa was sitting in a big braided rocker. Kendra, Seth and Dale are sitting nearby. The setting sun raced red and purple across the horizon. I try not to bring unnecessary technology onto the property, he continued, sauce the wand again. I just can't resist the bubbles. It blew, and more bubbles formed. A fairy who glowed softly in the fading light approached one of the bubbles. After thinking about it for a moment, he touched it and the bubble turned bright green. One more touch, and it was an inky blue. Another, and it was gold. Grandpa kept the bubbles coming and several fairies came on the porch. Soon all bubbles changed their colors. The hues are getting brighter as the fairies compare with each other. The bubbles cracked with flashes of light. One fairy collected bubbles until she had assembled a bouquet that resembled a lot of colorful grapes. Another fairy entered a bubble and inflated it from the inside until it tripled and erupted with a violet flash. There was a Kendra bubble full of winking fireflies. It was iced near one of the grandfathers, fell on the porch and shattered. The fairies flocked near Grandpa and craved the following bubbles. He kept them coming and the fairies continued to display their creativity. They filled the bubbles with glittering fog. They were chained up. They turned them into firebells. One of its surfaces is reflected like a mirror. It took the shape of another pyramid. Another cracked. When Grandpa put away the bubble solution, the fairies gradually dispersed. The sunset almost disappeared. Some fairies played between the chimes, making soft music. 20 years after most of the family, Grandpa said that some of your cousins came here. None of them came close to figuring out what was really going on. You didn't give them clues? Kendra asked. No more or less than I gave you. They weren't the right mindset. Was it Erin? Seth asked. He's a sober man. Be nice, Grandpa scolded you. What I'm trying to say is, I admire the way you kids have moved forward. He's adapted impressively to this unusual place. Lena said we could have a party with goats, Seth said. As your man, I wouldn't hold my breath. Why did you talk about satires? We found hoof marks in the kitchen, Kendra said. Things got a little out of hand last night, Grandpa admitted. Believe me, Seth, a relationship with satires is the last thing a boy your age needs. Then why did he do it? Seth asked. A visit to a fairy broker is a significant event and carries certain expectations. I admit that gets borders on stupidity. Can I try blowing bubbles? Seth asked. Another night. I'm planning a special trip for you tomorrow. I have to visit the magatatar this afternoon, and I'd like to take it with me so you can see more of the property. Can we see something besides fairies? Seth asked. Probably. I'm glad, Kendra said. I want to see everything you want to show us. Everything at the right time, my dear. After his breathing, Seth was sure Kendra was asleep. He sat up slowly. He didn't move. He had a weak cough. He wasn't twitching. He eased out of bed and crossed the attic floor to the dresser. He quietly opened the third drawer. There he was. Twigs, grass, pebbles, petals, mirrors, and everything. In the dark room, the inherent glamour illuminated the entire drawer. He pressed his tiny hands against the glass wall and looked up to him desperately. He twteeted something in the twittering language, waved him to open the lid. Seth looked over his shoulder. Kendra didn't move. Good night, little fairy, he whispered. Don't worry about it. I'll get you some milk in the morning. He started closing the drawer. The panicked fairy doubled down on her frantic protests. He looked like he was about to cry, which made Seth stop. Maybe he'll let her go tomorrow. It's okay, little fairy, he said gently. Go to sleep. I'll see you in the morning. He clasped his hands and shook them with a begging motion, begging with his eyes. She was so pretty, that fiery red hair on her creamy skin. The perfect pet. It's so much better than a hen. Which chicken can light bubbles? He closed the drawer and returned to his bed. Retribution Seth slept from the corner of his eye and stared at the ceiling for a moment. He flipped over and saw Kendra wasn't in his bed. The sunlight flowed through the window. He stretched out his back with a moan. The mattress was inviting. Maybe you should get up later. . . No, he wanted to see the fairy. He hoped a little sleep would calm him down. After firing the father of tangled blankets, Seth rushed to the dresser. It opened, it gasped. The fairy is gone. In his place was a hairy tarantula with striped legs and shiny black eyes. Ate? He checked the lid. It was still tight. Then he registered that he had not yet consumed milk. This could be the other form the fairy appeared in. He would have expected a dragonfly, but he thought a tarantula was possible. He also noticed that the mirror in the glass was broken. Did you break it with the gravel? It seemed like a good way to cut yourself. No rudeness, he scolded. I'll be right back. A round loaf of bread sat on the table, a stained mix of white, black, brown and orange. While Lena sliced it up, Kendra had another sip of hot chocolate. Considering all the ingredients I missed, I thought it might be a bunch of pies, Lena said. But calico breads are just as delicious. Try the play. He gave Kendra a slice. They did a great job on the pot, Kendra said. And the table looks perfect. Better than before, Lena agreed. I like the new comb. Brownies know what they do. Kendra examined the slice of bread. The strange coating continued along, not just the crust. He took a bite out of it. Cinnamon and sugar dominated the flavoring. He eagerly took another one. It tasted like blackberry jam. The next one tastes like chocolate with a hint of peanut butter. The next bite seemed saturated with vanilla pudding. It tastes so much! And they never collide the way they should, Lena said, and she bit herself. Bare legs, erect hair, Seth went into the room. He said good morning. Breakfast? You have to try this cage bread, Kendra said. He answered after a minute. Can I have a cup of hot chocolate? Lena filled a mug. Thank you, you said as you handed it to him. I'll be right back. I forgot something upstairs. He rushed off, drank from the mug. It's so weird, Kendra said, it bit the taste of banana bread. If you ask me, Lena answered. Seth put the mug on the cupboard. He took a comforting breath and quietly prayed that the tarantula would disappear and the fairy would be there. He slipped the drawer out. &g It a hideous little creature staring up from inside the glass. Snaps pointed teeth to cover a sieve. Brown, covered in leather, taller than his middle finger. He was bald, with ragged ears, a narrow chest, tummy, and shrunkun, spiky limbs. Lips frog-like, his eyes bright black, the nose with a pair of splits above the mouth. What did you do to the fairy? Seth asked. The ugly creature was stying again, turning around. There were a few knots above the bony shoulder blades. The hubs wiggled like the remaining amputee wings. Oh, no, no, no, What happened to you? The creature stretched out the long black tongue and slapped the glass with the crusty hand. He spotted some food, trembling language. What's going on? Why did the beautiful fairy mutate into a repulsive little devil? Maybe some milk would help. Seth took the bottle out of the drawer, took the mug out of the dresser, and ran down the stairs from the attic to the hallway. He ran into the bathroom, locked the door behind him. The mug was still full. Holding the bottle in the sink, she poured some hot chocolate onto the lid. Most ran down the side of the glass, but a little dripping through the holes in the top. A drop fell on the creature's shoulder. It angrily waved at Seth to unseat the lid and then pointed out the cup. Looks like he was going to drink straight from the mug. Seth examined the room. The window was locked, the door was locked. He put a towel on the square at the bottom of the door. Inside the glass, the creature made begging moves and drank from a glass. Seth twisted the lid. With a huge jump, the creature jumped out and landed on the counter. Squeaking, snarling, glistering at Seth. He said I'm sorry your wing fell off. This might help. He held the mug out towards the creature, wondering if it was sipping the flavored milk or just climbing inside the cup. Instead, he bit her and barely missed her finger. Seth knocked his hand out, screamed hot chocolate on the counter. Szisz6, the agile creature fell to the ground, rushed through the bathtub and vaulted inside. Before Seth could react, the creature squirted down the drain. The last confusing explosion of complaints knocked out of the dark hole, and then the creature disappeared. Seth poured the remains of hot chocolate down the drain in case it was of use to the deformed fairy. He looked back at the bottle, empty, except for a few wilted flower petals. He wasn't sure what he was doing wrong, but he doubted Maddox would be very proud. Later that morning, Seth sat in the cabin trying to find puzzle pieces to fit together. Now that the district is finished, adding pieces was a challenge. You all look the same. He's been avoiding Kendra all morning. He didn't feel like talking to anyone. He couldn't get over how ugly the fairy had become. He wasn't sure what he did, but he knew it was somehow his fault, some accidental consequence of catching the fairy. That's why he was so scared the night before. He knew he was condemned to turn into a nasty little piece. The pieces of the puzzle began to vibrate. Soon the whole cabin was shaking. Was it an earthquake? He's never been in an earthquake before. Chapter 10 Seth ran to the window. Fairies hovered everywhere, gathered in the air throughout the chalet. Their arms were raised, and it looked like they were chanting. One of the fairies pointed to Seth. Several people sniked closer to the window. One reached out in his direction, a flash, the window glass shattered. Seth jumped out the window as several fairies flew in. He ran to the opening, but the cabin lurked so violently that it fell to the ground. The tremors became more intense. The floor was no longer horizontal. A chair overturned. The door door slammed. He climbed over there. Something hot stung the back of his head. Colored lights started flashing. Seth grabbed the door, but it didn't open. He dragged her hand. Something burned his palm. He panicked, returned to the window and struggled to stay balanced as the floor trembled beneath him. The flock of fairies continued to chant. He heard their little voices. A loud crack, the cabin suddenly tilted to the side. The view from the window has moved the fairies to the fast approaching ground. Seth experienced a momentary feeling of weightlessness. All the objects were floating in the cabin as everything collapsed. Puzzle pieces filled the air. Then the cabin exploded. Kendra smeared sunscreen on her arm and didn't like the body lotion's greasy feeling against her skin. He was a timer, like when he first got to the sun and was warm today and didn't want to take any chances. His shadow was a smel puddle at his feet. It was almost noon. Lunch was not far away, and grandpa Sorenson would take them to the grocery. Kendra quietly hoped to see a unicorn. She hadn't heard a huge crash from the corner of the yard. Then he heard Seth screaming. What could have caused so much noise? He didn't have to go far to see the bottom of the tree. He ran towards Seth. His shirt's torn. He had blood on his face. It looked like Seth was trying to make a joke about fairies wanting revenge on him trying to catch them until he realized they were probably true. Did the fairies throw you in the cabin? They're after mel Shouted. Jump in the pool. Kendra called. Seth swerved in the direction of the pool and started pulling his shirt down. The ominous cloud of fairies had no problem keeping up with it. They threw sparkling streams of glitter. Leaving his shirt aside, Seth jumped into the water. The fairies are looking for Seth! Kendra cried, watching in horror. The Fairies above the pool. After a few moments, Seth showed up. With flawless synchronization, the cloud of fairies slapped, diving towards him. He shouted as flaming rays of light began to blaze around him and he went under the water again. The fairies jumped after him. He came to the surface gasping. The water churned. Seth's in the middle of an underwater pyrotechnics show. Kendra ran to the edge of the pool. Help! he cried, raising his hands from the water. Fingers fused together like pinball. Kendra was screaming. They're attacking Seth! Help! Page 12 page 12 someone! They're attacking Seth! He was flapping towards the pool. A rolling crowd of fairies converge on Seth again, towing him to the bottom of the pool amid the gruesome erupts of light. Kendra ran and grabbed the pool skimmer, swinging it into the relentless horde of fairies, never touched one of them no matter how dense the swarm appeared. Seth resurfaced on the edge of the pool and threw his arm on the flagstones and tried to pull himself out of the water. Kendra bent down to help him, but screamed instead. One arm was wide, flat and rubbery. No elbows, no hands. A fin coated in human skin. The other was long and banded, fleshy tentacle with lycrum fingers at the end. He looked at his face. Long fangs arched down a wide, lipless mouth. Hair spots are missing. His eyes were dinged with terror. The boisterless fairies mobbed him again and lost his grip on the side, disappearing into another pulsating successor between the colorful flashes. Steam glowed up in the seething water. What does that mean? Grandpa Sorenson shouted, snched on the edge of the pool. Lena followed him. The water in the pool flashed a few more times. A lot of fairies whizzed away. Some of them flew over to Grandpa's. A fairy chirped particularly furiously. He had short blue hair and silvery wings. What did he go to? Grandpa told me. An unrecognizable monstrosity climbed out of the water and lay panting on flagstones. The deformed creature had no clothes. He crouched next to Lena, putting his hands on her side. He had no idea this was going to happen, Grandpa complained. He was innocent! The fairy tweeted her disapproval. Kendra was gaping in her brother's strange form. Most of her hair fell out, and she revealed a lumpy scalp that was shed by moles. His face was wider and flatter, with wet eyes and banana-sized fangs from his mouth. A twisted hump swelled high above his shoulder. . . On his back under the hump, he had four holes for air. His legs were united in a single coarse tail. He slapped the ground with his fin arm. The tentake wighed like a snake. Unfortunate coincidence. Grandpa said comfortingly. The unluckiest. Can't you have mercy on the boy? The fairy chirped violently. I'm sorry that that way. I feel terrible about what happened. I assure you the atrocity was not intentional. After one last outbreak of creaking sounds, the fairy is elzommed away. Are you okay? Kendra told me, squatting next to Seth. He made a confused moan and then, second, more sad complaint that sounded like a donkey garncing mouthwash. Hush, Seth, Grandpa told me. You've lost his ability to speak. I'll bring Dale, Lena said, in a hurry. What did they do to him? Kendra asked. Revenge, Grandpa said grimly. That you're trying to catch fairies? For success. Did you catch one? It was him. So you made him into a deformed walrus? I thought they couldn't use magic against us! He used powerful magic to turn the captured fairy into an imp, unwittingly opening the door to magical retribution. Seth doesn't know any magic! I'm sure it was an accident, grandpa said. Do you understand me, Seth? Slap your pinball machine three times, if you understand what I'm saying. The fin slammed against the flagstones three times. It was very sily to catch a fairy, Seth said. I warned you they weren't safe. But I share responsibility. I'm sure Maddox inspired me and wanted to start a career as a fairy broker. Seth nodded awkwardly, the whole bloated tribe hovering up and down. I should have forbid it. I forgot how curious and daring children can be. And how resourceful. I never thought you'd be able to trap one. What kind of magic did you use? Kendra asked, on the verge of hysteria. If a captured fairy is held between sunset and sunrise, it changes into an imp. What's an imp? A fallen fairy. Nasty little creatures. Imps despise themselves as fairies worship themselves. Just as fairies are attracted to beauty, ugliness attractsimps. Is his personality changing that fast? Their personalities remain the same, Grandpa said. Shallow and arrogant. The change in appearance reveals the tragic side of that mindset. Vanity is going to be a misery. They'll be spiteful and jealous, wretchedly wallowing. What about the fairies Maddox caught? Why don't they change? He avoids leaving the cages overnight. His captured fairies spend at least part of every night outdoors. Just putting the tank outside prevents them fromimps? Sometimes powerful magic is accomplished by simple means. Why did the other fairies attack Seth? Why would they care if they're so selfish? They care because they're selfish. All the fairies are worried that he might be next. They said Seth even told a mirror with the fairy so he could buy himself after he fell. The fairies thought it was particularly cruel. Grandpa answered every question with great calm, no matter how much Kendra accused him or angrily did it. Peaceful behaviour! He's going to calm down a little bit. I'm sure it was an accident, he said. Seth nodded vigorously, blubber jiggling. I don't suspect it's malice. It was an unfortunate accident. But fairies don't care about their motives. You have the right to exact retaliation. You can change it back. Restoring Seth to his original form is far beyond my capabilities. Seth let me out with a wlog, mournful roar. Kendra's got her hump. We have to do something, why? Grandpa told me. He put his hand over his eyes and pulled them down in his face. It would be very difficult to explain that to your parents. Who can cure him? Maddox? Maddox is not a magician. Besides, he's long gone. Although I hesitate, I can only think of one person who would be able to reverse the spells placed on your brother, who? Seth met him. The witch? Grandpa nodded. Under the circumstances, our only hope is Muriel Taggart. The wheelbarrow swayed as it crashed into a root. Dale managed to stabilize him. Seth moaned. Seth was naked, except for a white towel wrapped around the middle. I'm sorry, Seth, Dale said. It's a tricky road. Are we almost there? Kendra asked. Not much longer, Grandpa replied. They walked a file, grandpa was in the lead, then Dale pushed the wheelbarrow and then Kendra from behind. What began as an almost undetectable path near the barn grew into a well-trampled path. Later, they set out on a smaller course. They haven't crossed paths since. The forest looks so quiet, Kendra said. They are the quietest when you stay on the trail, Grandpa said. It seems too quiet. There's tension in the air. Your brother committed a serious crime. The fall of a fairy is a deplorable tragedy. The fairies' retribution was just as brutal. Eager eyes wait to see if the conflict escalates. He won't, will he? Muriel cures your brother, fairies can interpret him as an insult. Would they attack him again? Probably not. At least not directly. The punishment was handed in. Can we cure the fairy? Grandpa shook his head. Could it be the witch? Seth was changed by the magic he was forced to do. But the opportunity to fall and become an imp is an essential element of b eing a fairy. It's been converted to a law that exists as long as fairies have wings. Muriel might be able to undo the spells he forced on Seth. Reversing the fall of a fairy far exceeds its capabilities. Poor fairy. They've reached the junction of the road. Grandpa turned left. Almost there, he said. Be quiet as we talk to him. Kendra stared at the bushes and trees, waiting for her to look back at her with malicious eyes. What kind of beings would the seers be if all the greens were removed? What would happen if the stormf of the path? How long before some creepy did he eat it? Grandpa stopped and pointed towards the trees. Here we go. Kendra saw the leafy hut in the distance, from the path through the trees. Dale said there was too much undergrowth for the wheelbarrow and shoveled Seth into his arms. Although Seth was much cryer, he didn't grow in size. As they waded through the undergrowth, Dale took it with him without difficulty. The amber-covered hut approached. They walked to the front. The filthy witch sat in it, back to back to the wooden stump, chewing a knot in a bristle rope. A couple ofimps sat on the wooden stump. One was skinny, with prominent ribs and long flat legs. The other one was compact and fat. Hello, Muriel, Grandpa told me. The bimps jumped out of the trunk and scurried out of sight. Muriel looked up, with a slow grin revealing decayed teeth. Could it be Stan Sorenson? He rubbed his eyes theatrically and squinted at her. No, I must be dreaming. Stan Sorenson said he'd never see me again! I need your help, grandpa said. And you brought company. I remember Dale. Who is this fine young lady? My grandson. He doesn't look like you. My name is Muriel, dear, it's nice to meet you. I'm Kendra. Yes, of course. You have that pretty pink nightgum with the bow on your bosom. Kendra looked at Grandpa. How does this crazy witch know about her pajamas? I know a thing or two, Muriel continued, touching his church. Telescopes are for the stars, darling, not for trees. Grandpa said don't listen to him. He's trying to make you feel like he has the power to spy on you in your bedroom. Witches hunt for fear. His influence does not stretch beyond the walls of his hut. Do you want to put on some tea? Offered. What news is comingimps, Grandpa continued. And sinceimps are banned from court, his news comes from a certain imp. Muriel laughed screaming. The crazy laugh was more suited to the curly knot than his speech. The imp saw the room and heard conversations where Seth hid it. Grandpa concluded. There's nothing to worry about. Muriel raised her finger in protest. There's nothing to worry about, you say? Nothing the imp saw or heard could be harmful, Grandpa clarified. Except maybe his own reflection, Muriel suggested. Who's our last visitor? This poor, bumpy abomination? Could it be? He applauded his hand and chuckled. Did our brave adventurer have an accident? Did his smart tongue finally betray him? You know what happened, grandpa said. I did, I did, he chuckled. I knew he was cheeky, but I never suspected such cruelty! Lock him in a shed, I say. For the sake of fairies. Close it tightly. Can you restore it? Grandpa asked. Restore? The witch exclaimed. After what he did? It was an accident, as you know. Why to save a killer from the noose? To spare a traitor his shame? Can you do it? Can I quote him a medal? A badge of honor for his crime? Can you do it? Eleven chapters muriel dropped the plot. He looked at his visitors with a fancy look on his face. You know the price. Grandpa says I can't relax a knot. Muriel threw up his snarling hand. You know I need the energy from the knot for magic, he said. He's got over 70 different curses on him. You'd have to release 70 knots. What about without the dickering? A lot, and your cruel granddaughter will return to her original form. Without the knot, I would never be able to counteract the spell. It's fairy magic. You knew the price before you came here. No dickering. Grandpa's skepticism. Show me the rope. Put the boy on my doorstep. Dale put Seth in front of the door. Standing at the door, Muriel stretched the rope out to grandpa. There were two knots. They both had dried blood. One was still wet with saliva. He told you to choose. Of my own free will, I cut this knot, grandpa said. Leaning forward, he gently blew the higher of the two knots. It's broken up. The air was shaking. On hot days, Kendra saw the air shimmering in the distance. That was similar, but right before. He felt pulsating vibrations, as if standing in front of a powerful stereo speaker during a song with a lot of bass. The ground seemed to have been overturned. Muriel shook Seth's hand. Muttered an incomprehensible incantation. His cries were waving like they were boiling inside. It looked like thousands of worms were under his skin, nesting in find a way out. Rotting steam fumes out of his flesh. His fat seemed to evaporate. His twisted body trembled. Kendra stretched out her arms and moved as the earth broke even more. There was a little darkness, an anti-flash, and Kendra tripped, barely catching herself. The strange feeling is over. The air cleared and the balance returned. Seth sat up. He looked just like his old self. There are no fangs. There's no swimming pool. There are no holes. He's just an 11-year-old kid with a towel around his waist. He ran away from the cabin and got back on his feet. Content? Muriel asked. How are you feeling, Seth? Grandpa asked. Seth had his bare chest skedal. I feel better. Muriel grinned. Thank you, little adventurer. You've done me a great service today. I owe you. You shouldn't have done it, Grandpa, Seth said. He said it had to be done. We'd better get going. Stay a little longer, Muriel offered. No, thank you, Grandpa said. Great. Respect my hospitality. Kendra, it's nice to meet you, find less happiness than you deserve. Dale, you're as dumb as your brother, and you're almost as pale. Seth, please have another accident soon. Stan, you lack the wit of the orangutan, bless your soul, no no Aliens. Kendra gave Seth socks, shoes, shorts and a shirt. As soon as he picked them up, they returned to the path. Can I ride in the wheelbarrow on my way back? Seth asked. Page 13 Page 13 You have to push me, Dale growled. How does it feel to be a walrus? Kendra asked. Is that who I was? A mutant humpback walrus with a deformed tail, he clarified. I wish we had a camera. It was weird breathing through my back. And it was hard to move. Nothing seemed right. Maybe it's safer if we don't talk so loud, grandpa said. I couldn't talk, Seth said quietly. I felt I still know how, but the words came out completely tangled. My mouth and tongue were different. What's up, Muriel? Kendra asked. If you release the last knot, will you be free? He originally tied thirteen knots, Grandpa said. He doesn't loosen up on his own, though that doesn't seem to prevent him from trying. But other mortals can withdraw the knot by asking for a favor and blowing on them. Strong magic keeps the knot in place. When he gets out, Muriel can direct this magic to give you the favor. So if you ever need his help again... Somewhere else, Grandpa said. I didn't want it to go down a whole lot. It's not possible to free him. I'm sorry I finally helped him, Seth said. Have you learned anything from the ordeal? Grandpa asked. Seth put his head down. I feel really bad about the fairy. He didn't deserve what happened to him. Grandpa didn't answer, and Seth continued to study his shoes. I shouldn't have messed with magical creatures, he finally admitted it. Grandpa put his hand on his shoulder. I know you didn't mean any harm. Around here, what you don't know can hurt you. And others. If you have learned to be more careful and compassionate in the future and to show greater respect for the inhabitants of this reservation, then at least something good has come of it. I learned something, too, Kendra said. People and walruses never mix. Hugo The triangular wooden tablet rested on Kendra's lap. He studied the hooks and planned his next jump. Next to her, Lena gently tipped back and forth with a rocker, watching the moon rise. From the porch, only a few fairies could be liked around the garden. Fireflies sparkled between them in the silver moonlight. There aren't many fairies tonight, Kendra said. It may take some time before the fairies return in force to our garden, Lena said. Can't you explain everything to them? Lena giggled. They'd listen to your grandfather before they listened to me. Weren't you one of them? That's the problem. Watch. Lena closed her eyes and began to sing softly. His tall, trailing voice gave birth to a yearning melody. Several fairies thundered through the garden, floating in a loose semicircle, interrupting the winding melody with a fierce twent. Lena he sang and said something in an incomprehensible language. The fairies chirp back. Lena made one last comment, and the fairies flew away. What did they say? Kendra asked. They told me to be ashamed to sing a naiaidic tune, lena replied. They hate reminders that I used to be a nymph, especially when these reminders suggest that I'm at peace with my decision. They were pretty upset. They spend most of their time mocking mortals. Every time one of us goes into mortality, the rest of us wonder what they're missing. Especially if it seems content. I'm being mercilessly mocked. You're not going to let him pick you up? Not really. They know how to stab him. They're teasing me to grow old, to grow old, to wrinkle. They're asking me how I'm going to enjoy being buried in a box. Lena frowned and looked thoughtfully into the light. I felt my age today when you called for help. What do you mean? Kendra jumped a wedge on the triangular wooden board. I tried to come to your aid, but I ended up on the kitchen floor. Your grandfather came before me, and he's not an athlete. It wasn't your fault. When I was young, I could have been there in the blink of an eye. I used to have a good time in an emergency. I just got limping to the ambulance. You're still moving well. Kendra's out of moves. He's already stranded. Lena shook her head. I couldn't take a minute of trapeze or lightpole dancing. Once I played with them facie agility. The curse of mortality. You spend the first part of your life studying, getting stronger, more capable. And then, through no fault of its own, your body begins to fall. You've regressed. Strong limbs become weak, sharp senses become dull, hardy constitutions deteriorate. Beauty comes first. The organs have exited. You remember yourself at the top, wondering where that person went. As your wisdom and experience culminate, your treacherous body becomes a prison. Kendra didn't move on her perforated board. Three hooks left. I never thought of it that way. Lena took the Kendra sing and started setting up the taps. When they're young, mortals can't remember like nymphs. At the top, wonders incredibly distant, not to mention the enforcement of old age. But you've been pondering, inevitably, the theft of youth. The things you spoke, you said, you wouldn't change your decision. I remember the name of Kendra. That said. If I had the chance, I'd choose Patton every time. All the other things you experienced mortality, I don't think I can get that. But the joys of life, have a price. Pain, illness, loss of loved ones, the things they could do without. The taps are set up. Lena started jumping on them. I am impressed with how easily most mortals face the wakening of the body. Patton. Grandparents. A lot of people. I can't say they're joyful. I've always been afraid of getting older. His inevitability haunts me. Ever since I left the lake, the possibility of death has been a looming shadow in my mind. He jumped over the last nail and left only one. Kendra's already seen him do this, but he hasn't been able to replicate his moves yet. Lena sighed softly. Because of my nature, I may have to endure old age for decades, like normal people. The humiliating finale of mortal condition. At least you're a peg-jumping genius, Kendra said. Lena smiled. The consolation of my winter years. You can still paint, cook, and do all sorts of things. I don't want to complain. There are not problems to share with young minds. It's okay, it's okay. You're not scaring me. You're right, I can't imagine him growing up. Part of me is wondering if high school's ever going to happen. Sometimes I think I die young. The door to the house opened, and Grandpa's head stuck it out. Kendra. I need to talk to you and Seth. Okay, Grandpa. Come to the study. Lena stood up and waved out to hurry. Kendra entered the house and followed Grandpa to the study. Seth had been sitting in one of his oversized chairs, drumming his fingers on the armrest. Kendra demanded the other one while Grandpa settled behind his desk. The day after tomorrow, June 21st, grandpa said. Do any of you know the significance of this date? Kendra and Seth shared a look. Your birthday? Seth tried. The summer solstice, Grandpa said. Longest day of the year. The night before is a celebration of rebellion to leave the capricious creatures of Fablehaven. Four nights a year, the boundaries that determine where different entities can take risks are dissolved. These nights of reveling are essential to maintain the segregation that usually reigns here. . . Midsummer Midsummer Night, the only boundary where every creature can roam and cause trouble through work is the walls of the house. . . If they're just asked, they can't enter. . . Is it Midsummer Night tomorrow night? Seth told her. I didn't want you to have time to worry about it. As long as you obey my instructions, he won't pass near me. I'll be loud, but you'll be safe. When other days are they going wild? Kendra asked. The winter solstice and the two ephes. Midsummer's is usually the mostrowdiest of them all. Can we watch the window? Seth asked eagerly. No, Grandpa told me. And he wouldn't enjoy what he saw. On festival nights, nightmares take shape and raid the courtyard. Ancient entities of the supreme evil patrol the darkness in search of prey. You'll be in bed by sun down. You're going to wear earplugs. And you don't get up until sunrise to dispel the horrors of the night. Should we sleep in your room? Kendra asked. The attic playroom is the safest place the house. They'll put extra protection on it as a favor for children. Even if, because of some misfortune, unpleasant creatures enter the house, your room would remain safe. Did anything ever get into the house? Kendra asked. Nothing unwanted did not breach these farmhouse walls, Grandpa said. Still, we can never be too careful. Tomorrow you'll help us prepare some defenses so you can give us an extra layer of protection. Because of the outrage with the fairies, I'm afraid it's a particularly chaotic Midsummer night, has anyone died here? Seth asked. I mean, on this property? You have to save that memoer another time, Grandpa said, standing. One of the guys turned into dandelion seeds. Kendra said. Someone else? Seth insisted. Grandpa looked at them soberly for a moment. As you learn, these reservations are dangerous places. Accidents have happened in the past. These accidents usually happen to people who venture in ways they don't belong to or manipulate things they don't understand. If you follow my rules, you don't have to worry. The sun hasn't risen far above the horizon as Seth and Dale walked along the rutted lane to run away from the barn. Seth never noticed the weedy carriage track in particular. The lane started on the other side of the barn and led to the forest. After winding under the trees for a while, the track continued through an extensive meadow. Above their heads, only a few dim clouds tore the bright blue sky. Dale walked briskly, forcing Seth to drink to keep up. Seth was already sweating. The warm day promised it would be warm by noon. Seth was watching the interesting creatures. He saw birds, squirrels and rabbits in the meadow, but he didn't see anything supernatural. Where are the magic animals? Seth asked. It's the silence before the storm, Dale said. I guess most of them are resting tonight. What kind of monsters are there going to be tonight? Stan warned me that you could try to get information out of me. It's better if you're not so curious about this kind of thing. Not telling me makes me curious. Dale said it was your fault. Part of the idea is that telling you might scare you. The other part is to tell me you might be even more curious. If you tell me, I promise I won't be curious anymore. Dale shook his head. What makes you think you can keep your promise? I can't be more curious than I am right now. Not knowing anything is the hardest part. Well, the thing is, I can't give you a satisfactory answer to your question. Have I seen strange things, scary things, in my yard here? And you will. Not just on festival nights. I stole a peek out the window at a festival night? A couple of times, of course. But I learned to stop looking. People shouldn't do that kind of thing, in their minds. It's hard to sleep like this. I don't look anymore. Neither is Lena, and neither is your grandfather, and neither is your grandmother. And we're adults. What did you see? Why don't we change the subject? You're going to kill me. I need to know. Dale stopped and faced it. Seth, you just think you want to know. It seems harmless to know walking under a clear blue sky on a beautiful morning with a friend. But what about tonight, alone in your room, in the dark, when the night outside is full of unnatural sounds? Maybe you're sorry I made a face for what's killing outside the window. Seth swallowed it. He looked up at Dale with wide eyes. What face? Let's just leave it at that. To this day, when I'm around after dark, I'm sorry I watched. When you're a few years older, the day will come when your grandfather will give you the opportunity to look out the window on a festival night. If you feel curious, postpone your curiosity until that moment. If I was on my own night, if I could go back, I wouldn't be looking for him. It's easy to say after you look at it. It's not easy to say. I paid a heavy price to say. A lot of sleepless nights. What could be so bad? I can imagine some scary things. That's what I was thinking. I couldn't appreciate that imagining and seeing are two very different things. If you've already looked, why don't you take a look again? I don't want to see anything else. I'm just guessing the rest. Dale started dating again. I still want to know,' Seth said. Smart people learn from their mistakes. But the real sharp ones learn from other people's mistakes. Don't suck, just don't fail. You're going to see something amazing. And you won't even have nightmares. Mi? See where the road leads to that climb? Yes. The surprise is on the other side. Are you sure? Positive. It better not be another fairy, said Seth. What's wrong with fairies? I've already seen a billion of them, and they've made me a walrus. It's not a fairy. Isn't it like a waterfall or something? Seth asked suspiciously. Chapter 12 No, you'll like it. Good, because you want to raise my hopes. Dangerous? Maybe, but we'll be safe. Let's hurry. Seth's upset about the ascension. He looked back at Dale, who kept walking. It's not a good sign. If the surprise was dangerous, Dale wouldn't want him running forward. At the top of the woman Seth stopped, staring down the gentle slope on the far side. Not a hundred meters away, a giant cartwheel waded through a hayfield wielding a pair of gigantic scythes. The hulking figure cut down a wide swate of alfalfa at a relentless pace, both scythe donkey and chiming without pause. Dale joined Seth at the top of ascension. What is this? Seth asked. Page 14 14 Ours, Hugo. Come and see. Dale left the carriageaway and set off through the field to Goliath. What's a golem? Seth asked, following him. Watch. Dale raised his voice. Hugo, stop! The scythe stopped cutting in the middle of stroke. Hugo, come on. The Herculean lawnmower turned and approached them with long, sloping steps. Seth felt the earth vibrate as Hugo approached. He was still clutching the scythe, the huge lining stopped in front of Dale and got over him. Is it made of mud? Seth asked. Soil, clay and stone, Dale said. The appearance of life was given by a powerful wizard. Hugo was donated to the reservation a few hundred years ago. How tall? It's over 9 feet when you're standing up straight. It's mostly closer to eight. Seth was staring at the behemoth. In shape, he looked more ape-like than human. In addition to his impressive height, Hugo was wide, with thick limbs and disproportionately large hands and legs. Lumps of grass and occasional dandelions sprouted from his earthy body. He had an el long head with a square jaw. Raw features resembled nose, mouth, and ears. The eyes are a pair of empty cavities under the outlier forehead. Can you talk? He's trying to sing. Hugo, sing us a song. The wide mouth began to open and close, and out rumbled a series of severe howls, some long, some short, none of them bearing much resemblance to the music. Hugo pulled his head back and forth, as if waving at the melody. Seth tried to suppress his laughter. Hugo, stop singing. The golem has stopped. Seth said it wasn't very good. It's as musical as a landslide. You're embarrassing him! He doesn't think like us. You won't be happy, or sad, or angry or bored. He's like a robot. Hugo just obeys orders. Can I tell him for something? If I ordered him to obey you, Dale said. Otherwise, he'll just listen to me, Lena, and your grandparents. What else can he do? He's very good. He does all kinds of manual work. It's going to take a big enough team to match his job. Hugo never sleeps. If you leave him a list of chores, he'll be all night. I want to tell him to do something. Hugo, put the scythe down, Dale said. The golem put the scythe on the ground. Hugo, this is Seth. Hugo will obey Seth's next order. Nwo? Asked Seth. First, say his name so he knows you're talking to him. Hugo, make a cartwheel. Hugo stretched out his palms and shrugged. Dale said he didn't know what you were thinking. Can you make a cartwheel? Yes. Hugo, Seth is going to show you a cartwheel. Seth raised his hand, jumped to the side, and cartwheeled in sloppy form. Hugo, Dale told you to obey Seth's next order. Hugo, make a cartwheel. The selem raised his arm, pulled to one side and completed an uncomfortable cartwheel. The ground was shaking. Good enough for the first try, Seth said. He copied yours. Hugo, if you're going to make a cartwheel, keep your body. Body, and tuned to a plane like a wheel turn. Hugo, make a cartwheel. This time Hugo is finally a near-perfect cartwheel. His hand left a mark on the field. He's a quick learner, Seth exclaimed. Anything physical, least of all. Dale put his hand on his hip. I'm sick of walking. Why don't we let Hugo take us to our next stop? Really? If you'd rather walk, we'll always... Kendra used a hacksaw to separate another pumpkin from the grapes. Further down the long trough of the ground, Lena was cutting a big red one. Nearly half of the greenhouse is dedicated to pumpkins, large and small, white, yellow, orange, red, and green. Through the forest, they arrived at the greenhouse on a faint path. Aside from pumpkins and plants, the glass structure contained a generator to power the lights and air conditioning. Do we really have to cut to 300? Kendra asked. Just be glad you don't have to fill them, Lena said. Who's got one? It's a surprise. Jack-o-lanterns really that big a deal? Work? I'm pretty good. Especially if we can convince the fairies to fill them. Magic? Living in them for the night, Lena explained. Fairy lamps have long been one of the surest protection creatures with unremitting intent. But I thought the house was safe now. Kendra started sowing the stems of a tall orange pumpkin. Security layoffs are wise on festival grounds. Especially on Midsummer Night, after the last commotion. How are we going to dismember them all by tonight? Leave that to Dale. He could have carved them himself as long as he had a spare. It's not always the most artistic rendering, but one can produce mass. You carve just for fun; He knows how to make it out of need. I never liked pulling out my intestines, kendra said. Really? Lena told me. I like the slimy texture, getting greasy up to my elbows. It's like playing in the mud. Then we'll have a nice pie. Is this white too tall? Maybe save it for the next year. Do you think the fairies are coming? It's hard to say, Lena admitted. Some, that's for sure. Normally, we don't have a problem filling as many lanterns as we want, but tonight could be an exception. What if they don't come? Kendra asked. It's going to be okay. Artificial lighting works just not as well as fairies. The fairy lanterns, the commotion stays further away from the house. In addition, Stan will be sticking out tribal masks, herbs, and other safeguards. Is this night really that bad? We'll hear a lot of disturbing sounds. Maybe we should have left out the milk this morning. Lena shook her head, didn't raise her eyes from her job. One of the most insidious tricks used tonight is artificial and illusion. Without the milk, you'd be even more sensitive. It would only broaden their ability to mask their true appearance. Kendra disconnected Pumpkin. Either way, I'm not going to look for you. I wish we could transplant some of your common sense into your brother. After everything that's happened, I'm sure he'll be fine tonight. The greenhouse door opened, and Dale stuck his head in. Kendra, come here, I want you to meet someone. Kendra went to the door with Lena behind her back. At the door, Kendra stopped and let go of a little scream. A bulky creature with a simian build marched toward the greenhouse pull of rickshaw-type gadgets like the same as a cart. What is this? This is Hugo, Seth was out of the handcart. He's a robot made of earth! He jumped out of the car and ran to Kendra. I ran forward so you could see it coming, Dale said. Hugo can run really fast if you tell him Seth's breaking out. Dale let me give him orders, and he obeyed everything I said. See this? He's waiting for instructions. Hugo stood motionless next to the greenhouse, still holding the rickshaw. If he didn't see Hugo move, Kendra would have thought it was a raw statue. Seth passed Kendra in the greenhouse. What is he? Kendra asked Lena. The golem, he replied. The animated material gave me rudimentary intelligence. He does the most hard work around here. It fills the balls. And he rolled his car to the house. Seth stepped out of the greenhouse and toting a pretty big pumpkin. Can I show him the order? he asked. Sure, Dale told me. H.ugo, obey Seth's next order. Holding the pumpkin at the waist with both hands, leaning back a little to keep it balanced, Seth approached his nemene. Hugo, take this pumpkin and throw it as far away as you can into the woods. The inert golem came alive. Grabbing the pumpkin with a huge hand, he twisted and then violently uncoiled, tossing the pumpkin into the sky like a discus. Dale whistled softly as the pumpkin shrunk into the distance, eventually disappearing out of sight, an orange spot disappearing behind the distant trees. Did you see this? Seth cried. It's better than a water balloon launcher! Regular catapult. Dale murmured. It's very effective, Lena agreed dryly. Forgive me if I hope to make some pumpkins for more practical use. Boys, help us cut off the rest of our crop so we can fill them up. Hugo can't do a few more tricks? Seth begged her. He knows the cartwheel. There will be time for nonsense later, Lena assured him. We will be able to finish our preparations for the evening. Midsummer's grandfather poked the logs in the fireplace with a pickaw. A shower of sparks swirlid up the chimney as one of the logs opened and revealed the inside of a glowing ember. Dale filled himself with a cup of steaming coffee, adding three spoonfuls of sugar. Lena looked out the window through the blinds. The sun will reach the horizon in no time, he announced. Kendra sat next to Seth on his side, watching grandpa the fire. The preparations were all in place. The entrance to the house was full of jack-O lanterns. Lena was right, Dale made over 200 of them. Not quite thirty fairies have reported their duty, far less than Grandpa expected, even as recent strained relations. Eight fairy lanterns were placed on the roof outside the attic, four at each window. Luminous sticks illuminated most pumpkins, two or two. Grandpa Sorenson ordered them in bulk. Does it start when the sun goes down? Seth asked. Things don't really go until dusk fades, Grandpa said, calling poker alongside the rest of the fire irons. But the hour has come for the children to retire to your room. I want to stay up with you, Seth said. The attic bedroom is the safest place in the house, Grandpa said. Why don't we stay in the attic? Kendra asked. Grandpa shook his head. The spells that make the attic impenetrable only work when occupied by children. Without children or with adults in the room, obstacles become ineffective. Shouldn't the whole house be safe? Kendra asked. I think so, but nothing in an enchanted reservation is certain. I'm worried about just a few of the fairies who came forward this afternoon. I'm worried this could be a particularly outrageous Midsummer Eve. Maybe the worst since I've lived here. A long, mournful roar underscored his statement. The disturbing call was answered by a stronger roar, closer, which ended with a chuckling. Chills tingled behind Kendra's shoulder. The sun's gone, Lena reported from the window. He squinted and put his hand to his mouth. Closing the bar, he stepped away from the blinds. They've already entered the yard. Kendra leaned forward. Lena seemed very upset. He was visibly pale. His dark eyes were restless. Grandpa's sullen. Is it a real problem? Nodded. Grandpa censured his hands. Up in the attic. The tension in the room prevented Kendra from protesting. Looks like Seth left urgency, too.

staring at Seth through a slightly curled pane. Hey, a fairy came out. The tiny fairy waved one arm and joined the three others. One made a face for Seth, and then all four of them sped off into the night. Now he didn't see anything. Seth closed the curtains and backed away from the window. You looked like kendra said. Are you satisfied? He said the fairies flew with the jack-o-lanterns. Good job. They probably saw who they were guarding. Actually, I think you're right. One of them put a face on me. Back to bed, Kendra ordered it. The drumming stopped, along with the chanting. The spooky wind has quietened. The howls, screams and laughter decreased the volume and frequency. Something came through the roof. You... Silence. Something's wrong, Seth whispered. They probably saw you; Back to bed. I have a flashlight in my emergency kit. He went to the bedside table by his bed and took a small flashlight out of the cereal box. Kendra kicked her sheets off and threw herself at Seth and pushed him to his bed. He ripped the flashlight out of his grasp and pushed it off himself to regain his leg. He accused her. Twisting, he used the momentum to shove it onto his bed. Stop it, Seth, or I'll get Grandpa right now. I'm not the one who's starting to fight! His expression was a portrait of the resentment of the wounded. He hated it when he tried to act like the victim after he caused trouble. Neither do I. First you hit me, then you jump on me? Stop breaking the rules, or I'll go straight down. You're worse than itching. Grandpa, build you a cabin. Get in bed. Give me my lamp. I bought it with my own money. They were interrupted by the sound of a cry. There was nothing desperate about it but the roar of a troubled baby. The crying seemed to be coming from outside the dark window. A baby, Seth, or, No, it's a trick. Maaama, the baby was whining. It sounds pretty real,' Seth said. Let me take a look. It's going to be a skeleton or something. Seth took the flashlight from Kendra. He didn't give it to her, and he didn't stop her from taking it. He reached for the window. Holding the front of the flashlight to the window glass and moving a hand to minimize the reflection, he turned it on. Oh, my God, he said. It's really a baby! anything else? It's just a crying baby! The crying stopped. He's looking at me now. Kendra couldn't resist. He's behind Seth. On the roof, behind the window stood a tear-striped toddler who barely looked old enough to stand up. The baby was wearing diapers and nothing else. She had thin blonde curls and a small round tummy with an outie umbilic. Tearful eyes, the child stretched out his tummy arms toward the window. Kendra says it's just a trick. It's an illusion. Spotlighted by the flashlight, the toddler took a step towards the window and fell on all fours. He was pushing, on the verge of crying. Standing up, the baby tried another shaky move. He had goose bumps on his chest and arms. It looks real,' said Seth. What if it's real? Why would there be a baby on the roof? The baby tumbled to the window, pushing the chubby palm against the glass. Something was shining in the light behind it. Seth pushed the beam to a pair of wolves with green eyes, who secretly approached from the edge of the roof. The animals stopped, the light fell on them. They both looked masculine and skinny. One of the wolves had sharp teeth, foaming from his mouth. The other one was missing an eye. They're using him as bait! Seth was yelling. The baby looked back at the wolves, then turned back to Seth and Kendra, with renewed power, fresh tears, tiny hands slamming the window panes. The wolves accused him. The toddler wailed. In his cage, Goldilocks was wildly dreated. Seth opened the window. Not! Kendra yelled, though reflexively she wanted to do the same. The moment the window opened, the wind flowed into the room, as if the air itself were waiting to strike. The baby dove into the room,grotes over as it landed on the floor with a neat somersault. The child was replaced by a leech goblin with yellow columns on the eyes, a wrinkled nose, and a face like a dried lemon. Bald and mangy on top, the head was fringed with long, weblike hair. The winding arms were gangly, with hands long and leathery, tipped hooked claws. The ribs, clavicle and pelvis jumped out arselessly. Spider networks of veins expanded against maroon meat. In the supernatural haze, the wolves sailed through the window before Seth could move it to close it. Kendra pushed Seth away and pulled the window in time to prevent a coldly beautiful woman from entering in writhing black dresses. The dark hair of apparition is diluted like steam in the wind. His pale face was a little translucent. He looked into the empty, scorching eyes frozen in Kendra, where he stood. The chattering whispers filled his mind. His mouth is dry. He couldn't swallow it. Seth closed the curtains and dragged Kendra towards the bed. Whatever trance it was, it dissolved for a moment. He ran to the bed next to Seth in confusion, feeling something that was chasing me. When they jumped on the mattress, a bright light flared up behind them, accompanied by a sharp stutter like firecrackers. Kendra's distorted to see it. The maroon goblin stood by the bed, snapping its bony shoulders. The sullen creature was as tall as Dale. At stake, a knobby reached for him, and another bright flash staggered away. The salt cycle! At first, he couldn't understand why Seth dragged him to the bed. At least one of them was thinking! Kendra glanced down and saw that the two-inch salt around the bed was indeed an indication of the line through which the goblin could not cross. The twelve-foot centipede has three wings and three pairs of taloned leg corkscrew around the room in a complex aerial display. The brutal monster with a pronounced underbite and plates down his spine threw the wardrobe across the room. The wolves are undressed, too. The maroon goblin beeper roamed the room with an antail, ripped off the bookshelves, upset the iron and snapped, horn down the rocking horse. He picked up Goldilocks' cage and threw it against the wall. The slender bars crumpled and the door jumped out. Terrified chicken flew with golden feathers. Goldied tresses approached the bed. The winged centipede slammed into the nervous chick, but missed. The maroon demon made an acrobatic leap and caught the chicken on both legs. Goldilocks draped and squirmed in a deadly panic. Seth jumped off the bed. Crouching, he picked up two handfuls of round salt and uploaded the wiry goblin. Now holding the chicken in one hand, the mocking goblin rushed to meet him. Moments before the demon's outstretahed hand reached him, Seth threw a handful of salt. Releasing Goldilocks, the demon reeled back, scorched by blinding flames. The chicken got straight to the bed, and Seth threw the other handful of salt wide to cover their retreat, scalding the flying centipede in the process. The bulky creature of the underbite tried to beat Seth to the bed, arrived too late and received a violent shock as it collided with the invisible salt barrier. Back on the bed, Seth clung to Goldilocks, arms shaking convulsively. The maroon demon growled. His face and chest were charred by salt. Smoke inks curled up from the burns. He turned, the demon took a book off the shelf and tore it in half. The door opened, and Dale opened a rifle at the monster with the underbite. You kids stay put no matter what. He called. All three monsters gathered at the door. Dale went down the stairs, the gun was silent. The winged centipede jumped out the door over the other cipher creatures. They heard a gunshot from down the hall. Close the door and stay in control. Dale yelled. Kendra ran and slammed the door and then sprinted back to her bed. Seth held Goldilocks, tears flowing down his face. I didn't want that to happen, he moaned. Page 16, p. 16 There were several shots fired from downstairs. Growls, howls, screams, glass breaks, shards of dick. Outside, the cacophony outrage continued louder than ever. Pagan drums, ethereal choirs, tribal chanting, lamenting lamentations, throat-groaning, unnatural howls and infused screams united in unreasonable disharmony. Kendra, Seth and Goldilocks were waiting on the bed for down. Kendra had to constantly fight for pictures of the woman in swirling black dresses. He couldn't get the apparation out of his head. When she looked into the soulless eyes, even if the lady was outside, Kendra was sure there would be no getting out. Late at night, anger finally began to ease, replaced by more unsettling sounds. The babies started crying again through the window looking for mom. When that didn't spark an answer, the voices of young children begged for help. Kendra, please hurry, they're coming. Seth, Seth, open it, help me. Seth, don't leave us alone. After the crying went overlooked for a while, snarls and screams simulate the demise of the young supplicant. Then a new batch of lawyers started begging for access. Perhaps the most unsettling thing was when Grandpa invited them to breakfast. We've done it, kids, the sun's up! Come on, Lena made cheesecake. How do we know you're our grandfather? Kendra asked, more than a little suspicious. Because I love you. Hurry up, the food's getting cold. I don't think it's the day yet, Seth replied. It's just a little cloudy in the morning. Go away, Kendra told me. Chapter Fourteen Just let me in; I want to say good morning. Our grandfather never kisses us, you sick, Seth yelled. Let's get you out of our house. The exchange followed devilish banging on the door for a solid five minutes. The hinges trembled, but the door held. The night's over. Kendra leaned into the headrest while Seth nod off at his side. Despite the noise, the eyelids began to feel heavy. He suddenly woke up. Gray light oozing through the curtain. Goldilocks wandered the floor, pinching the seeds from her spilled bucket of fodder. When the curtain masked the unmistakable sunlight, Kendra pushed Seth. He looked around, blinked, then climbed into the window and peeked out. The sun is officially up, he announced. We did it. I'm afraid to go down, Kendra whispered. Everyone's fine, Seth said snantly. Then why didn't they come for us? Seth didn't respond. Kendra was gentle with him during the night. The consequences of opening the window were brutal enough without blaming and arguing. And Seth rarely regretted what he did. But now he's back to his idiotic snr. Kendra looked at him. You know you killed them all, right? His face fell off and turned away, shoulders shaking with sobs. He buried his face in his hand. They're probably fine, he created. Dale had a gun and everything. They know how to handle themselves. Kendra felt bad, considering Seth was worried, too. He approached her and tried to hug her. He pushed her away. Leave me alone. Seth, whatever happened, it's not your fault. Of course it's my fault! His nose was getting crowded. I mean, we've been conned. I wanted to open the window when I saw those wolves attack. You know, in case it wasn't fake. I knew it was a trick, she sobbed. But that baby seemed so real. I thought she was abducted to be used as bait. I thought I could save him. You wanted to do the right thing. She tried to hug him one more time, but she pushed him away again. No, he's crazy. I didn't want to blame him,' Kendra said. You acted like you didn't care. A I'm interested! You don't think I'm afraid to go down there and find out what I did? You didn't do it. I've been conned. I would have opened the window if you didn't. If I'd stayed in bed, nothing would have happened, Seth complained. Maybe they're okay. Right. And they let a monster into the house, and they went up to our door, lying themselves as grandpa. Maybe they had to hide in the basement or something. Seth wasn't crying anymore. She picked up a doll and wiped her nose with her dress. I love. In case something bad happens, you can't blame yourself. You just opened the window. If those monsters did something wrong, it's their fault. Partially. Grandpa, Lena and Dale all know that living here is risky. I'm sure they're fine, but if they're not, you can't blame yourself. Any. I'm serious. I prefer it when you're funny. You know what I liked? Kendra told me. Mi? When you saved Goldilocks. He laughed, sucked through his stuffy nostrisps a little bit. Did you see how badly the salt burned that guy? She got the baby back and wiped her nose on the dress again. It was very brave. I'm glad it worked. It was quick thinking. Seth glanced at the door and back at Kendra. We should check the damage.' If you say so. Aftermath Kendra knew it would be bad as soon as she opened the door. Ragged grooves furnished the walls of the stairwell. Raw pictograms have damaged the far side of the door, as well as plenty of less orderly nicks and scratches. Near the bottom of the stairs was a crusty brown substance on the wall. Seth said I'd get some salt. He returned to the ring around the bed and filled his hands and pockets with the salt that had scorched the intruder the night before. When Seth rejoined him, Kendra headed down the stairs. The stairs creaked loudly in the quiet house. The lower room was worse than the stairwell. Once again, the walls were cruelly raked by claws. The bathroom door was down to hinges, and three splintered holes of different sizes. Carpet stains were burned and painted. Kendra went down the hall, standstayed by the aftermath of the violent night. A shattered mirror. A broken luminaire. A table reduced to kindling. And at the end of the hall, there's a gaping rectangle instead of a window. Seth looks like other people were allowed in, Kendra said, pointing to the hallway. Seth was examining the scorched hairs in a wet spot on the floor. Grandfather? Shouted. Anyone! Silence was an ominous response. Kendra went down the stairs to the entrance hall. Parts of the ceiling are gone. The front door was slammed, an arrow that stretched across the frame. Primitive drawings and disrupted walls, some scored with nails. In the trace, Kendra roared the lower room of the house. They guttered the plants. Almost all windows have been destroyed. The shabby doors lay far from their frames. The rusted furniture is a bleeding fire in the mantled garb. Shredded curtains hanging in ragged ribbons. Chandlers lay in shattered ruins. Half of one of her charred dajias is completely gone. Kendra walked the back porch. The wind chimps were in a tangle. The furniture is scattered throughout the garden. A broken rocking chair balanced on top of a fountain. A wicker lounge seat stretched out of a hedge. In the house, Kendra heard Seth in Grandpa's office. It looked like an arvil had fallen on the table. Pulverized memorabilia covered the floor. Seth said everything is ruined. Looks like a demolition team came through here with a hammer. Or hand grenades. Seth indicated where the tar was the wall was. Is that blood? It seems too dark to be human. Seth spotted himself around the splintered table to the empty window. Maybe they got out. I hope. Out on the lawn, Seth said. Is that a man? Kendra approached the window. Dale? Shouted. The prone figure didn't move. Come on, Seth said, hurry up to the wreckage. Kendra followed him through the front door and to the side of the house. They ran to the figure lying down at home near an overturned birdbath. Oh, no, Seth told me. It was a painted statue of Dale. A faithful copy, except the paint was much simpler than the actual color would have been. His head turned to one side, his eyes closed, his arms raised protectively. The proportions were accurate. She was wearing the same dress she wore the night before. Kendra touched the character. It's made of metal, clothes and everything. Bronze, maybe? Leads? Steel? He held his fist to the forearm. It sounded solid. There's no hollow ring. Seth said he made it into a statue. Do you really think it's him? It has to be! Help me turn it upside down. They were both tense, but Dale wouldn't move. It was too hard. I really screwed up, Seth said, palm pressed into his butt. What did I do? Maybe we can change it back. Seth knelt down and put his mouth to Dale's ear. If you can hear me, give me a signal. Shouted. The metallic figure didn't respond. You think Grandpa and Lena are here? Kendra asked. We're going to have to check it out. Kendra wrapped her hands around her mouth. Grandfather! Grandpa Sorenson! Lena! Can you hear me? Look at this, Seth said, squatting next to an overturned birdbath. The bird bath tipped towards a flower bed. The flower bed had a clean footprint with three big toes and a narrow heel. The fingerprints were large enough to suggest that it came from a creature the same as a grown man. Giant bird? Look at the hole behind the corner. He stuck his finger in a nickel-sized hole. It's a few inches deep. Strange. Seth acted there's a pointy thing on the back of his heel, a spur or something. Which means what? We'll probably be able to track him down. Track him down? Seth was moving forward in the direction his toes were pointing, scanning the ground. See, he's here! He crouched, pointing to a hole in the lawn. This spur digs deep. You're going to have to leave a clean trail. And what happens if you catch up with what made the tracks? He's been siefing his pockets. I'm going to throw some salt and save Grandpa. How do you know it took a grandfather? No, he admitted it. But it's a start. What if you turn into a painted statue? I don't look at him directly. Only in the mirrors. Where did you get that? History. You don't even know what you're talking about, Kendra said. We'll see. I'd better get my camo shirt. First, let's make sure there are no more statues in the yard. Okay. I'm out of here. I don't want to see the trail to get cold. After searching the house for half an hour, Kendra and Seth encountered various pieces of furniture from the house or veranda in unexpected places, but found no other life-size painted sculptures. They ended up in the pool. Have you noticed the butterflies? Kendra asked. Yes. Is there anything special about them? Seth hit his forehead with his hand. We haven't had milk today! Oh. There are no fairies, only bugs. If those fairies are smart, they're not going to show their faces here, growled Seth. yes, you're going to show them. What do you want to be this time? A giraffe? None of this would have happened if they'd kept the window guarded. You tortured one of them, Kendra pointed out. I've been tortured! We're even. Whatever we do, let's have some milk first. They went into the house. The fridge was lying on the side. Together, they forced the door open. Some milk bottles were broken, but some were unharmed. Kendra grabbed one of them, pulled down the cap and had a drink. Seth drank next time. I need my stuff, he said, running to the stairs. Kendra started looking for clues. Grandpa wouldn't have tried to leave a message for them? Maybe there wasn't time. He walked into the rooms, but didn't come across any references to explain the fate of Lena or Grandpa. Seth showed up in his camouflaged shirt, carrying the cereal box. I was trying to find the rifle. Didn't you see it? There's an arrow at the front door. You can put that on the monster. I think I'll stick to the salt. We didn't look at the basement, Kendra said. It's worth a shot. They opened the door by the kitchen and looked down into obscurity. Kendra found out it was the only undamaged door in the house. Stone steps led me into the darkness. What about that flashlight? Kendra told me. Don't you have a light switch? he asked. They didn't find any. He went through the cereal box and pulled out the flashlight. A Salt from his pocket grabbed him in one hand, and with the flashlight in the other, Seth led the way. The flight was longer than it would normally lead to a basement with more than twenty steep stairs. At the bottom of the flashlight lit illuminated a short, barren hallway ending with an iron door. They walked to the door. There was a keyhole under the handle. Seth yanked the door knob, but the door was locked. There was a little door at the bottom of the door. What is this? he asked. It's for the brownies so they can come in and fix things. He opened the door. Grandfather! Lena! Anyone! They waited in vain for an answer. He called again before standing up and shining his light into the keyhole. None of your keys would fit in this? he asked. They're too small. Maybe there's a key in grandpa's bedroom. If they were here, I think they'd answer. Kendra and Seth up the stairs. At the top, they heard a loud, deep moan that lasted at least ten seconds. The intireble sound came from the outside. He was too strong for a man to do it. They ran to the back porch. The moaning is over. It was hard to tell which direction it came from. Page 15, page 17, page 17. After a tense minute or two, Kendra broke the silence. What was that? I bet it was what Grandpa and Lena said. And it didn't sound too far away. It sounded big. Yes. Like the big whale. We have the salt, Seth reminded him. We have to follow that lead. Are you sure this is a good idea? Is there a better one? I don't know. Wait, see if they show up? Maybe they'll escape. If that hasn't happened yet, it won't. We'll be careful and get back before dark. It's going to be okay. We have the salt. That stuff acts like acid. If something goes wrong, who's going to save us? Kendra asked. You don't have to come. But I'm going. Seth hurried down the porch stairs and headed across the yard. Kendra followed him reluctantly. He wasn't sure how they'd make the rescue if the monster's salt scalding failed, but Seth was right about one thing, they couldn't leave Grandpa. Kendra caught up with Seth at the flower bed where the fingerprints were originally found. Combing through the grass, they followed a series of nickel-sized holes on the lawn. The holes were spread roughly five feet apart and followed a usually straight line, passing the barn and eventually leaving the yard along a narrow path into the woods. No longer cover the grass, the tracks are even easier to follow. They passed some intersecting paths, but the road was always certain. The fingerprints of the creature that left the holes were unmistakable. They've made rapid progress. Kendra left looking for mythical animals looking for trees, but he didn't see anything more spectacular than a golden finch and some squirrels. I'm starving to death, Seth announced. I'm fine, Mi. But I'm getting sleepy. Just don't think about it. My throat hurts, Kendra continued. You know, we've been up for almost 30 hours. I'm not that tired, Seth said. I'm just hungry. We should have been looking for food in the panty. You can't break them all. We can't be too hungry if we didn't think about it at the time. Suddenly Seth stopped short. Uh-oh, I'm sorry. Mi? Seth took several steps forward. He leaned close to the ground and fought his way back past Kendra. He moved forward more slowly and also kicked aside the leaves or branches on the path. Kendra found out about the problem before Seth said it. No more holes. He helped me search the earth. They both looked at the same section of the road several times before Seth started looking for the trail. He said this could be bad. There's a lot of underground, Kendra agreed. If we could find even one hole, we'd know where he went. If he's left the road, we'll never be able to follow him. Seth crept his hands and knees on the edge of the road, drizzling through the mulch beneath the undergrowth. Kendra picked up a stick and used it to snoop around. Don't make holes, Seth warned me. I'm just moving letters. You can do it with your hands. If I wanted an insect bite and a rash. Hey, that's it. He showed Kendra a hole about 1.5 meters from the last one on the trail. He turned left. Diagonally. He made a line with his hands connecting two dots and continuing into the woods. But it may have turned more, Seth said. We need to find another one. Finding the next hole took almost 15 minutes. He proved that the creature turned almost directly to the left, right on the road. What if it keeps spinning? Kendra told me. It would be a step backwards if it turned even more. Maybe he was trying to throw the chase away. Seth went 1.5 meters forward and almost immediately found the next hole. He confirmed that the new track was perpendicular to the path. The underground isn't that bad here, Seth said. Seth, it would take us all day to take 20 steps. I don't want to track him down. I'm just going to walk in that direction for a while. Maybe he'll cross the tracks and get a lead again. Or maybe it's not much further. Kendra put her hand in her pocket, feeling for salt. I don't like the idea of leaving the trail. I don't either. We're not going far. But this thing seems to like clues. He's been following one all this way. Maybe we're close to a discovery. It's worth looking at a little bit. Kendra was staring at her brother. Okay, what if we run into a cave? Looking. What if we hear breathing from the cave? You don't have to go in there. Look at me. The important thing is to find Grandpa. Kendra bit her tongue. He almost said if they found him here, they'd probably be in pieces. Okay, just a little bit. They walked in a straight line from the path. They kept nibbled on the ground, but didn't notice any more holes. They didn't cross a dry, rocky creek bed for long. Soon after, they wandered into a small meadow. The brush and wildflowers in the meadow grew almost to the waist. I don't see any other leads, Kendra said. Or any monster house. Let's take a good look at the meadow, said Seth. He searched the meadow area completely and found no holes or paths. Let's face it, Kendra said. If we try to keep going, we'll wander blindly. What about climbing mountains? Seth suggested indicating the highest point seen in the meadow, less than a quarter mile away. If I wanted to make a home around here, that would be there. Plus, if we go up there, we'll have a better view of the area. These trees make it difficult to look. Kendra clenched her lips. The mountain was not steep; it would be easy to climb. And it wasn't too far. If we don't find anything there, will we go back? Handle. They marched towards the hill, which was along a line other than the one originally taken from the road. As they passed through the denser undergrowth, a twig bounced to one side. They stopped, they kept quiet. 'I'm getting very nervous, Kendra said softly. We're fine, we're fine. It's probably just a falling cone. Kendra tried to push away the photos of the pale woman in swirling black dresses. The thought of kendra froze. When she saw him in the woods, Kendra was worried he'd curl up in a ball on the ground and let them take him. He said I didn't know where we were going. Under the trees, the line of sight of the mountain and meadow was broken. I've got my compass. So if everything else fails, we can find the North Pole. The trail we were following went northwest. Seth secured him. Then we put him out in the southwest. The mountain to the west, the meadow to the east. That's pretty good. The only trick is to watch. Not long before, the trees had thinned and they had walked up the mountain. The trees are further apart, the undergrowth grew taller and the bushes larger. Kendra and Seth were moving up the temperate slope towards the coat of arms. Can you smell that? Seth asked. Kendra stopped. It's like someone's cooking. The smell was weak, but now that he noticed, it was different. Kendra was suddenly on alert to study the area. Oh, my God, he said squatting down. Mi? Down the stairs. Seth knelt down next to him. Kendra pointed towards the ridge of the mountain. Out on one side rose a weak column of smoke - a thin, fluctuating distortion. yes, he whispered. Maybe we found it. >gt; had to bite his tongue again. He hoped someone wouldn't cook Grandpa. What do we do? Stay here,' Said Seth. I'm going to go check it out. I don't want to be alone. Then follow me, but stay a while. We don't want to get me at the same time. Keep the salt ready. Kendra didn't need that memo. The only reason he was worried about the salt was that his sweaty hands turned him into paste. Seth crept forward, staying low, using the bushes to cover, gradually moving toward the pantry line of smoke. Kendra imitated his moves, impressed that his hours in the army had finally paid off. Even when he followed her, he struggled to deal with what they were doing. Sneaking up on a monster cookout was one of the activities he could do without it. Shouldn't they be sning away? The trembling axis of smoke was getting closer. Seth waved to him. He hid next to her behind a wide bush, twice as high, to breathe quietly. He put his lips to his ear. I'm going to see what's going on if I go around this bush. I'll try to shout if I get caught or something. Get ready. He put his mouth to his ear. If you fool me, I promise I'll kill you, really. No, I won't. I'm scared, too. It's sunk forward. Kendra was trying to calm you down. Waiting was torture. He was considering moving around the bushes to take a peek, but he couldn't gather the courage. The silence was good, wasn't it? Unless they secretly dropped Seth with a poisoned spear. The break was relentlessly pulled away. Then he heard Seth come back less carefully than he left. When he went around the hot porridge, he walked up straight and said, Come here, you need to see this. What is this? Nothing scary. He's got it around the bush, he's still tense. In front of us, in a clear area near the tip of the mountain, saw the source of this smoke-a waist-high cylinder stone with a wooden windlass and a hanging bucket. A well? Yes. Come on, snooping. They walked to the well. The rising smoke even evaporated up close and remained blurry. Kendra leaned over and looked down into the deep darkness. It smells good. Like soup, Seth said. Meat, vegetables, spices. Am I just hungry? It smells delicious. That's what I think. Shouldn't we try? Let the bucket down? Kendra asked skeptically. Why not? Seth replied. There could be creatures there. I don't think so, he said. You think it's just a well full of stew, Kendra's got it. We're on a magical reservation. As far as we know, it could be toxic. It can't hurt to look at it, Seth insisted. I am hungry. Besides, not everything here is bad. I bet the fairies come here for dinner. See, he's got his crank. He began to turn the windlass, spooling the bucket down into darkness. I'll stay in the stand out, Kendra said. That's a good idea. Kendra felt defenseless. These far enough from the summit not to see anything on the other side of the mountain, but they were tall enough to command an expansive view of the trees and terrain. With little cover around the well, he worried that invisible eyes might be spied on under the foliage. Seth continued to break the rope and sent the bucket deeper and deeper. Finally, he heard that he had reached rock bottom wet. The rope's loosened a little. After a moment, he started to re-up the bucket. Hurry up, Kendra said. I. This thing is deep. I'm worried everything in the woods can see us. He's coming. He stopped cranking and pulled the bucket up to the last few feet by hand, calling it the lip of the well. Kendra joined him. Inside the wooden bucket were pieces of meat, cut carrots, potato pieces and onions floated in a fragrant yellow broth. It looks like a normal stew, Kendra said. More than usual. I'm trying, too. Not! He warned me. Relax. He cut out a piece of dripping meat and tried it. Good! He announced. He ripped out a potato and made a similar report. He tipped the bucket and smeared some of the broth. Wonderful! Said. You have to try it. From behind the same bush they used as their final hideout as they approached the well, a creature appeared. He was a shirtless man from the waist up, with an exceptionally hairy chest and two pointed horns above his forehead. From the waist down, they were the legs of a bushy goat. The satyrian wielded a knife and attacked them directly. Kendra and Seth were also alarmed by the hooves on the slope. Salt, Seth told me, dipped it in his pocket. As he roamed for salt, Kendra ran around the well and placed him among the attacker. Not Seth. He stood up on the ground, and when the satir was a few steps away, he threw a handful of salt at the goat. The satir stopped short, apparently surprised by the cloud of salt. Seth threw another handful, groped in the pockets of his coat. The salt did not sparkle or sizzle. Instead, the satyre seemed confused. What are you doing? he asked softly. I can ask the same question, Seth replied. No, you can't. He's ruining our operation. The satyre jumped past Seth and cut the rope with his knife. He's coming, who? I'll save the questions later, the satir said. He wound the rope until it was tight around the windhills, grabbed the bucket and headed down the hill and poured soup as he went. From the other side of the mountain, Kendra heard foliage and branches crunched. He and Seth followed the satires. The satyr slipped into the bush, which Kendra had previously squatted back. They're going to jump next to Kendra and Seth. After a moment, he ducked out of sight, a voluminous, hideous woman fading into view and approaching the well. There was a wide, flat the greasy earlobes that was grazing almost on her muscular shoulders. Her mishapen bosoms were dripping inside a rough hole. Avocado skin is like hair and she has a shaggy mane, and her build is obese. The well barked, making it much taller than Hugo. He swagwed from side to side as he walked and breathed heavily through his mouth. Bent down, he patted the well, stroked the wood, the ground, and the satir whispered. When he said that, the ogres raised his head. He was whining in some synergage. A few steps from the well, he was ashamed, squatted down, and snoped to the ground. When Seth threw the salt, Page 18 Page 18 There were people here. He accused the husky, accented voice. Where are you, people? The satyr had his finger against his 10th. Kendra kept me from seeing his seat, and despite her alarm, she tried to breathe softly. He was trying to plan which way he was going. They were down the slope towards their hideout, smelling high and I heard people, I smelled people. I can feel my stew. People were at the stew again. Now you're coming out to apologize. The satyr shook his head and slit his throat with a finger of emphasis. Seth put his hand in his pocket. The satyr touched his wrist and shook his head with a sullen. The ogres closed the distance halfway through the bush. You guys love my stew so much, maybe you'll take a bath in it. Kendra resisted the urge to flee. The ogres will be on them in no time. But the satir seemed to know what he was doing. He raised his hand, tacily signaling that they should remain calm. Without warning, something began to collapse in the bushes about twenty meters to the right. The ogres turned and stumbled toward the racket with a quick, awkward gallop. The satir nodded. They climbed out of the bush and headed down the hill. Behind them, the ogres stopped and changed course, after them. The goat cutter threw a bucket of stew into a thorn spot and went over a fallen log. Kendra and Seth ran after him. With his backward momentum, Kendra found himself making bigger strides than he wanted. Every time his feet touched the ground it became a new opportunity to lose balance and tumbling forward. Seth stayed a few steps ahead of him, and the quick satyre gradually increased his advantage. The obstacles were chased loudly by the ogres, trampling bushes and tearing them through branches. He was damp, wheezing and occasionally cursed, returning to his incomprehensible mother tongue. Despite its cumbersome size and apparent exhaustion, the mishapen ogres quickly strengthened. Chapter Sixteen The slope is evenly matched. Behind Kendra the ogres fell, branches Deadfalls snapping like fireworks. Kendra glanced back and saw burly ogres surging on her feet. The satyr led them into a shallow ravine, where they found the wide entrance to a dark tunnel. And then, he said, he ran into the tunnel. Although it seemed spacious enough for the ogres to enter, Seth and Kendra followed without question. The satire seemed confident, and so far he's been right. The tunnel got darker the deeper they ran. They were followed by difficult steps. Kendra looked back. The ogres filled the underground passageway, shutting off most of the light coming in from the hatch. It was hard to see in front of the satire. The tunnel was getting narrower. Behind Kendra, the ogres gasped and coughed. Hopefully he had a heart attack and collapsed. For a place, the darkness is complete. Then it started to brighten up. The tunnel continued to shrink. Soon Kendra had to crouch and the walls were accessible on both sides. The satyr loosened the pace, looking back with a naughty grin. Kendra was over her shoulder, too. The panting ogres crawled and then scooted forward on his belly, wheezing and choking. When they couldn't get any further, he screamed in frustration, with a tense, gluttonous cry. Then it sounded like he was vomiting. He was crawling in front of the satir. The hallway fell up. Through a small gap, they developed into a bowl-shaped depression. A second satyr was waiting for them. The second had reddish hair than the first and slightly longer horns. He waved to them to follow them. The two satires and two children for a few more minutes recklessly in the woods. When they arrived in a clearing of a small pond, the red-haired satir stopped and confronted the others. What was the idea of ruining our operation? he asked. Clumsy work, the other satir said. We didn't know, Kendra said. We thought it was a well. Did you think the chimney was a well? The redhead complained. I suppose sometimes you mistake icicle for carrot? Or carts for outbuildings? Seth said there was a bucket. And it was in the ground, Kendra added. There is one point, the other satir said. You were on top of the ogres buoy, the redhead explained. Now we understand,' Seth said. We thought it was a hill. It's ok to tweak a little soup in his can, the redhead continued. They're trying to be free with our wealth. But you're going to have to use some delicacy. A little cunning. At least wait for the old lady to fall asleep. Who are you, anyway? I'm Seth Sorenson. Kendra. I'm Newel, said the redhead. This is Doren. Do you realize we're probably going to have to build a whole new rigging? He's going to rip off the old one, Doren explained. Almost more than cooking your own stew, Newel huffed. We can't get him out the way he did, Doren mourned. I have a Newel agreed. We're sorry, Kendra said. We're a little lost. Doren waved on your hand. Don't worry about it. We just like to be blustery. If he ruined our wine, it would be a different story. Still, Newel said a guy has to eat, and free stew is free stew. We're trying to repay you for a way to repay you, Kendra said. So are we, Newel said. I don't happen to have any. Batteries? Doren asked. Batteries? Seth asked, frowned. Size C, Newel is clear. Kendra folded her arms. Why do you need the battery? They're shiny, Newel said, nudging Doren with an elbow. We love them, Doren said, nodding wisely. They look like little gods to us. The children stared at the goats in disbelief, unsure how to continue the conversation. They were obviously lying. Okay, Newel told me. We have a portable television. Don't tell Stan. We had a lot of batteries, but we ran out. And our supplier doesn't work here anymore. We can make a deal. Newel held his hand diplomatically. Some batteries to make them regret interrupting the extraction of the stew - Then we can exchange more. Gold, booze, whatever you want. Doren turned his voice down a little. Of course, we have to keep our agreement a secret. Stan doesn't like it when you look at the pipe, Newel said. Do you know our grandfather? Seth asked. Who doesn't? Newel told me. Haven't you seen him lately? Kendra asked. Sure, just last week, Doren said. I mean, since last night, No, why? Newel told me. Didn't you hear? Seth asked. The satyrs shrugged off each other. What's the news? Newel asked. Our grandfather was abducted last night, Kendra said. You grandfather's a kid? Newel told me. It means she's been kidnapped, Doren cleared her. Kendra nodded. The creatures got into the house and took her and our housekeeper. Not Dale? Doren asked. We don't think so, Seth said. Newel shook his head. Poor Dale. I've never been very popular. Lousy sense of humor, Doren agreed. It's too quiet. Do you know who might have taken them? Kendra asked. Midsummer Night Christmas Night? Newel said he put his hand up. Anyone. Your guess would be better than mine. Can you help me find him? Seth asked. The satyrs looked at him with a restless look. yes, oh, Newel got off to an uncomfortable start, it's been a bad week for us. Many commitments, Doren confirmed, back away. You know, now that I've been thinking about it, Newel said we might have needed a new rigging on the chimney. How about we separate and we're even? Don't take what we said to heart, Doren said. We were just satirical. Seth stepped forward. Do you know anything you're not telling us? It's not that, Newel said, continuing his slow retreat. It's Midsummer Night. We're booked. Kendra said you'd help me escape the ogres. To our delight, Newel replied. All parts of the Doren added. Can you at least show us home? Seth asked. The satires didn't back down anymore. Doren stretched out his arm. There's a path. When you reach it, go right, Newel said. This will steer you in the right direction. Give it to Stan when he shows up. The satires hurriedly turned away and ran into the trees. Chapter Twelfth's Barn Kendra and Seth found their way as the satires instructed, and soon re-encountered the nickel-sized holes that served as the perfect trail of breadcrumbs toward home. Those goats were idiots, Seth said. They saved us from the ogres, reminded him of Kend. They could have helped save Grandpa, but they lost us. He was sullen as they continued along the path. As they approached the court, they heard again the inhuman growl, the same sound they heard when they exited the basement, only louder than ever. They stopped. The baffling sound came forward. A long, plaintive moan similar to the fog-infused explosion. Seth dug some salt out of his pocket and ran forward. At their accelerated pace, they soon returned to the edge of the court. Everything seemed normal. They didn't see a giant behemoth capable of the huge sound they heard. You know, that salt didn't do much with the satires, Kendra said. He's probably just burning the wrong creatures, he replied. I think the ogre lady picked up a few. By then, it was all in the ground. You saw him set those guys on fire last night. They waited, stakes, to enter the yard. So what happens now? Kendra asked. The huge moan echoed across the courtyard, getting closer and louder. The shingles were ringing in the barn. Seth said it was coming from the barn. We never looked! Kendra told me. I didn't even think about it. The terrible moaning roared for the third time. The barn trembled. Birds flew up from the front. You think something took Grandpa and Lena to the barn? Kendra told me. Looks like he's still there. Grandpa told us never to enter the barn. I think I'm already grounded, Seth said. No, I mean, what if the keeps cruel creatures there? Maybe he had nothing to do with her disappearance. This is our best chance. Where else would we look? We don't have any other leads. The tracks were dead ends. We could at least try to take a look. Seth began the barn, with Kendra following reluctantly behind. The towering structure rose to a good five storeys high, topped with a weather paddle-shaped bulb. Kendra has never studied the entrances before. He noted the obvious set of large double doors on the front, as well as some smaller front doors on the side. The barn creaked, and then it started shaking like it was an earthquake. The sound of wood fission filled the air, followed by another mournful moan. Seth Kendra. There was something huge about him. A few moments later, the barn still grew. Chains and a heavy padlock tied the double doors in front, so Seth moved along the building, quietly trying the smaller doors. Everyone was locked up. The barn had several windows, but the lowest was three floors off the ground. They secretly toured the entire building and couldn't find any doors open. There weren't even cracks or peephole. Grandpa closed this place tightly, Kendra said. They might have to make a little noise to get in, Seth said. He started circling the building again. I'm not sure that's smart. I'll wait for the barn to shake again. Seth sat down in front of a small door, just over three feet tall. It's been minutes. Do you think he knows we're waiting? Kendra asked. You're just unlucky. Don't say that. A fairy snaped over near them. The satyr tried to shove it away. Get out of here. The fairy easily dodged the shooping movements. The more strongly he waved at her, the closer he came. Stop it, I'm just shaking, Kendra said. I'm sick of fairies. Then don't listen to him, and maybe he'll leave. He didn't listen to the fairy anymore. He came up behind his head. When the proximity didn't respond, the fairy fell on her head. Seth slapped him, disappeared as he lurked around his planned punches. When he jumped on his feet to chase him, the humming grom came again. The little door was shaking. Seth went back and hit the door with both feet. The moan softened most of the impact noise. At the fifth kick, the edge of the small door split in two and opened. Seth rolled away from the opening, and Kendra pulled over. Digging through his pocket, Seth withdrew the remains of the salt. Would you like some? Oral. Kendra accepted some salt. A second or two later, the deafening moan ceased. Seth made a gesture to wait for Kend. He climbed through the little door. He was waiting for Kendra, and he put the salt in his palm. Seth reappeared at the opening with an insatiable look on his face. You need to see this, he said. Mi? Don't worry about it. Come and see. Kendra jumped through the little door. The huge barn contained only a hollow room with a few cabinets around the perimeter. The whole room was dominated by one gigantic cow. It wasn't what I expected, Kendra murmured in disbelief. He stared in amazement at the colossal cattle. The huge head was near the rafters, 40 to 50 feet high. The hay loft, which spans the entire side of the building, served as a power box. The cow's hooves were the same as the hot tubs. The giant edgy is completely edgy. Milk is inladed and dripping with dicks almost the same as punching bags. The huge cow pulled its head up and stared at the newcomers in the barn. It let out a long moo, so the shake it simply by changing its position. Holy cow, Kendra mumbled. You can say that one more time. I doubt Grandpa's going to run out of milk anytime soon. We're friends, Kendra called the cow. The cow tossed its head and began to mingle from the hay loft. Page 19, p. 19 Seth was amazed. Probably never loses. I think he's in pain, Kendra noted. See how swollen the edgy is? I bet he can fill a pool. Seriously. Someone probably milks it every morning. And no one did it today,' Seth said. They stood and stared. The cow continued to mingle from the hay loft. Seth pointed to the back of the barn. Chapter Seventeen Look at the manure. Patient! The biggest cow pie in the world! You'd notice that. The cow let out another bell-ringing complaint, the most persistent yet. They squeezed their hands in their ears until the low point stopped. Maybe we should try to milk it, Kendra said. How do we do this? Seth cried. There's got to be a way. They have to do it all the time. We can't even get to his things. I bet that cow will tear this place apart if you want. I mean, look at him. He's getting nervous. It looks like it's going to break up for who. Who knows what kind of skills he has. Its tee allows people to see fairies. The last thing we need is a giant magic cow running free. Maybe it's total chaos. Folding his arms, Seth assessed the task. That's impossible. We need to search the corners. Maybe they have special tools. What about Grandpa? We're out of leads, Kendra said. If we don't milk the cow, we could end up in another disaster. The cabinets were found with a variety of tools and equipment, but no obvious equipment for milking gargantuan cows. There were empty barrels around and out of the cupboards which Kendra thought should be used for teething milk. In one of the closets, Kendra found some A-frame ladders. That could be all we need, he said. How can we even get around these things? We don't. There has to be a gigantic milking machine. Seth said. I don't see anything like that. But maybe it'll work if we hug. Is he crazy? Why not? Kendra said, movement between the cseki and the floor. It's not that far from the nipples to the ground. Don't we want to use barrels? No, we can waste the milk. The barrels would be in the way. We just need to relieve the pressure. What if she steps on us? There's hardly room to move. If we stay under the edgy, everything will be fine. The ladders were pulled into place, one each on the same side of the mammoth hemmothere, along with both of these. They climbed the ladders. Just standing one degree above they were high enough to grasp the cise near the edgy. Seth waited while Kendra tried to get in. They're shaking, he said. Balance. The hesinty got up. He looked a lot taller than he looked from the ground. Are you ready? No, I bet this barn keeps him in. We have to at least try. Hug that thing and slide down? Seth asked. We're leaving, you, then me, then you, then me, then me. Then we'll do it on the other side. Why don't you start? Kendra says you're better at this kind of thing. That's true, lots of huge cow heads. I'll show you my trophies someday. Seriously, you start, urged Dendra. What if it hurts him? I don't think we're big enough. I'm more worried we can't get out. So I'm going to have to squeeze as hard as I can, Seth confirmed it. Sure. As soon as I do, you'll do it, and we'll go as fast as we can. And if I ever find a giant cow milking trophy, I'll buy you what Kendra offered me. We'd better keep it a secret. Are you ready? Go ahead. Seth shook his hand on his giant toe. The cow mated, and bounced back, crouching and grabbing the ladder with both hands to calm him down. Kendra tried to stay balanced as she laughed. In the end, the fog-mad mae is over. Seth said I changed my mind. I'm counting to three, Kendra said. Either you go first, or I don't do it. I almost fell and wet my pants. A... Two... Three! Seth stepped off the ladder, hugging the ccs. He slid down and fell to the ground along with a stunning jet of milk. Kendra took off and hugged the. Even if he held her tight, she slipped through her embrace faster than she expected. He's on the ground with warm milk already soaking in his jeans. Seth was on his way up the ladder. I've been disgusted, he said, stepping out and sliding down again. This time, he kept his feet when he landed. Kendra went up and slipped again. Hugging him as hard as he could, he descended a little slower, but still fell when he fell to the ground. Milk was everywhere. They soon got into a rhythm, and most of the time they both landed on their feet. The stuffed edgy hung low and was increasingly using a cseki-hug to control the fall. The milk was ginging profusely. While they were sliding, the ccs sprayed like fire hoses. There must have been at least 70 jumps before the output began to loosen. On the other side, Kendra gasped, breathing hard. My arm is dead, Seth complained

wheelbarrow inside a bag found in the chamber. They tried to bend the cage back, but they couldn't hold the door. The bag had a drawing, which was tightly tightened around the hen's neck so that its head would stick out. It was hard to think of the chicken as Grandma Sorenson. The hen didn't perform a single grandma's gig all morning. He did not respond to the announcement that they would see Muriel and laid eggs on Kendra's bed during the night. Kendra and Seth woke up just before sunrise. In the barn, they found the wheelbarrow, which they found easier than carrying goldlocks the whole way. It was Kendra's turn when they pushed the wheelbarrow. The chicken seemed calm. He probably enjoyed the fresh air. The weather was pleasant-sunny and warm without being hot. Kendra wondered how the negotiations with Muriel were going. In the end, they decided it wouldn't hurt to see what conditions they could achieve with the witch. Then they could base their final decision on the fact that Muriel would be willing to do what, rather than just thinking about conjecture. They filled the wheelbarrow with food, clothing, tools and tools in case they could trade for comfort instead of freedom. Most of the clothes were torn apart midsummer night, but they found some unshredded objects that Grandma might have worn in case they were able to transform. They made sure to feed the chicken milk in the morning and drink it themselves. The paths to the hut were not difficult to remember. They've just identified the leafy device where the witch lived. Leaving the wheelbarrow, Seth carried the chicken while Kendra collected an arm's worth of bartering items. Kendra had already reminded Seth to stay calm and be polite, no matter what happened, but he repeated the wave. They heard strange music as they approached the hut, as if someone were playing rubber bands while clicking on castles. When they got to the front door, they found the filthy old hare playing a mouth harp with one hand while making her limberjack dance with the other. I didn't expect to see the visitors again so soon, laughed the witch when the song ended. It's a shame about Stanley. What do you know about our grandfather? Seth asked. The forest has all the buzz news of his abduction, Muriel said. The naaidic housekeeper as if anyone wants to hear the gossip. What a scandal. Do you know where they are? Seth tried. Look at the beautiful gifts you brought me, the witch breaking out, clasped her veins. The duvet is beautiful, but it would ruin my modest apartment. I'm not going to let you waste your generosity on me. I don't know what this kindness is good for. We brought these to the trade, Kendra said. Commercial? The witch asked theatrically, snapping her mouth. To my teal Nonsense, my child, I wouldn't dream of demanding my hospitality. Come in, and the three of us will drink together. Not to replace the tea, Seth said, held up Goldlocks. We want you to turn our grandmother back into herself. In exchange for a chicken? He's the chicken, Kendra explained. The witch grinned, stroking her jaw. I thought I recognized him, and he smudged me. You poor darlings, one guardian in the night, the other reduced to poultry. We offer a duvet, a bathrobe, a toothbrush, and a lot of homemade food, Kendra said. As charming as it is, Muriel said I'd need a lot of break-ups to operate any spell that could restore your grandmother to her former state. We can't unsing your last knot,' Seth said. Grandpa would be mad. The witch shrugged. My situation is simple. Imprisoned in this cabin, my abilities have been curtailed. The problem has nothing to do with my willingness to compromise, the dilemma that the only way I can fulfill your request would be to use the energy stored in the final knot. The decision is in your hands. I don't have a choice. If we untie the last knot, will you tell us where they took our grandfather? Kendra asked. My child, there's nothing I'd like more than to reunite you with your lost grandfather. But the truth is, I have no idea where they took him. Once again, I'm going to have to lose my knot to give you enough strength to recognize your whereabouts. You're going to find Grandpa and change grandma with a lot of power? Kendra asked. Unfortunately, I would have had the opportunity to do just one feat or the other. Both would not be possible. If you don't come up with something, you won't have a chance to do it either, Seth said. Then we hit a dead end, and the witch apologized. If you say there's no deal, if I can't achieve the impossible, then there's no deal. I could fulfill any of your requests, but not both. If you switch grandma back, kendra asked you to help me find grandpa when you're free? Maybe the witch smeared me. yes, without guarantees, once I'm free, maybe I can use my powers to shed light on your grandfather's whereabouts. How do we know you won't attack us if we let you go? Seth asked. Muriel said this was a fair question. Maybe I'm bitter. I'm bitter. years of imprisonment and eager to work trouble when released. But as a practitioner of ancient art, I give you my word that I will not harm you or your grandmother when I am released from this captivity. If they were to hold malice, to those who imprisoned me, to the enemies who led this life decades ago, not to those who freed me. If anything, then I consider myself indebted. And you promise to help me find Grandpa Sorenson? Kendra told her. Your grandmother can refuse my help. He and your grandfather never honored me with much respect. But if you accept my help in finding Stan, I'll give it to you. We need to discuss this in private, Kendra said. Be my guest, Muriel said. Kendra and Seth are back on the trail. Kendra threw his bartering stuff in the wheelbarrow. He spoke softly. I don't think we have a choice. I don't like how nice he is, Seth said. It's almost scarier than before. I think he can't wait to get out. Know. But I think we're trying to restore Grandma right now, and maybe find Grandpa. He's a liar, Seth warned me. I don't think we can count on his promises. Probably not. We have to expect him to attack us as soon as he gets out. If not, great, but I brought salt, no matter what you do. Don't forget grandma's going to help you treat her. Kendra said. Grandma may not know anything about fighting witches. >: I'm sure you've learned a trick or two. Let's try to ask him. Seth held up the chick. Kendra gently stroked her head. Grandma Sorenson, Kendra said. Ruth. I want you to listen to me. If you can hear me, you have to answer. This is very important. The hen seemed to be watching. Untie the last knot to restore Muriel Tagger? The head swayed. Was that a yes? His head climbed again. Can you say no? The hen didn't answer. Grandmother. Ruth. Can you shake his head so we can be sure he can hear us? Again, the chicken did not take credit. Maybe all it took was for him to answer your first question, Seth speculated. It looked like he was nodding. Kendra said. And I don't know what else to do. Freeing the witch is a big price to take, but worse than not hoping to find Grandpa and keeping Grandma trapped like a chicken forever? We should get him out. Kendra stopped and examined her feelings. Was that really their only option? It seemed to be. Let's go back, he agreed. They're back at the cabin door. We want you to restore grandma, Kendra said. Will you voluntarily strike down my last knot, the ultimate obstacle to my independence, if I restore your grandmother to her human form? Yes. How do we do that? Just tell me I'm going to cut this knot of my own free will, and then blow it on it. It should probably be likely something your grandmother wears. She won't be wearing any clothes. Kendra ran to the wheelbarrow and returned wearing a bathrobe and a pair of slippers. Muriel stood at the door, clutching the rope. Put your grandmother on my doorstep, she gave you an order. That's what Seth said. Sure, Kendra answered. You let grandma out of the bag. Kendra crouched and pulled her mouth from the bag wide open. Muriel stretched the rope for Seth. The chicken looked up, ruffling its feathers and flapping its wings. Kendra tried to calm him down, outraged by the feeling of slender bones moving under his hands. Of my own free will, I'll cut this knot, Seth said as Goldlocks loudly squawked noisily. It exploded, and the knot broke up.

Muriel reached out to the nervous hen with both hands and chanted softly, indecipherable words. The air swayed. Kendra squeezed the nesting hen. At first, I felt as if bubbles were shooting through the flesh of the bird; then the delicate bones began to swirl. Kendra dropped Goldlocks and stepped back. Kendra saw everything as if it were through the fun homemade lenses. Muriel looked distorted, first wide, then high. Seth became an hourglass with a wide head, a tiny waist, and clowny legs. Rubbing his eyes didn't heal his scurred vision. When he looked down, the earth turned in all directions. He leaned in and swished his arm to maintain his balance. The cheerful voice of Muriel began to ripple, as did the startling image of Goldlocks shed feathers as they expanded into one person. The scene faded, as if the clouds had blocked the sun, and a dark aura gathered around Muriel and grandma. The darkness widened, covering everything for a moment, and then grandma stood in front of them, completely naked. Kendra put the bathrobe on her shoulder. From the inside of the hut came the sound like rushing in a terrible wind. The earth was pounding. Le. Grandma said, pul Kendra to the ground. Seth fell, too. An angry storm blew the walls of the hut into shrapnel. The roof jumped beyond the top of the trees, a wooden conetti geyser. The stump split in half in the middle. Pieces of wood and amber are whistling in all directions, clattering against the trunks and cutting through the undergrowth. Kendra raised her head. Dressed in rags, Muriel tolerated the miracle. Pieces of wood fell further than hail, along with pieces of amber falling. Muriel grinned, showing deformed teeth and inflamed gums. He started giggling, tears in his eyes. He spread his wrinkled arms wide. Emancipation! Cried. I'm finally going to get justice! Grandma Sorenson got up. He was shorter and stouter than Muriel, the hair color of cinnamon and sugar. You need to leave this property immediately. Muriel glowered at grandma, the joy of her gaze eclipsed by malice. A tear escaped and slid down to his jaw. Is that my thanks for appeasing your curse? You have your reward for your service. You're out of captivity. Eviction from this reservation is a consequence of previous indicks. They paid off my debts. You're not the janitor. My power is the same as my husbands'. In his absence, I am indeed the caretaker. I ask you to leave and never return. Muriel turned around and began to break away. Where I'm going is my business. He didn't look back. Not on my reservation. It's your reservation, isn't it? I object to its ownership. Muriel still hasn't looked back. Grandma went after him, an old woman in a bathrobe, following an elderly woman dressed in a rag. The new offences will come with new penalties, the grandmother warned. You might be surprised who handles the punishments. Don't provoke new hostilities. Go in peace. Grandma picked up the pace and caught the Muriel in the upper arm. Muriel twisted and turned to Grandma. Careful, Ruth. If you're looking for trouble right here, right now, in front of the little ones, I'm obliged to you. This is not the time to stick to outdated protocol. Things have changed more than you think. I suggest we go before I get the power back. Seth ran towards them. Grandma withdrew. Seth threw a handful of salt at the witch. It had no effect. Muriel pointed to him. Your compensation is coming, brave little bastard. I have a long memory. Your actions require retribution, Grandma warned. Muriel missed again. You're talking to deaf ears. You said you'd tell us how to find our grandfather, Kendra called. Muriel laughed without looking back. Keep your tongues, kids, grandma said. Muriel, I ordered you to go. Your defiance is an act of war. Chapter Nineteen you issue evictions in order to build a case for wrongdoing and thereby justify retaliation, Muriel said. I'm not afraid of strife with you. Grandma turned away from Muriel. Kendra, come here. Grandma hugged Seth tightly. When Kendra approached, he embraced her, too. I'm sorry I misled you, kids. I shouldn't have led you to Muriel. I didn't know this was his last knot. Page 21. Kendra told me. You heard us talking. Grandma smiled sadly. Like a chicken, thinking clearly becomes a gruelling challenge. My mind was in a fog. To interact with you as a person, even for a moment, required tremendous concentration. Seth nodded to Muriel. Should we stop him? I bet the three of us could take him. If we attack, he'll be able to defend himself from magic, Grandma said. We are losing the protection afforded by the founding alliances of the Treaty. Did we mess things up? Seth asked. I mean, I'm free to free him. Things have been depressing, Grandma said. Having him loose loose complicate the situation. Whether my help counteracts the interference is still the music of the future. Grandma looked flushed. He sn snatched his face. Your grandfather left us in a lot of trouble. Seth said it wasn't his fault. Grandma bent down, put her hand on her knee. Kendra stopped him. I'm fine. Kendra. I'm just a little dizzy. He's experimentally up. Tell me what happened. I know unwanted creatures went into the house and took Stan. Lena was taken, too, and I think Dale was turned into a statue, Kendra reported. We found him in the yard. Grandma nodded. As a janitor, Stan is a valuable trophy. It's the same with a fallen nymph. By contrast, did she seem uninterested and lagging behind. Any leads on who took them? We found some footprints near Dale, Seth said. Did they lead you somewhere? Do you have any idea where Grandma and Lena are being held? Muriel probably knows, Grandma said. He made an alliance with a witch. Speaking of Muriel, Kendra said where did she go? They all took a look around and she was out of the sky. Grandma frowned. He must have special means of flying or traveling. It's not our matter. We're not prepared to deal with it. What do we do? Muriel said. The first thing we do is find your grandfather. Learning your location should dictate how best to proceed. How do we do that? Grandma sighed. The easiest option would be Nero, who's a vision singer. He could reveal his location if you successfully, he could reveal his location. Do you know him well? Seth asked. I've never met him. Your grandfather had a thing for him once. It's going to be dangerous, but he's probably our best alternative right now. We have to hurry. I'll tell you on the way. Have you ever heard people talk while you fall asleep? Grandma told me. Words reach you from a distance, and you can barely see the meaning. It happened to me at a motel once when we were on a trip. Kendra said. Mom and Dad were talking. I fell asleep, and their conversation turned into a dream. Then to some degree, you can see my state of mind like a chicken. You say it's June. My last clear memories come from February, when the spell was introduced. I stayed quite alert for the first few days. Over time, I became unable to rationally think, unable to interpret my environment as a person would. It's weird. Seth said. I recognized you when they arrived, but through a cloudy lens. My mind didn't wake up until you let those creatures in through the window. The shock pushed me out of shock. It was a struggle to cling to my elevated consciousness. I can't describe the concentration needed to write this message to you. My mind wanted to disappear to calm me down. I wanted you to the fine seeds, not sorting them with bizarre patterns. They were traveling on a wide dirt road. Instead of going back to the house, they continued along the path and ventured deeper into the forest. The trail is eventually forked and then intersects with the road they are currently following. The sun was burning above, the air was heavy and humid, and the forest remained unnaturally quiet around them. Kendra and Seth brought a pair of jeans, but it turns out they're from grandma's skinnier days, and they weren't even close to fitting. The snip shoes were grandma's and were too big in several sizes. So grandma was now wearing a bathing suit under her robe, and her feet were left in slippers. Grandma raised her hand, stared as she opened and closed them. Strange to see the right fingers again, he murmured. How did you become a chicken? Seth asked. Pride is sloppy from us,' grandma said. It's a sobering reminder that none of us are immune to the dangers here, even if we imagine we have the upper hand. Let's save the details for another occasion. Why didn't Grandpa change me back? Kendra asked. Grandma's eyebrows were raised. Probably because I put eggs for his breakfast. I'd like to think that if he'd taken me to Muriel, I could have prevented this nonsense from happening. But I think he was looking for an alternative cure for my condition. In addition to asking Muriel, Seth said. Exactly. Then why did Muriel cure you? I'm sure he knew your parents would be back soon, so there wasn't enough time left to find a new cure. You had no idea Seth was a mutant walrus, and Muriel gave it back? Kendra told me. I missed all that, grandma said. As a hen, you missed most of the details. When I urged you to take me to Muriel, I assumed she had two more knots. It was only when I looked up and observed the only knot that I began to decipher the actual situation. By then, it was too late. By the way, how did you get into walrus? Seth and Kendra linked the peculiarities of the fairy's imp and subsequent retribution. Grandma kept quiet and asked some clarifying questions. As the road curved around a high scrub, a covered bridge came forward. Over the ravine, the bridge is made of dark wood. Although elderly and weathered, it seemed to be a fairly good fix. The goal is approaching, Grandma said. Across the bridge? Kendra asked. Down in the abyss. Grandma stopped and studied the foliage on both sides of the road. I suspect siltiness in these woods. There's a lot of tension in Fablehaven today. He continued to walk. Because of Grandpa? Seth asked. Yes, and your new hostility to faeries. But I'm worried there might be more. I can't wait to talk to Nero. Will it take Us? Kendra asked. He'd rather hurt us. Trolls can be violent and unpredictable. I wouldn't ask him for information if our situation was any less dire. What's the plan? Seth asked. Our only chance is smart bargaining. Rockrolls are cunning and ruthless, but their greed can be a weakness. Greed? Seth asked. Greed. Rock trolls are shingled creatures. They're treasure hunters. Cunning negotiators. They enjoy the excitement of defeating their opponents. Whatever agreement we make, Nero must feel like an undisputed winner. I just hope that we can define something that he appreciates, that we're willing to part with. What if we don't know? Kendra told her. We have to do this. If we don't reach an agreement, Nero won't let us leave unharmed. They're on the brink. Kendra held her hand to the bridge and leaned forward to look down. It was surprisingly deep. Persistent vegetation clung to the steep walls. A narrow stream dripping down the bottom. How do we get down there? Careful. Grandma said it was a place on the edge of the abyss. She rolled over her belly, first starting to descend from the downhill ledg and looking ridiculous in her robe and slippers. The slope was not completely vertical, but most of the descent was quite steep. If we fail, we will fall all the way to the bottom, Kendra remarked. For a reasonable reason not to fall, Grandma agreed, gently down. Come on, he looks worse than he is. Just find solid handrails and take one step at a time. Seth followed Grandma, then Kendra left, frantically hugging the side of the abyss, taking experimental steps, blindly hunting for the next place to rest her legs. But grandma was right. As soon as it started, the climb was less difficult than it looked. There were many handrails, including skinny bushes, with well-anchored stems. After moving forward cautiously for the first time, he became more confident and increased the speed of his descent. When Kendra reached the bottom, Seth squatted next to a group of flowers on the edge of the creek. Grandma Sorenson was standing nearby. Seth said it took a long time. I was just being careful. I've never seen anyone move an inch an hour. Grandma says there's no time for bickering. Kendra did well, Seth. We have to hurry. I love the smell of flowers, said Seth. Come away from you, Grandma insisted. Why? They smell good; smell it. Those flowers are dangerous. And we're in a hurry. Grandma waved her to follow and headed off, picking her way gently along the rocky floor of the ravine. Why are they dangerous? Seth asked, he caught up with her. These are the specific classes of lotus flowers. The smell is intoxicating, the taste is divine. A tiny wall of a single petal carries away a lethargic trance inhibited by vivid hallucinations. Like drugs? It's more addictive than most drugs. Sampling the lotus flower awakens the desire to never be silenced. Many have wasted their lives chasing and consuming petals of mesmerizing flowers. I didn't want to eat it. Not? Sit down and smell them for a few minutes, and you'll have a petal in your mouth before you know what you're doing. They passed quietly for a few hundred meters. The walls of the abyss became more translucent and rocky as they moved forward. They noticed a few other bunches of lotus flowers. Where's Nero? Kendra asked. Grandma scanned the ravine wall. It's not far now. He lives on a ledge. Do we have to climb up to him? Stan said Nero lowered a rope ladder. What is that? Seth asked, pointing ahead. I'm not sure, grandma said. At a good distance down into the ravine, about twenty standing logs growing in height led to the edge of the stream from the wall of the ravine. The tallest log provided access to a rocky ledge. Maybe that's our goal. Stan didn't write that down. They've arrived at the logs. The lowest was three feet high, the next was six feet, and each subsequent log stood roughly three feet taller than the previous one, until the highest rose about sixty feet tall. The logs were arranged about three feet away, in a cascading row. None of the logs had limbs. Short or tall, they all had similar circumferences, about 18 inches, and they were all flat on top. Placed next to his mouth, Grandma called me on the ledge. Nero! We'd like to meet you. Not a good day, a voice answered, deep and silky. Try next week. They didn't see the speaker. We have to see each other today or never, grandma insisted. Who needs it so urgently? the resonant voice asked. Ruth Sorenson and her grandchildren. Ruth Sorenson? What's your request? We need to find Stan. The janitor? yes, I recognize his location. Go up the stairs and we'll discuss the terms. Grandma looked around. You don't mean the journals, he called. I'm sure you do. Stan told me you had a ladder. That was before I set up these logs. There's no small business. Their climb seems uncertain. Let's call it a filter. Nero said. It's a lot to make sure that those who seek my services are serious. So we have to climb the logs so we can talk to you? Why don't we talk from down here? Unacceptable. Your stairs are unacceptable, grandma said firmly. If the need is terrible, you can scale them, watching the troll. What did you do with the ladder? I still have it. You want to climb it? I'm not dressed for an obstacle course. We're going to make it worth it. How about a compromise? One of you climbs the logs. Then I'll lower the ladder to the other two. Last offer. Admit it or go information elsewhere. Grandma looked at him. If anyone's going to climb the logs, it's going to be me. I am taller and better able to access the log in the log. I have smaller legs, so the logs will feel bigger. I'll keep my balance. I'm sorry, Seth. I have to do this. Seth rushed through the first log, scrambled onto not much trouble and took a leap as if he were playing leapfrog, eventually sitting atop the second log. Grandma rushed over to the second log. You've got to get down from there. Seth got back on his feet shaking. Leaning forward, he put his hand on the third log. In his position in the second diary, at the top of the third came almost in the middle of his chest. Another jump and he sat on top of the 9-foot-tall log. He said I could do it. It won't be as easy as it gets taller, Grandma warned. Come down and let me do it. Not going to be like that. I already have a dead grandmother. Kendra watched quietly. From his sitting position, Seth fell to his knees and stood precariously on his feet. He jumped over to the next log, now it's not grandma's way. Kendra was quietly happy that Seth climbed the logs. She couldn't imagine grandma doing it successfully, especially in a bathrobe and slippers. At least think about those horrible places where he can get splints. And Kendra could clearly imagine Grandma Sorenson creasing in a lifeless pile at the bottom of a log. Seth Andrew Sorenson, take care of your grandmother. I want you to get down from there. He said don't distract me. It may seem fun on these lower logs, but when you get higher, I always climb high, Seth insisted. My friends and I are going to climb the bars under the bleachers in high school. If we fall there, we could die, too. He got up on his feet. He seemed to be getting better at it. Seth landed on the next pole for a moment before he got down on his knees. Page 22 Page 22 Be careful, Grandma said. Don't think about heights. I know you want to help, Seth said. But please don't talk. Grandma came and stood up for Kendra. Can you do it? Whispered. He's got a good chance. He's very brave and very athletic. His height may not reach it. I'd freak out. Kendra wanted to look away. He didn't want her to fall. But he couldn't take his eyes away from his brother as he jumped from the log into the log, getting taller. As she jumped up to thirteen, almost forty feet tall now, she leaned precariously to one side. Chills raced through Kendra, as if she was the one who lost her balance. Seth grabbed his leg and leaned the other way, regaining his balance. Kendra was able to breathe again. Chapter 24 Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. Kendra glanced at grandma. You were going to make it. Seventeen. He got back on his feet, trembled a little, shook hands on both sides. These high can shake the Called. Seth jumped on the next log and landed awkwardly, teetering too far to one side. For a moment, he was on the verge of regaining his balance. All the muscles in Kendra's body were clenching in horror. The arms are buttoned, Seth's down. Kendra was screaming. He couldn't look away. Something flashed off the ledge, a slender black chain with a metal weight at the end. The chain was wrapped around one of Seth's legs. Instead of falling to the ground, he fell into the rock and roughly collided with the stone wall. It was the first time Kendra looked at Nero. Built as a man, the troll had reptile features. Some bright yellow markings adorned her glossy black body. He had a weaker holding the chain Seth was hanging from. The muscles were tight, Nero dragged Seth up the ledge. They went out of sight, and then a rope stand opened from the ledge, and they went all the way to the bottom of the rock. Are you okay? Kendra yelled at Seth. I'm fine, he answered. I just got knocked out by the wind. Grandma's got the ladder up. Kendra followed, forcing herself to focus on grabbing the next rung, refusing the urge to look down. He's finally reached the ledge. He went to the back of the ledge, standing next to the low mouth of a dark cave, from which he received a cool draught. Nero looked even more awesome up close. Tiny, elegant scales obscured her curly body. Although she wasn't much taller than her grandmother, the thickness of her muscular physique made her seem huge. He had a nose, not a nose, and bulging eyes that never blinked. A series of sharp spikes ran from the center of his forehead to his small back. Thank you for saving Seth, grandma said. I told myself if the boy was over 15, I'd help him if he fell. I admit I'm curious what you'd trade to find out where your husband is. His voice was bleated and rich. Tell me what you're thinking, grandma said. A long gray tongue jumped out of his mouth and licked his right eye. You want me to talk first? So be it. I'm not asking for much, a trivial little thing for the ownership of this illustrious reservation. Six gold casks, twelve silver punches, three barrels of uncut gemstone, and a bucket of opal. Kendra looked at grandma. Could he have so much treasure in his possession? It's a reasonable amount, grandma said. Unfortunately, we didn't bring such wealth with us. I can wait until you get the payment back if you leave the girl as collateral. Unfortunately, we don't have time to price treasure unless you reveal Stan's location before he gets compensation. Nero licked his left eye and grinned, a hideous sight that appears in a double set of needle teeth. I have to pay you a full amount before I fulfill your request. Grandma folded her arms. I imagine you already have a large cache Treasure. I'm surprised that such a small financial offer I was able to provide would tempt you to trade. He said let's go. You're offering us a service. Maybe we should pay you back with a service. Nero nodded thoughtfully. Possible. The boy has a little ghost. Enlist me for 50 years. Seth looked desperately at grandma. Grandma frowned. I hope to leave the future business open, so I don't want you to ignore me. The boy has a soul, but little ability. You'd take the burden of training him as a servant, and you'd find yourself in insensible. It would add more value to his life through education than he would to yours through service. Your honesty is appreciated, Nero said, though there is much to learn from haes. I'm starting to wonder if you have any valuable offers. If you don't, our conversation won't end well. You're talking valuable, grandma said. I'm asking you, what value does it have a rich troll? The more assets you have, the less each new acquisition will improve your total value. A golden rod means so much more to a beggar than it does to a king. I also question the value of a fragile human servant to an infinitely wiser and more knowledgeable master? Consider the situation. We want you to give us a valuable service, something we can't do for ourselves. You can't expect any less. I agree. Take care of yourself. Your words throw a net at your feet. A deadly wind crept into his voice. That said, unless I'm trained to provide an extraordinary service. Have you ever had a message? Are you serious? The idea has always seemed ridiculous. The idea seems absurd to the uninitiated. Beware of reckless judgments. We all strive for wealth, and those who collect the most can afford some comfort that is not available to the masses. Among these luxuries is the indescribable release and relaxation of massage in the hands of a skilled in art. And you're saying you're familiar with this so-called art? He was trained by a true master. My ability is so great, it's almost beyond shopping. The only person in the world who's had a full massage in my hand is the janitor himself, and that's because I'm his woman. I can give you a full massage, knead and soothe every muscle in your body. The experience would reinterpret your enjoyment. Nero shook his head. It's going to take more than floral words and grandiose promises to convince me. Consider my offer from a point of view, Grandma said. People pay exaggerated amounts for an expert massage. He gets you for free, just in exchange for a service. How long would it take to find out Stan's location? A few moments. A massage will take 30 grueling minutes. And you'll experience something new, a joy you've never experienced before, you met met Year. A similar possibility may never arise again. Nero licked his eyes. I admit, I never got a massage. I could name a lot of things I've never done before, especially since I don't care. I tasted human food, and I found that they wanted to. I'm not convinced that I can find a massage satisfying as you describe it. Grandma studied it. Three minutes. I'll give you a sample for three minutes. This will provide you with just a narrow look at the unspeakable happiness that awaits, but should be placed in a position to make a more educated decision. Great. I don't see anything wrong with a protest. Give me your hand. My hand? I'm massaging a hand. You have to use your imagination to imagine how this feels throughout your body. He reached out. Grandma Sorenson took it and started working with her thumb on the palm of her hand. At first, he tried to keep a straight face, but his mouth started twitching, and his eyes started spinning. How's that? Grandma asked. Is it too deep? His poor lips trembled. Just fine, purred. Grandma continued to expertly rub her palms and palms. He was compulsively licking his eyes. He killed his fingers. The protest is over, he announced. You're saying 30 minutes of this in my whole body? The kids are going to help me,' grandma said. We're going to trade a service for a service. But I could replace my service with something more durable. For the treasure! One message is too fleeting. The law of declining returns applies to messages like this most things. The first is the best and all you really need. Besides, you can always exchange your services for a good thing. This may be your only chance to get an expert massage. He stretched out his hand. One more example to help you decide. No more samples. You're just offering me a massage for 12 years? Grandma's getting rattled. I'm not asking you to look on your heart more than once. For multiple purposes. I need the information. Service for a service. That's my offer for your good. The message takes thirty minutes, as opposed to the sheer minutes that pass into the tunnel. But if you need the information, Nero reminded him, I don't need a message. Meeting needs is a burden on the person. The rich and powerful can afford to indulge in their wants and whims. If you pass on that opportunity, it's always a miracle what you miss. Don't do it. Grandma. Keep that. Just give him the treasure. Nero raised his finger. This suggestion is unusual and against better judgment. But the idea of a message intrigues me and I am rarely excited. However, thirty minutes is too short. Say... two hours. 60 minutes, grandma said. Ninety. Nero was against it. Grandma twisted her hand and stretched his arm out. He rubbed his forehead. Ninety minutes is too long. Kendra said. You never massaged Grandpa for more than an hour! Keep your mouth shut, child, grandma got you. Ninety or not business, Nero said. Grandma sighed in her resignation. Ok.. Ninety minutes. All right, I'll take it. But if I don't approve of the whole massage, the deal's over. Grandma shook her head. They don't have any. A 90-minute massage in exchange for Stan Sorenson's seat. His memory will be preserved forever. Nero eyes Kendra and Seth before fixing grandma with a cunning gaze. Agreed. What's next? The best table grandma could find was a fairly narrow stone shelf near the mouth of the cave. Nero stretched out the shelf and grandma showed Kendra and Seth how to massage her legs and feet. He showed her how and where to use their fists and the corners of their hands. He said he was very strong to hold his fist to the bottom of his feet. Bend over as much as you want. He put his foot down and stood next to his head. The children have their instructions. Nero. The 90 minutes start now. Kendra put her hands on the troll's bulging calves. Although they weren't wet, the scales felt slimy. He had held a snake before, and the texture of Nero's scaly skin was very similar. With Nero lying prone, Grandma went to work on the back of her neck and shoulders. She applied various techniques-probing her thumb, rubbing her palms, pushing her fists, digging her elbows. He ended up kneeling on his small back, making sure to avoid the spikes along the spine, squeezing and kneading and applying pressure in different ways. Nero was obviously in ecstasy. Decadent satisfaction purred and moaned. His lips were constantly drowsy compliments. He beafully encouraged them to rub harder and deeper. Kendra got tired of it, and grandma used to introduce him and Seth to different techniques on a regular basis. Kendra despised nero's leg, from the curvyness of his cracked heels to the smooth cushions of his calluses to the knotty bunion on his toes. But he did his best to follow Grandma's tireless example. In addition to assisting with her legs and feet, the grandmother worked on her head, neck, shoulders, back, arms, hands, chest and abdomen. When they finally finished, Nero sat up with an euphoric smile. All cunning disappeared from his bulbous eyes. He looked ready for the most satisfying day of his life. Closer to a hundred minutes, grandma said. But I wanted to do it right. Thank you, you said you were dizzy. I never thought it would be like this. He got back on his feet, leaning against the rock wall to solidify. You've earned your reward in abundance. I've never felt anyone so full of knots and Grandma told me. I feel relaxed now,' she said, swinging her arms. I'll be right back with the information you're looking for. Nero jumped into the cave. I want to see his magic stone, Seth mumbled. Wait patiently, grandma chided, wiping sweat on her forehead. He must be exhausted, Kendra said. I'm not in very good shape, Grandma admitted. That took a lot out of me. He turned his voice down. But he sure beats the treasure barrels we don't have. Seth went to the edge of the ledge and looked down into the abyss. Grandma sat down on the shelf where the massage was practiced, and Kendra waited next to her. Soon Nero turned up. He still seemed friendly and relaxed, though not as much as before. Stan's chained in the basement of the Forgotten Chapel. Grandma's jaw is tight. Are you sure? It was a little tricky to find him and take a good look, considering who else is there, but yes, I'm sure. Are you all right? He's alive. Was Lena with him? The naaid? Of course, I saw it. Was Muriel around? Muriel? Why.. Oh, that's it! Ruth, the agreement was about one thing. But no, I didn't see it. I think that concludes our agreement. He was pointing towards the ladder. If you'll excuse me, I have to go to bed. The attic's spatial grandmother refused to speak while they were in the abyss. He wore a sour, thoughtful expression and silenced all attempts to talk. Kendra waited for them to return to the path next to the covered bridge to try her question again. Grandma-Kendra started it. Not here, Grandma warned. We must not discuss the situation openly. He waved them to hide close together, and they continued softly. That's enough. We have to go after your grandfather today. It may be too late tomorrow. We'll go home right away, get ready, and go to the place where he's being held. I'll reveal his exact whereabouts as soon as we're inside. Muriel may not know where he is yet, and even if he does, I don't want him to know what we know. Page 23 Page 23 Grandma stopped whispering and hurried them down the path. I'm sorry if I've been antisocial since leaving Nero, he said, having walked quietly for a few minutes. I had to come up with a plan. You kids really did an exceptional job back there. No one should have to spend an afternoon rubbing a troll's feet. Seth was heroic on the logs, and Grandma bluffed well in the negotiations. You both exceeded my expectations. Kendra said I didn't even know you were a masseuse. I learned it from Lena. He has collected expert instructions from around the world. If you ever get a chance to get a massage from him, don't turn him down. Grandma put some stray hair behind her ear. He came again for a moment, pursing her lips and staring from a distance as she walked. I have a few questions for the two of you that we can talk about openly. Have you ever met a man named Warren? Warren? Seth repeated it. Handsome and quiet? White hair and skin? Dale's brother. No, Kendra told me. Maybe they took him to midsummer night's house, grandma p snitted him. We were with Grandpa, Dale and Lena until sunset, but we never saw anyone else, Seth said. I didn't even hear them mention it, Kendra added. Neither did I, Seth agreed. Grandma nodded. He must have been staying at the cabin. Have you met Hugo? Yes! Seth told me. He's really cool. I wonder where he went. Grandma took a look at Seth. I trust you did your chores in the barn. I don't think so, Kendra said. We had to milk the cow yesterday. Are you deciphering Viola? Grandma said she was clearly surprised. How? Kendra described how the ladders were set up and slid down the chute. Seth added details about how milky they got. Resourceful children! Grandma told me. Stan didn't say anything about it? We found him because he was musing so loudly, Seth said. He shook the whole barn. It looked like her edgy was going to explode, Kendra said. Viola is our milch cow, Grandma said. Every reservation has such an animal, although not all are cattle. Older than this reservation, which was founded in 1711. At the time, he was brought over from Europe by boat. Born a milch cow on a reservation in the Pyrenees, he was about 100 years old when he made his way and has been bigger than an elephant. He's been here ever since, gradually increasing in size every year. He looks like he's about to out grow out of the barn, Seth said. Its growth has slowed over the years, but yes, perhaps one day it will become too colossal at its current borders. He provides milk for the fairies drink, Kendra said. More than fairies drink. His ancient kind feeds and worships all creatures of the fairy. Every day, they cast magic on his food and make secret offerings to honor and strengthen him. In return, the top acts as an ambrosia at the heart of their survival. No wonder cows are still considered sacred in certain parts of the world. You have to make tons of manure, Seth said. Another blessing. His manure is the best fertilizer in the world, flattering plants that mature much faster than usual and sometimes achieve incredible proportions. With the power of manure, you can harvest more crops from a field in the same season, and many tropical plants bloom on this estate, which would otherwise be destroyed. Didn't you put milk out to the fairies? No, Seth told me. We poured everything down the drain. We were mainly trying to calm the cow. It doesn't matter. Lack of milk can make fairies a little bit. But they'll get over it. They'll get it tomorrow. So usually Hugo's milk violet, Kendra guessed. Correct. It's a constant order, which is why there must be a reason why he hasn't executed it in the last few days. Haven't you seen him since Midsummer Night? Not. He was probably left to Warren and the cabin until he was subpoenaed. You should come if we call. Could something have happened to him? Seth asked. The golem may seem like little more than animated material provided elementary intelligence, but most creatures of this preservation fear Hugo. Few people can hurt him if they try. He will be our supreme ally to save your grandfather. What about Warren? Kendra asked. Is he going to help you? Chapter 21 Grandma wrinkled her eyebrows. You didn't meet him because his mind was ruined. Dale stayed on this reservation mainly to take care of him. Warren was lost in a catatonic image. Fablehaven has a lot of stories. His is another tragic story about a mortal venturing where he doesn't belong. Warren's not going to help us. Someone else? Seth asked. Like satires? Satires? Grandma exclaimed. When did you meet satires? Maybe I'll have a few words for your grandfather when we find him. We met them in the woods by accident, Kendra assured him. We bought stew from what looks like a well, and we were warned that we were actually stealing from ogres. Those bastards defended their tresy action better than you, Grandma. They've been stealing his stew for years. The villains didn't want to rebuild the thief's lot-probably sounded too much like who. Satyrs live for frivolity. The ultimate nice weather friends. Your grandfather and I have mutual respect for different beings on this reservation, but there's not much more loyalty than we'll learn in the wild. The herd looks like patients or injured are brought down by predators. If your grandfather is rescued in such a short time, it will be our job, other than Hugo, to help us. It was late afternoon when they got to the yard. Grandma stood with her hands on her hips, taking the scene. The ruined cabin. Damaged furniture is scattered throughout the garden. The gaping, glassless windows. I'm afraid to go in, he mumbled. Don't you remember how bad it is? Kendra asked. It was a chicken, remember? Seth told me. We ate his eggs. Creases appeared on grandma's forehead. It seems such a betrayal that your home has been violated, he said softly. I know there are sinister evils in the woods, but they've never crossed that line. Kendra and Seth followed Grandma in the yard and on the porch. Grandma bent down and picked up a copper triangle, attached to a hook hanging from an angle. Kendra remembered the triangle that noticed the triangle hanging between the wind chimes. A short copper a chain of beads is attached to the triangle. Grandma clanged the rod noisily around inside the triangle. It brings Hugo with it, grandma explained. He crosses the porch and stops at the door, staring at her home. Looks like we got bombed and murmured. What senseless vandalism! He roamed the gutted house in a gloomy stupor, occasionally stopping to pick up a damaged frame and examining the torn-up photograph, or running his hands along the remains of a beloved piece of furniture. Grandma climbed the stairs and went up to her room. Kendra and Seth watched him rummage through the closet and eventually take out a metal lunch box. At least it's intact, Grandma said. Hungry? Seth asked. Kendra slashed him on the shoulder with his palm. What's the matter, Grandma? Follow me. Downstairs in the kitchen, Grandma opened the lunch box. He removed a handful of photos. Help me put up the bowls. The pictures were taken of the house. Each room was visible from several angles. The exterior was also visible in several ways. In total, there were over 100 images. Grandma and the kids started handing them out on the kitchen floor. We took these pictures if the unthinkable ever happened, Grandma said. Kendra suddenly made contact. For the brownies? She's a smart girl, Grandma said. I'm not sure they'll be up to the challenge, considering the extent of the damage, but they have done wonders in the past. I'm sorry you were here for this misfortune. You shouldn't, Seth said. It was because of me. You're not supposed to take responsibility, grandma insisted. What else can we do? Kendra said we caused it. Kendra didn't do anything, Seth said. He tried to stop me. It's all my fault. Grandma looked at Seth in a pondering way. You didn't mean to hurt Grandma, yes, you made him vulnerable because of your disobedience. I understand you've been ordered not to look out the window. If he had taken the order, he would not have tempted to open the window and his grandfather would not have been taken away. You have to face that fact and learn from it. But the whole reason for Stan's predicament is a lot more guilt than you deserve. Your grandfather and I are the custodians of this estate. We are responsible for the actions of those we bring here, especially the children. Stan allowed you to do your parents a favor, but also because we need to start selectively sharing this secret with our offspring. We're not going to be here forever. The secret was shared with us, and the day came when the responsibility of this enchanted refuge fell on our shoulders. One day, we're going to have to give responsibility to others. He grabbed Seth and Kendra by the hand and fixed them with his loving gaze. I know the mistakes you've made aren't intentional or Your grandfather and I made a lot of mistakes. So do those who have ever lived here, no matter how wise or careful they are. Your grandfather must share the responsibility for putting you in a position where opening a window with kind intent can cause such damage and destruction. And it's obvious that the evil men who kidnapped him are ultimately the most guilty. Kendra and Seth were quiet. Seth fringed on his face. If it wasn't for me, Grandma would be fine right now, he said, fighting hard not to cry. And I still have a chicken in the cage, Grandma said. Let's worry about solving the problem rather than the blame. Don't despair. I know we can make things right. Take me to Dale. Seth nodded, sniffed and rubbed his forearms through his nose. He led the way through the back porch, weaving the garden toward their destination. There really aren't many fairies, grandma said. I've never seen the court so lifeless. There hasn't been much around since he was attacked by Seth, Kendra said. Since Grandma disappeared, there's been even fewer of them. When they stood over Dale's painted, life-size metal bust, grandma shook her head. I've never seen this magic before, but it's Dale. Can you help him? Kendra asked. Maybe if we had enough time. Part of counteracting magic is understanding who placed it and how. Seth said we found clues. He showed grandma the fingerprints in the flower bed. Although the impression has faded a little, it remains recognizable. Grandma frowned. You don't look familiar. Many creatures wild on festival nights that otherwise never meet, which is why we take over indoors. Maybe the print isn't an important clue. It could be the unsub's, or the mount the unsub was riding, or it could belong to something that came up sometime during the night. So we don't care about Dale right now? Kendra asked. We don't have a choice. Time is short. We can only hope that if we save your grandfather, we can shed more light on what caused Dale's condition and find a way to reverse the curse. Comes. They're back in the house. Grandma spoke over her shoulder as she mounted the stairs to the second floor. There are some special fortifications in the house. One of them is the room where he was staying. The other is a second room on the other side of the attic. I knew this would happen! Kendra told me. I knew by heart there had to be more in the attic. But I never found a way in. You probably looked in the wrong place, grandma said, leading them down the hall to her room. The two sides of the attic are not connected. When we get there, I'll fill you in on my strategy. Grandma squatted and picked up a broken bedside table. He found some hairpins and used them to stack his hair in a matronly bun. more, he found a key. He introduced them to the main bathroom, where he used the key to open the cupboard door. Instead of a cabinet, the door opened to reveal the second door, it is made of steel with a large combined wheel. It's a vault's gate. Grandma started spinning the wheel. Four turn right to 11, three to left to 28, two to 3 to the right, one to 31 to the left, and half to the right to 18. He pulled the lever, and the heavy door opened. Carpeted stairs led me to another door. Grandma went up first. Seth and Kendra joined him in the attic. This side of the attic was even bigger than the playground. Grandma turned the switch and several lights dispelled the gloom. One side of the room was dominated by a long workbench, and the wall above it was covered with tools supported on the hooks. Nice wooden cabinets lined the other walls. Various unusual objects littered the room - a birdcracker, a phonograph, a battle-head, a hanging scale, a mannean, a globe the big as a beach ball. Suitcases and boxes were arranged in rows on the floor, leaving just enough space in the corridors to access them. Heavy curtains hid the windows. Grandma had them all slipped over to the workbench where they were sitting on the chair. What's in the boxes? Seth asked. A lot of things, most of them unsafe. This is where we keep our most valuable weapons and talismans. Spell books, ingredients for drinks, all good things. Can you tell us about Grandpa now? Kendra told me. Yes. You heard Nero say that Stan and Lena are being held at the Forgotten Chapel. Let me sum up history so we can have the consequences in mind. A long time ago, this land was invaded by a powerful demon named Bahumat. For centuries, he terrorized the natives who lived in the region. They learned to avoid certain areas, but even with these precautions, it wasn't really safe nearby. The natives made all the offerings the demon needed, but they lived in fear. When a group of Europeans offered to overthrow the demon in exchange for lawful lands, infidel local leaders agreed. Page 22 On page 24, the help of powerful spells and powerful magic, the Europeans successfully subdued and imprisoned the demon. A few years later, Fablehaven was founded on the land that was taken out of Bahumat. The four years have passed. In the early 1800s, members of the court of the United States family that emerged in this area. Stan's parents were built on a small island and built a small settlement. The old mansion still stands on this property, although the building around it have

go over there and kill him, even if I can justify the deed, the protection of the contract will never be mine again. I heard Dale was shooting and he was having stuff the night the creatures came through our window, Kendra said. Creatures flooded our territory, Grandma explained. Regardless of the reason, by coming into this house, they're waived all protection. Under these circumstances, Dale could be late without fear of retribution, which means that under his contract, his status will remain secure. The same principle could work against you if you ventured into certain forbidden areas of fablehaven. If they stripped me of all defenses like this, it would be an open hunting season for Kendra and Seth. That's exactly why these areas are forbidden. I don't understand who would punish me for killing Muriel, Seth said. The mystical barriers that protect you would be lifted, and the punishment would, of course, follow. As mortals, we may choose to violate the Mystical beings seeking asylum cannot afford this luxury. A lot of people would break the rules if But they're tied. As long as I follow the rules, I'm safe. But if I lose the protection afforded by the treaty, the consequences of my vulnerability would inevitably follow. Does that mean Grandpa's alive? Kendra asked in a small voice. They can't kill him or anything. Stan complied with the rules of blood shed, and even on the night of the party, they couldn't kill the dark creatures on the reservation. And they wouldn't force him to go to a place where he could be killed. He was imprisoned, tortured, made crazy, lead-maybe became. But he has to be alive. And I have to go after him. And I have to come with you,' Seth said. You need backup. Hugo's my backup. Seth fringed his face, resisted tears. I'm not going to lose you, especially if it's my fault. Grandma Sorenson embraced Seth. Honey, I appreciate your courage, but I'm not risking losing a grandson. Wouldn't we be in as much danger as if we were with you? Kendra told me. If the demon gets loose, we'll all be burned. I mean, I'm going to send you off the reservation, grandma said. Kendra folded her arms. So we can wait outside the gate until our parents come back, tell them that a demon killed us, and insist we don't go to the house because it's a magical reservation that's gone dark? Your parents don't know the true nature of this place, grandma said. And they wouldn't believe me without seeing me. Exactly! Kendra told me. If you fail, Dad will go straight to your house first and investigate. There's nothing we can say to keep him away. And he's probably going to call the cops, and the whole world is going to find out about this place. They can't see anything,' grandma said. But a lot of people would die inexplicably. And in fact, they saw the cow, even without milk, because Viola remains a mortal being. We came in good with the troll, Seth said. And no matter what you do or say, I'm going to follow you. Grandma threw her hand up. With all due respect, kids, I think it's going to be okay. I know I've written down a terrible script, but things like this happen from time to time on cans, and we usually work them out. I don't see why that would be any different. Hugo will solve the problem without serious incident, and if it gets to the head, I'm the crack shot with the crossbow. If you wait for the gates, I'll pick you up before it's too late. But I want to see Hugo Pound Muriel, Seth insisted. If one day we might inherit this place, you won't always be able to protect us from danger, Kendra said. Wouldn't it be a good experience if I watched you and Hugo handle the situation? Maybe we can even help? Field trip! Seth cried. Grandma watched them with love. They were growing up so fast, he sighed. The forgotten chapel, like With the sun hesitating over the horizon, Kendra looked out at the side of the car and watched the trees pass by. He remembered staring at the trees through the suv window on his way to the reservation with his parents. This road was much southerly, bumpier and windier. And the goal was more formidable. Hugo pulled the oversized rickshaw. Kendra doubted that a group of horses would have been able to reconcile the tireless speed of his sloping steps. They reached the open area, and Kendra saw the tall hedge that surrounded the lake with the pavilion promenade. It's strange to think that Lena once lived there as a naiad. Chapter 22 Before they boarded the wagon, Grandma commanded Hugo to obey Kendra and Seth's instructions. He told Kendra and Seth that if things went wrong, they should retreat hastily with Hugo. He also warned them to be careful with what they say to Hugo. Because he had no will of his own, the punishments for his actions fall on the heads of those who give orders. Grandma changed from her bathrobe. Now she was dressed in faded jeans, work boots and a green top that was pulled out of the attic. Seth took the selection of the green shirt with great satisfaction. Seth was clutching a leather case. Grandma explained that it's full of special dust that keeps unwanted creatures away from them. He told Seth he could use it the same way he used salt in the bedroom. He also warned her to use it only as a last resort. Any spell they've used would only lead to less tolerable retaliation if they failed. He also had a pore of dust. Kendra left empty-handed. Since she hasn't used magic yet, grandma said it would be a mistake if she started now. The protection of the treaty seems to have been quite strong for those who have completely refrained from magic and trouble. The car shook in a particularly rough place. Seth grabbed the side to avoid falling. He looked over his shoulder and smiled. We're pulling! Kendra wished she was so forgetful about the whole thing. He felt bad in his stomach. It reminded him of the first time he had to sing a solo in a school play. He's always done well in practice, but when he peeked out at the curtain next to the audience, a sickening feeling began to broth in his belly until he was sure that he was going to throw up. Her cue, going out onto the bright stage, staring at the dim crowd, couldn't find her parents in the crowd. The intro played, the moment arrived, and as he began to sing, the fear dissipated and the nausea disappeared. Page 25, p. 25 Was the wait worse than the event itself? At least once they got there, reality would replace uncertainty and they'd be able to do something, act. Everything he does there was no concern at the moment. How far was this crazy church? Grandma said Hugo didn't have to last more than 15 minutes as there was a decent ride all along. Although he kept an eye on unicorns, Kendra didn't see any imaginative creatures. Everything's hidden. The sun is sorely below the horizon. Grandma showed me. In front of us, in the middle of a clearing, sat an old-fashioned churchhouse. It was a boxed structure with a series of large windows, broken glass and a dome that probably contained a bell. The roof's sped. The wooden walls were grey and splintered. There was no guess as to what the original color might have been. A short, warped staircase led to an empty door, where double doors once provided access. It looked like a perfect boron place for bats and zombies. Hugo relaxed at the pace and they stopped in front of the shaded door. The church was completely immobile. There was no sign that anyone had been there in 100 years. I prefer the sun, but at least there's still some light, Grandma said, using a tool to adjust the silver-headed arrow to string her undersized crossbow and pull it into place. Let's get this over with as soon as possible. Evil loves darkness. Why is that? Seth asked. Grandma thought about the question for a moment before answering. Because evil likes to hide. Kendra didn't appreciate the little note she got when grandma said so. Why don't we talk about happy things? he suggested as they climbed off the car. Because we hunt witches and monsters, Seth said. Kendra's right, Grandma said. It's not good for us to think about dark thoughts. But we want to be on the road and away before dusk disappears. I'm still saying we should have brought some rifles, Seth said. Hugo! Grandma told me. Drive him quietly to the basement. Protect us from trouble, but don't kill. Kendra calmed down as she watched the vast goliath of earth and stone. Since Hugo was their champion, he couldn't imagine anything that would cause them a lot of trouble. The stairs moaned under Hugo as he climbed them. He stepped carefully and jumped through the big door. The others followed him, remained close to their powerful bodyguard. Grandma put a red scarf over the crossbow to hide it. Please let Muriel not be here, Kendra prayed quietly. Please, let's just find Grandpa and Lena and nothing else. The interior of the church was even gloomier than the exterior. The decaying benches were smashed and overturned, the front pulpit was thrown down, and the walls were covered with maroon doodles. Cobwebs festooned the rafters like gossamer banners. Amber light from the sunset flooded entry through the windows and some irregular holes in the roof, but not enough to dispel the murkiness. There was no token that this was once a house of worship. It was just a big, ruined, empty room. The floorboards creaked as Hugo leaned toward the door on the other side of the chapel. Kendra found herself worried that the floor would turn itself in, and Hugo suddenly took a shortcut to the basement. He had to push 1,000 pounds. Hugo eased the corroded door. Because the door was the normal size, he had to squat and twist to squeeze through. It's going to be okay, grandma said, placing an uplifting hand on Kendra's shoulder. Stay behind me. The stairs dilated and ended at a door with no door. The light flowed into the stairwell. Peeking around Hugo as he distorted to pass through the door, Kendra saw that they were not alone. As he followed Grandma Sorenson into the spacious basement, the consequences of the scene began to register. The room was cheerfully lighted by no fewer than two dozen bright lanterns. It had high ceilings and sparse furniture. Grandpa Sorenson and Lena both chained him to the wall. There was a strange figure standing in front of Grandpa and Lena. Completely smooth, made of dark wood, it looked like a primitive puppet, not much shorter than Grandpa. Instead of matching joints, the wooden parts were tied with gold hooks on the wrists, elbows, shoulders, neck, ankles, knees, hips, waist, and fingers. The head made Kendra think of a wooden hockey mask, although it wasn't entirely correct because it was rarer and simpler. The unusual mannean danced a little jig, arms imbring, leg tapping and suffusing, looking toward the far end of the basement. Is that your limberjack? Seth asked quietly. Naturally! It was Muriel's creepy dancing puppet, only much bigger, and it's no longer controlled by a pole on its back! On the other side, he was in the basement in a big booth. It looked like someone had torn down some planks to gain access to the gap. A net of knotted ropes crossed the cab, preventing the view from the mournful reed. A dark shape hovered over the ropes. A tall, beautiful woman, she stood next to the reed with a glittering cascade of honey-blonde hair that blew on one of the many knots. She wore a spectacular azure dress that accentuates her seductive figure. The striking woman was surrounded by what looked like human-sized versions of theimps Kendra saw in Muriel's hut. They were all looking at the booth, staring at the ground. They're 5 to 180 meters high. Some were fat, some thin, some muscular. Some had crooked backs, or humps, or horns, or antlers, or bulging cysts, or tails. A couple was missing a limb or an ear. They all had scars. All were weathered, leathery skin and nubs instead of wings. At its feet were human-sizedimps in a number of tiny fairy-sized versions. The air is shimmering. A pair of black wings made of smoke and from the booth. Kendra experienced a feeling of dizziness that had overwhelmed her when she changed her grandmother back to being a hen. His booth seemed to move further and further away, as if he were looking through the wrong end of a telescope. The outburst of darkness momentarily obscured the lanterns' constant sheen, and suddenly, in the middle, where all theimps were focusing their attention, a new human-sized imp sprouted out. Kendra covered her mouth with both hands. The beautiful woman had to be Muriel. Bahumat was imprisoned by a net of knotted ropes, similar to the rope that trapped him and used it to increase the size ofimps, gradually releasing the demon! Hugo, grandma said it softly. We're going to do a deed, and we're going to get Muriel as soon as they double it. Hugo attacked forward. One imp turned around and let go of the disgusting howlers, and others spind to confront the intruders, revealing cruel, vicious faces. The beautiful blonde turned, her eyes widened to surprise. Grab them. Shouted. There were over 20 antojó shoddy, and 10 times as many small. Led by the greatest and most muscled men, they rushed to Hugo, a motly mob. Hugo met them in the middle of the room. With one hand, he grabbed the leader by the waist, grabbed both legs with the other, and twisted him vividly in opposite directions. Hugo threw the roaring leader aside as the others descended on him. Fist-slamming like battering rams, Hugo sentimps sailing wild cartwheels. They're pouring in, making agile jumps on his shoulders and scratching his head. But Hugo was just spinning, lofting and vomiting, a violent ballet that sent as manyimps as it did to groom him in the basement. Someimps nimbly dodged around him to sprint toward gran and Kendra and Seth. Hugo spind and charged after them, grabbing a couple of them on the knee and then welding them as the clubs swat others away. The flexibility of theimps was impressive. Hu go throw one into the wall and the persistent creature stumbles on his feet and wades back in for more. Even the burly leader is still in the skrimish, starting awkwardly with truncated legs. Looking beyond the commotion, Kendra noticed Muriel blowing a knot. Grandma, he's up to something. Hugo, grandma was crying. Leave the attraction to us and catch Muriel. Hugo threw away the magic he was holding. The whiny creature skied the entire distance of the wall to the ceiling, where it was hit by a repulsive crunch. Then I'm going to golem Muriel. Mendigo, protect me. Muriel screamed. The wooden man, who was still dancing near Grandpa and Lena, sprinted to catch Hugo. The damage is taken by grandma in front of grandma, who put herself in front of Kendra, and Holding a purse in one hand, Grandma swished it by scattering a cloud of twinkling dust. As theimps reached the cloud, electricity cracked, throwing them back. Some jumped into the cloud and tried to force their way through, but the electricity flared brighter and made them tumbling. Grandma threw more dust in the air. Large dark wings spread out of the compartment. The air is dilated. Kendra felt like she was looking at the cellar from afar, through a narrow tunnel. Hugo almost reached Muriel. The ingrown limberjack arose at the foot of the golem, using both arms and legs to entram Hugo's ankle. The golem has leaned forward. Hugo kicked me out of Mendigo, sent the wooden puppet across the floor, then fell to his knees and reached for Muriel. His outstretches were inches away from being held when a thunder shook the basement, accompanied by a brief blackness. The huge golem collapsed into a pile of rubble. Muriel boasted triumphantly, her eyes crazy, and they looked away for so narrowly dosing Hugo's claws. Mendigo sat up. The puppet lost his arm by the shoulder. He picked up the limb and sewed it back on. Muriel's eyes sharpened as he sensed a certain victory. Bring them all to me, he trumpeted. A red scarf fluttered on the floor. Grandma Sorenson raised the crossbow in one hand while scattering the last contents of her purse with the other. He threw the pouch and stepped forward into the glittering cloud of dust, grabbing the crossbow in both hands. The arrow flew away. Mendigo jumped up, desperately trying to block the arrow, but Hugo pushed the puppet too far. Muriel screamed and fell back into a net of knotted ropes, a manicured hand covering the front of her shoulder. She bounced forward, fell to her knees, panting, still clutching her shoulders, black feathers reaching out between her slender fingers. You're going to pay for this sting! she was screaming. Runt Grandma Sorenson yelled at the kids. It's too late. My lips were moving with my eyes closed, my lips were moving softly, Muriel stretched out her hands with blood on her hands, and a gust of wind removed the glittering dust. The injuredimps rushed in, grabbing grandmother Sorenson pretty much. Seth jumped forward and threw a handful of dust at grandma andimps. Lightning struck and theimps tripped. Mendigo, get the boy. Muriel called. The wooden servant chases towards Seth, racing on all fours. Theimps have fared several clusters near the door to prevent them from escaping. Seth threw it in the dust as Mendigo jumped. The electric cloud knocked back the puppet. At the same time, an imp darts from behind, knocking the pouch from Seth's grasp in a chopping motion. The high imp twisted Seth around, grabbed his upper arm and lifted him into the air, leaving him staring face to face. The imp mouth open, black tongue hanging grotesque. Hey, Seth said at the dawn of recognition. You're the fairy I caught! The imp pinned Seth on his shoulder and ran toward Muriel. Another imp grabbed Grandpa's to take her to the witch. Kendra froze with horror. Imps surrounded him. Escape was impossible. Hugo was reduced to a pile of rubble. Grandma missed the arrow, wounded, but didn't kill Muriel. Seth did his best, but he and grandma caught him. There was no more protection. No more tricks. There was nothing between Kendra and what Muriel and your troubles caused. Except the crooks didn't take it. They were standing around him, but they couldn't seem to reach out and grab him. They raised their arms at part of the road and then stopped as if their limbs were disobeying. Mendigo, bring the girl here, muriel ordered. Mendigo pulled theimps. His hands reached toward him, then stopped, wooden fingers twitching, hooks rattled softly. They can't touch you, Kendra, Grandpa called from where he was handcuffed to the wall. You didn't cause any trouble, you didn't do magic, you didn't hurt me. Run, Kendra, they can't stop you! Kendra pushed me between a couple ofimps and headed for the door. Then he stopped short. Can't I help you? Muriel is not bound by curbing his hen ties, Grandpa shouted. Run all the way home, straight down the road where you came from. Don't hurt on the way! Don't go off the path. Then let's get you off the property. I hit the gate with my truck! Fablehaven's going to fall! One of us has to survive. Muriel, clutching his injured shoulder, was already in pursuit. Kendra ran up the stairs and ran through the chapel to the front door. My child, wait! She was called a witch. Kendra stopped on the doorstep of the church and looked back. Muriel leaned into the door that led to the basement. He looked pale. The blood drenched the air of his dress. What do you want? Kendra said he was trying to sound brave. Why are you running away in such a hurry? Stay, we can talk about it. It wasn't look good. This little thing? Losing a lot of it fixes it. Then why didn't you do it? I wanted to talk to you before you run away, the witch calmed down. What's there to talk about? Let my family go. Kendra demanded. Maybe in time. My child, you don't want to escape into the woods at this hour. Who can call me what horrors await you out there? They can't beat what's going on. Why are you letting that demon go? You never understood, Muriel said. Do you think he'll be your friend? You'll end up chained to the wall with the others. Page 26 Page 26 Do speeches on issues far beyond comprehending, Muriel snapped. I have made covenants that place me in unfathomable power. After you've bid my time for many years, I can feel my hour of triumph at hand. The evening star is rising. Night star? Kendra repeated it. Muriel grinned. My ambitions go far beyond hijacking the only reservation. I am part of a movement with much broader objectives. The Evening Star Society. You can't imagine the plans are already on the move. I've been locked up for years, yes, but not without communicating with the outside world. Theimps. And other collaborators. Bahumat's been organizing this day since his capture. Time was our ally. Watching and waiting, we quietly took advantage of countless opportunities to gradually secure our release. No prison is going to last forever. Sometimes our efforts have brought little fruit. On gladder occasions, we've toppled many dominoes with a single judge. When Ephira managed to get you to open the window on Midsummer Night's Eve, we hoped the events would unfold as much as they did. Ephira, what's wrong? You looked him in the eye. Kendra was shaking. He didn't appreciate the retouching woman in the translucent black dress. Muriel nodded. He and others will soon inherit this sanctuary, a vital step toward achieving our ultimate goals. After decades of perseverance, nothing can prevent me. Then why didn't you let my family go? Kendra begged. They'd try to intervene. Not that they had a chance at this point, but they didn't, but I'm not taking any chances. Come on, face your loved ones at the end, instead of being alone in the night. Kendra shook her head. Muriel stretched out his unscathed arm. The fingers, red with their own blood, were torn into an unnatural form. He spoke a confused language that made Kendra think of the whispering of angry people. Kendra ran out of the church, down the stairs, and over to the car. He stopped to look back. Muriel didn't show up at the door. Whatever spell the witch tried to cast had no effect. Kendra was racing on the road. The sunset was still quite clear. They were only in the church for a few minutes. The tears began to make him go to the light, but he kept running, not knowing if he was being chased. His whole family is lost! It all happened so fast! One moment, Grandma confidently provided certainty; In the next, Hugo was destroyed, and Seth and grandma captured him. Kendra should also have been taken, except that she has been so careful since arriving at Fablehaven that she was still shielded by the full power of the treaty. Theimps weren't able to do it with a finger on him and Muriel had been too damaged to make a proper chase. Kendra looked back on the empty road. The witch would have healed the injury by now, but she probably would have only come after him by freeing Bahumat, as Kendra had such a big advantage. Muriel might catch up with magic. De Kendra That the urgency of releasing the demon would prevent Muriel from pursuing him for now. Turn around and go back? Are you trying to save his family? How? Throw rocks? Kendra could only imagine a certain capture if he returned. But he had to do something. When the demon was released, it destroyed the contract, and Seth died, along with Grandpa, Grandma and Lena! The only option he could think of was going back to the house and trying to find a gun in the attic. Do you remember the combination to the vault door? An hour ago, he watched Grandma open it and heard the numbers say out loud. He couldn't recall them, but he felt like he might see them someday. Kendra knew she had no hope. The house was miles away. How much? Eight? Ten? Twelve? You'd be lucky to get there, let alone back before Bahumat's free. There were a lot of knots, and muriel seemed to be able to undo one at a time. Each lump seemed to last at least a few minutes. But at this time, it's a matter of hours, not days before the demon is free. At least finding the gun in the house was a goal. No matter how desperate the odds are, it gave him a direction to head and a reason to get there. Who knew what the gun was going to be, or how it was going to be used, or if it was even going to get into the attic? But at least there was a plan. At least you could tell yourself there was a brave reason to run. Desperate Gamble has done nothing from terror night to prevent it. The sunset dropped and disappeared, while Kendra's only light was reflected on half a moon to guide her. The night got cooler, but not cold. The forest was cast by a gloomy shadow. Sometimes he heard disturbing voices, but he never saw what made them. Although he often glanced back, the road behind him remained as empty as the road ahead. Kendra took turns jogging and walking. Without landmarks, it was difficult to recognize how much area it covered. The dirt road seemed to stretch forever. He was worried about Grandma Sorenson. Since he shot Muriel and used Hugo to paralyze the cripples, there probably wouldn't be a defense for Grandma against similar torture. Kendra wished she'd accepted Muriel's invitation to stay in the temple with her family. The guilt of being the only fugitive was almost too much to bear. It was hard to calculate the passage of time. The moon gradually wandered through the sky. Or is the road changing course? Kendra was sure she'd been on the road for hours when she got to an open area. The moonlight showed an intimate path that forked away from the road. He ran towards a tall, shaded hedge. The lake with the pavilions! Finally, a milestone. It couldn't have been more than half an hour from the house, and No sign of dawn. How long will it take to get Bahumat out? Maybe the demon's out of control. Do you know when it happened, or you wouldn't have found out until monsters surprised you? Kendra rubbed her eyes. He felt tired. His legs didn't want to go any further. He noticed he was very hungry. He stopped and stretched for a minute. Then he started jogging. You could run for the rest of the trip, right? It wasn't too far. As he passed the small path branching off the road, Kendra stopped. A new thought came to mind, inspired by an irregular hedge on the side of the road. The Fairy Queen had a shrine on the island in the middle of the lake. Wasn't he the most powerful man in the fairy world? Maybe Kendra could try asking him for help. Kendra folded her arms. He knew so little meant the Fairy Queen. In addition to hearing that the Queen was powerful, all she heard was that she had set foot on her island, which means certain death. A guy tried it, and it turned into dandelion seeds. But why did you try? Kendra didn't think he had a specific reason, only that he desperately needed it. But the fact that he tried meant he could succeed. Maybe he just didn't have a good enough reason. Chapter 23 Kendra thought he needed it. His grandparents and brother were going to be killed. And Fablehaven was covered up. That would be bad for fairies, wouldn't it? Or don't fairies care? Maybe they'd just go somewhere else. Indecisive, Kendra stared at the faint clue. What kind of gun did you expect in the house? Probably nothing. So he'll probably end up crashing through the gate or climbing onto it to escape before Bahumat and Muriel catch up with him and kill him. And his family would be destroyed. But this Fairy Queen idea could work. If the Queen were so strong, she'd be able to stop Muriel and maybe even Bahumat. Kendra needed an ally. Despite his noble intentions, he did not see how he could manage on his own. Kendra's felt a new feeling in there ever since she came up with the idea. The feeling was so unexpected that he momentarily recognized it as hope. There were no combination locks in the way. All he had to do was expose himself to an almighty being and beg for his family. What was the worst thing that could have happened? Death, but on his terms. No bloodthirstimps. There are no witches. There are no demons. It's just a big dandelion fluff. What was the best option? The Fairy Queen would change dandelion seeds from Muriel and save Kendra's family. Kendra's on the trail. He felt butterflies in his stomach. It's an encouraging kind of nervousness, far more beneficial than fear of certain failures. He started running. Let's not climb under the hedge this time. led to an arch. Kendra ran under the arch and onto the manicured lawn too. In moonlight, whitewashed pavilions and walkways were even more picturesque than during the day. Kendra could really imagine a fairy queen living on the island in the middle of a tranquil lake. Of course, the Queen didn't actually live there. It was just a shrine. Kendra will have to petition and hope the Queen answers. Getting to the island would be the first challenge. The lake was full of naiads who liked to drown people, which meant he needed a strong boat. Kendra rushed across the lawn to the nearest pavilion. He tried to ignore the changing shadows that prescient beings could see out of sight. Expecting what she was up to, Kendra felt like her intestines were trapped in an egg beater. It drove away fear. Would Grandpa turn around and run away? Granny? Seth, too? Or are they doing everything they can to save him? He billed the steps of the nearest pavilion and began running along the promenade. His shoes slammed loudly against the boards, defying silence. He saw his destination, the boathouse, three pavilions away. The surface of the lake was a black mirror reflecting the moonlight. Some twinkling fairies were over the water. Otherwise, there was no sign of life. Kendra reached the gazebo attached to a small pier. He ran down the stairs and went to the wharf. He got to the boathouse and tried to get to the door. Just like before, it was locked up. The door wasn't big, but it looked strong. Kendra kicked him hard. The impact shook the length of his leg, so he winked. He hit the door with his shoulder, and again he got hurt himself instead of the door. Kendra stepped back. The boathouse was basically a large shed floating on the water. He didn't have windows. He hoped there were still ships in it. If they did, they'd be sitting in the water, protected by walls and roofs, but without floors. If he jumped into the lake, he could jump into the boathouse and climb into a boat. He studied water. The black, reflective surface was impenetrable. There may be 100 naiads waiting for the raid, or it's impossible to tell. The whole plan would be pointless if he drowned before he reached the island. From what he heard from Lena, naiads eagerly waited to get close to the water. It would be suicide to jump in. He sat down and started bucking the door on both feet, the same method Seth used to break into the barn. He made a lot of noise, but it didn't seem to hurt the door at all. The harder kick made his leg hurt more. He needed a tool. Or a key. Or some dynamite. Kendra ran back to the pavilion looking for something to pry the door open. He didn't see anything. I wish there was a hammer Around. He was trying to calm himself down. He had to think. Maybe if he kept banging, the door would sooner or later. It's like erosion. But he hasn't moved yet, and he hasn't been on it all night. There had to be a smarter way. What did he have to work with? Nothing! Nothing but a few shadowy creatures who hid out of sight when he approached him. Okay, listen up. Shouted. I know you can hear me. I need to get into the boathouse. A witch will free Bahumat, and all of Fablehaven will be destroyed. I'm not asking anyone to stick their neck out. I just need someone to hit the boathouse door. My grandfather's the janitor here, and I'm giving him full permission. I'm going to turn my back and close my eyes. If I hear the door break, I'll wait 10 seconds before I turn back. Kendra turned around and closed her eyes. He didn't hear anything. Anytime, just break down the door. I promise I won't look. He heard a gentle splash and a tinkling sound. Okay! Sounds like we have a buyer! Just break down the door. He didn't hear anything. Suddenly, he realized something must have fallen out of the water and sneaked up behind him. He couldn't resist, turned around and peeked. There were no dripping creatures in the sky. Everything was quiet. There were waves on the previously glassy lake. And lying in the harbor, near the boathouse, that was the key. Kendra ran down the stairs and picked up the key. It was wet, corroded, and a little slimy. Longer than a traditional key, it seemed old-fashioned. Wiped on his shirt, he took the key to the boathouse with him and put it in the keyhole. It fits perfectly. He turned it around, and the door turned inward. Kendra was shaking. The consequences were disturbing. Looks like a naiad threw him the key. They wanted it on the water. Since only the moonlight was seeping through the door to illuminate it, the boathouse was very dim. Khungó, Kendra saw three boats tied to the narrow pier: two large rowing boats, one slightly wider than the other, and a smaller paddleboat. The pedal was a cyclist. Kendra once rode in a park full of lakes. On one wall hung several oars of different lengths. There was a crank and an arm near the door. Kendra tried to turn the crank, but he wouldn't move. He pulled the lever. Nothing happened. He tried the crank again, and this time he turned around. From the harbour on the other side of the boathouse, a sliding door began to open and allowed more light in. Kendra continued to roll and was relieved to be able to row a boat out of the boathouse to the lake. Standing in the gloom of the boathouse, staring out at the open door of the pond, Kendra began to doubt. He felt nauseous with fear. Were you really ready to die? To drown naiads or become a victim. a spell to protect a forbidden island? island?

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