"I saw them again" said Elsie breathlessly, almost afraid to hear her self speak.  
  
  
"You saw no such thing, besides you mustn't make up stories, are you trying to scare Addie" said Susan  
"I'm not scared" said Addie the youngest, and blondest of the three sisters, "why would i be scared even if it wasn't make believe?"  
  
Then more quietly she followed up quickly with" where did you see them at?" Then as she looked around nervously, a few minutes ago the late fall afternoon had seemed full of color and beauty, but now the evening shadows creeping over the forest made her slide closer to Susan  as a tinge of fear creeped up her spine.  
  
"Well" elsie started then paused looking out at the small creek running swiftly by them,  
  
 " it was" she began, then she stopped again  
  
Well go on" said Susan, in a rather Adult sounding tone.  
  
Well elsie began again reluctantly then , suddenly spilled out in a torrent, blurted out "past Lana's glen in the pine forest above it."  
  
"Elsie grace Simmons!" Susan burst out "above the glen? You went to the cairns again after father told you not too" you know better then that! What were you thinking!"  
  
"Fathers not going to find out" Elsie responded with a pointed look at her older sister. "It's not like I'm a baby I can take care of myself and I wanted to take a picture of them so that everyone will stop teasing me and saying i make up stories."  
  
people in Sunday school can talk about something else besides crazy Elsie" Elsie Simons sitting in a tree kissing..  
First comes love then comes marriage The come a psychiatrist  
 to take away the baby carriage  one cause shes crazy  
  
"What a stupid song it doesn't even rhyme. "  
  
"Just ignore it he made it up to get your attention, and it is a little bit funny"  
  
"Well they are just teasing and besides it's your fault your the one always bringing it up. If you didn't insist on acting like you believe your wild tales you wouldn't get teased." Susan said  
  
Elsie tried to hold her tongue but couldn't, "there not wild tales I saw something up there i know it."  
  
Anyways you shouldn't go up there I don't believe your stories at all but it's dangerous up by the cairn thats where the potter boy disappeared a couple years ago. And there Are lots of other strange stories and legends about that place" said Susan  
  
They say its haunted by the restless ones.  
  
"Oh please, it's perfectly safe that's just a rumor and besides I've seen them and they are beautiful and friendly." She paused unwilling to go on.  
  
Elsie bit her lip as she sat thinking and gazing out at the soft evening sunlight that filtered through the autumn leaves. making patches of sun and shade That played with each other on the surface of the creek  
That danced upon the ground.  
that seemed to be playing with each other on the surface of the creek and upon the ground around them.  
  
The three girls sat in silence only broken by the gentle creek tumbling slowly down to the sea and the light evening breeze that caused the leaves to gently bend and twist (in the evening sun) causing a kaleidoscope of shadow and sun. trying to hold into their  
  
they were reluctant to let go of their summer glory when they were strong and green.  
  
Eventually Susan looked over at her sister not quite sure what to say her imagination was maybe a little too active, but she really seemed to believe her latest stories.  
  
She decided to change the subject and ground it back in reality, "of course Some people say the potter boy just ran away to sea, and i wouldnt blame him id run away too if father had as much ear hair as mr potter. All the girls laughed.  
  
I suppose we should feel sorry for him Elsie said.  
Yes that's true said Susan feeling bad about her joke... I have only seen him twice but he sure looked mean all hunched over and dressed in black with his cane and top hat. She shuddered at the thought of the Mean looking old man she had seen in the city.  
  
Even hunched over he towered over me.  
  
I bet he would have tried to hit me with his cane if I had gotten close enough Susan said. He looks like the kind of old man that would swing his cane at kids.  
  
That's what I want to be like when I get older Elsie said proudly.  
  
An old man Susan Queried  
  
No an old women but it sounds fun to swing by cane at children and yell at them.  
  
Well you are still a child Susan replied which is even more obvious with comments like that.  
  
I won't have to swing my cane just at children you know  
Elsie went on  
I can swing it at pesty older sisters too.  
  
Susan rolled her eyes anyways she went on I heard a rumor from Maggie that mr potter was strict and cold always demanding."and his father was into the black magic dark arts she lived in the village near where his place was before she moved here.  
  
There is a rumor he could talk to spirits and the spirits dragged his boy from this world.  
  
Maggie was a little slip of a girl pale and frail with big eyes and curly brown hair she was shy and sweet sir and wasn't the type of girl to make up stories she was shy and respectful.  
  
Madison  
  
Do you know Maggie at school  
  
Oh yes she is nice  
  
Yes it was scary I never would have went but my parents were on vs action at the seaside for the night my sister Annabelle was watching me.  
  
Neither of us are very rebellious  
  
Elsie laughed they were both the farthest thing from rebellious  
  
Well she went on we used to live near his house and three of my sisters friends invited us on a hike.  
  
It was a rainy day but the rain had stopped so we put on our rain boots and set off it was a long walk and we laughed and talked everyone was excited. The road to his house was about 3 miles from his and then it was about 2 more miles from there but we had night and set out in the afternoon.  
  
The rain had stopped but the dark clouds still hung in the fall sky as the dusk gathered around them. We began walking up the winding road to his house the overgrown pine woods crowded around us they seemed threatening.  
  
We hiked the Rocky road as it winded up and up and up into the dark Evergreens.  
  
Silence was all around us just the occasional dripping from leaves as the water pooled and flowed gathering until it dripped, falling to the earth.  
  
  
  
  
  
from the water caught in the trees making its way to the. earth.  
  
We began to talk in quiet whispers as the moon peaked out from behind ragged clouds. Something felt not right a presence haunting the night sinister and malevolent.  
  
Something didn't feel right but we all  
Thought it must be our imagination.  
  
The early October air blew chill.  
  
  
  
Yes I did see a snake but only one but it slithered across my show it was black with red markings.  
  
I tried to shriek but not much came out I was too scared; it was more like a whimper.  
  
and she said some kids went up to his house they said there were small candles burning outside in the black night all in a circle like some ritual.  
  
They heard whispering in the trees thier blood ran cold  
  
She also said there were snacks crawling through the trees they all ran home terrified.  
  
That night she had a dream a handsome man was a macabre feast blood dripped from the Black trees. Dim lights hung from the pale black pines. The guests all wore grotesque and fantastic masks it was hard to see them though they all seemed faded and scratchy, a part of the background or some long forgotten past that never happened.  
  
Chapter  
She had heard a voice she was sure of it whispering through the pine woods.  
  
She stopped nervous and excited and listened. She  
  
  
Also Mother said that their boy was strikingly good looking almost beautiful she said she never did see how he was related to old mr potter.  
  
Yes and he was wild I heard, young Bacchus was his nickname.  
  
I tried to ask her more about him one night but she wouldn't say anything else about it.  
  
Well Susan said trying to convince herself, "Everyone  knows he ran away to sea" so there is nothing to worry about"  
  
Hmm Elsie said pensively i dont know what to believe but that does make more sense then some of the more wild stories and besides I don't think anything up at the cairn is dangerous just beautiful and strange so if he went some where he probably wanted to."  
  
"That's n, n, not what you said when you saw them the last week before October last year All Hallows' eve when you said you saw them right by our house on the way home, you said they were dark shadows that glided beneath the trees you heard them whisper" Addie said as she slipped her nervous hand into Susan's.  
  
You said you saw shadows gliding beneath the trees.  
  
  
"maybe we should head home it's getting late and chilly. " Susan said not wanting to show she too was getting nervous.  
  
Yes let's said Elsie feeling the skin on her neck prickle with fear "Yes but that want Them it was the Others did day that but I think it was my imagination, and we should get home remember father said he was gonna make us a treat"  
  
I hope it's lavender ice cream Addie said, ohh interjected Susan I hope it's fudge with chocolate sauce  
"I hope it's not burnt" Elsie said and the girls all laughed at the memory of smoke pouring out the kitchen into the house at their fathers last attempt at backing.  
  
Even moments of joy can be pierced With sorrow when you lose the one you love.  
  
They remembered the last time he made them a treat and cooked it an hour too long both the other girls laughed at the memory of the smoke pouring from the kitchen. Yes I suppose mothers a better cook  
  
Move up in story  
Susan put on her light blue woven sweater, brrr she said it is getting cold faster.  
  
Yes and it's getting darker quicker Elsie said looking out at the sun as it seemed to be hurrying across the sky to hide behind the mountains. I wish summer would go on for ever everyone could live in the woods and hills like the elves and the fairies.  
  
I don't think you'd like that Susan said. Don't you like the fall and carving jack I lanterns and what about winter? don't you like the snow and sledding and night hikes with father through the snow as the bright moon turns the whole evening world to a strange light.  
  
As the moon Sets the whole evening aglow with strange lights.  
  
I don't think you'd like that Susan said. Don't you like the snow? And fall and carving jack o lanterns and sledding and seeing night hikes with father through the snow as the bright moon turns the whole evening world to a strange light.  
  
Yes I suppose your right Elsie said.  
  
And besides Susan said reverting back to a slightly superior tone, those stories about elves are not very realistic, a bunch of elves always feasting in the woods.  
  
It's not very practical said Susan.  
  
Think of the economics the whole picture of elves is all demand no supply. Prices would sky rocket.  
  
Ughh Elsie said your always so practical. Who cares about supply and demand when all you have to do is dance beneath the twilight and feast with the king.  
  
I suppose I have been reading too much economics and math lately. Have you ever heard of a giffen good?  
  
Oh goodness su no is this more economics no I haven't and I just don't care. How did get so dull!  
  
More like cultured Susan replied. Father and I talk about economics.  
  
Well did it ever occur to you that maybe your boring him but he is just to nice to say anything; you know you really are lucky you have me in your life.  
  
Ok ill admit economics aren't for everyone but well anyways this gifffen good  
  
It's a bit fanciful but scholars think the Irish potatoe might in fact be one quite wondrous to dream about.  
And besides Susan said reverting back to a slightly superior tone, It's not very practical. I was reading my economic theory book about the role of governmental restrictions and their affect on production  
  
Elsie rolled her eyes as she  cut her sister off  
  
oh su, really?  
  
We have 24 days and she paused thinking, and fourteen hours tell school can we try really hard not to learn anything until then.  
  
Because I'd rather dunk my head in the toilet then read boring economics.  
  
Well that seems a little dramatic Susan said. What would even make you say or think that.  
Then susan smiled a mischievous smile as she went on is that how you do your hair in the morning get it wet in the toilet then frizz it up like a wild man?  
  
Wild woman Elsie corrected her and what if i do it still looks better then the unruly mess you have.  
  
Addie giggled as Susan responded  
  
  
  
Elsie smiled well we all know you have the best hair.  
  
  
And besides she said her voice rising a little you tease me for dreaming of fairys and elves and forgotten kingdoms and then you talk about a legendary potatoe, please!  
  
Ok Susan laughed. When I'm a lord in the House of Commons I just might let you come visit me. Or maybe ill give you a job, someone will have to keep my house tidy. She laughed at her own joke.  
  
Elsie replied I can see it now on the front page of every newspaper, the world waits in awe as dignitaries and scientists wait for a glimpse of the the long thought legendary potatoe which has been discovered.  
  
Addie giggled at her older sisters, and Susan said I'm just kidding else, she slipped her arm around her younger sister. She thought maybe she was teasing her a little too much she knew how tender hearted and caring and sensitive Elsie was thought she hid it well.  
  
They heard something in the bushes and all looked nervously, suddenly remembering their precious conversation. I suppose we should be getting going Elsie said.  
  
It's just a deer Elsie said see it over in the bushes.  
  
The three sisters stood up and began to walk up the grassy bank away from the gentle stream with its small pebbles that the water endlessly  danced and played around as it slowly tumbled to the sea. By the time they got back to the dirt path that lead to their house the twilight was over taking the gentle autumn sun and casting longer and darker shadows across the woods.  
  
 They hurried through the twilight  
Back home along the small path that winded through the woods.  
  
As they marched through the twilight woods Elsie got the feeling she was being watched she didn't want to worry Susan or Addie so she picked up the pace she heard a noise and a grunt and turned to see Susan almost fall.  
  
Oh are you ok she asked yes Susan laughed I just tripped on a root  
  
We can slow down a little Elsie said then added we wouldn't want anything to happen to that pretty face of yours.  
  
Susan peered through the gloom trying to tell from Elsie's expression if she was being sarcastic.  
  
  
  
  
They began walking Back down the path Susan was in front then Addie and Elsie was in the Back.  
  
The feeling of being watched grew and she turned twice to see of some thing was behind them.  
  
  
  
  
They all felt relieved when they saw the soft (warm and gentle) light of the windows in their house up ahead.  
There father was out pretending to work but it was obvious he was just waiting for them to get back when he saw them he burst into a big smile,  
  
Hello my little button he said, scooping up Addie into a great big hug.  
  
And what were my three big girls up to today?  
  
"We went up to the creek"  
  
 "we saw a fish!"  
  
"We found a grassy meadow with a stream in it!"  
  
 "I saw a unicorn!"  
  
They all burst out at once.  
  
"A unicorn"there father said to Addie who he was now carrying up to the house in a piggyback ride.  
Well it might not have been a Unicorn Susan said we didn't exactly see a horn."  
  
Maybe it was a white horse their father replied  
  
Yes well it was a little larger then a horse Elsie added.  
And it wasn't quite as graceful as a horse Susan added  
it said moo, it was a cow" Addie finished  as they all Laughed.  
  
"Well you never know what strange creatures you might see roaming about, the world is a big wide place, why just the other night I was outside paddys pub and,"  
"father!" Susan cut in  
"And I saw a great big dragon their father finished clearly changing his story and smiling at Susan.  
  
Susan had heard a story going around school about something a visiting and very drunk sailor had got up to outside the pub. He was locked up over night and when he sobered up he was quite remorseful. (I'm afraid if I told you what he was up to your parents might not let you read this book).  
  
Their father was a tall good looking man with dark hair and a kind disposition.  He had a rugged youth and though now a wealthy gentleman he never forgot his humble beginnings. He loved his girls and if he had a weakness it was that he spoiled them. But it hadnt gone to their heads and since they stayed grounded he saw no reason to stop.  
Their parents could not have been in anymore love and Susan could see why her father was so on live with their mother she had never seen anyone so pretty. As she had gotten older she began to notice some secret buried between the two of them it showed itself on rare occasions as a faint sadness that punctuated thier joy  but it was moments few and far between usually quickly ending with their father engaging in some roguish behavior and their mother smiling "oh Charles"  
  
She thought the secret was something sad but she had never been able to figure out much.  
  As father and the girls walked (or rode) up to the house he asked them  
  
"So you saw a fish up in the creek?"  
"Yes it was a big one!"  
Addie said, she always got more talkative around her father. She also talked a lot around her sisters but she was so shy she almost never spoke to anyone else. There was a rumor at school that she couldn't speak at all.  
  
"Well I think it's time we took a trip to the ocean maybe we could see a shark!" The father Said.  
  
I think the weekend after this ill  
Be free and we can all plan a trip  
Down to the seashore.  
  
Yay! The girls all Cheered Elsie skipped around her father in excitement.  
  
I'm gonna catch a shark and ride it.  
  
Id love to catch one and ride it Elsie said all the sailors would think I was a goddess of the sea an omen of good luck.  
  
Oh would you now their father laughed. If you tried to ride one it would gobble you up in one bite.  
  
And spit you back out I'm sure you probably taste like skin and bones... And dirt, Susan added giving Elsie a smug look.  
  
Elsie rolled her eyes. I took a bath this morning thank you very much.  
  
By this time they had reached their house and gone inside.  
  
There house was large and nice the kind you find in the wealthy parts of England, perhaps you've seen pictures or been able to visit one. Or maybe you are even lucky enough to live in one.  
  
Their house was warm and inviting though, not cold and stern like some of them can be.  
  
Like some of the large English estates can be.  
  
It felt like you could break something and that would be ok. Which was a good thing Because the girls did break things (usually Elsie) when they were rough housing.  
  
But there father was the biggest culprit he loved to rough house with his girls and usually crashed or blundered into tables chairs lamps walls and the occasional portrait. Who needs a portrait of stern great uncle Winston be had said on a particularly rainy day when they were playing tag as they all stood around looking at the broken glass and damaged picture lying on the floor as the girls tried not to giggle.  
  
And by the way he said Your mother doesn't need to know about this.  
It's not my fault that picture was hanging where I wanted to kick the football.  But maybe we best not play indoor soccer.  
  
 It's not my fault that wall was so close to where I was falling.  
  
He had played football at university, not american football but the kind you play with your feet, and seemed to forget to be careful at times but he was always gentle with the girls.  
  
  
As they took off their coats and hung them in the closet Elsie said  
  
"Oh it smells good what is that?"  
  
I made us some brownies I figured we should spoil ourselves while mother is away.  
  
"Yay, we can have them after dinner" Susan said what did you make for dinner?  
  
Dinner? well i guess, Brownies... Their father said slowly I suppose I made us brownies simply because I forgot to make us anything else.  
"That sounds fine to me" Elsie said  
"We can't just have brownies Susan said we could will feel sick all night we could have some of the bread we made yesterday  
  
"Or go down to the village and eat at the landing Elsie said  
  
Oh ho you have expensive taste their father responded, what do you think Addie  
  
I think we should play a game and eat brownies Addie said and I love whatever we have"  
  
Well we sailed all over the bright big world the orient, the South Pacific the eastern coast of Russia, we landed in Portland Oregon I liked it there.  
  
Did you see any indians? Elsie asked  yes I met some, they were very kind to me, there seemed to be more hidden behind his words but he smiled and the smile hid his thoughts  
  
It's easy to believe in anything when your walking home in the dark he responded with a laugh  
Come here he grabbed Addie in a big hug and sat her in his lap  
  
Well the winter nights are long and you can only gossip about so many times before  
  
He was gone for a year in the great and terrible war when men kill men because of the color of their coat or worse the color of thier skin and when he came back he didnt talk or smile much but time brought healing and with it joy returned that was many years Ago when  was a small baby  
  
It is true that all wars are evil But not all who  Fight in them are evil. In fact some are noble and quite good They're fighting to defend the weak from the violent And when the war is over they take no delight in violence anymore In fact they never enjoyed it in the first place the menories haunt them; hangs about them dogs they steps like a violent memory They did what was right and for some as their bodies heal The scars in their minds will never fade away  
  
But it's a fact that while there bodies heal the scars that haunt their mind will follow like a faithful friend until their  
  
But lets not talk of such things at least now  
  
She awoke with a start and padded barefoot to the window, fear creeping over her. She pressed her hands against the glass and in the night saw something dark a dark figure that filled her heart with terror she felt stricken dumb, rooted to the spot. She felt she was sinking into a dark pit. She saw a vision of a great city sinking into the ocean and knew she had caused it. How long she stood there she didn't know it could be minutes or ages of this world. She woke again in her soft bed with autumn sunlight gently streaming in the window, the nightmare almost forgotten  
  
She awoke with a start and padded barefoot to the window, fear creeping over her. She pressed her hands against the glass and in the night saw a dark cowled figure that filled her heart with terror it raised its hand toward her and she was stricken dumb rooted to the spot. She felt she was sinking into a dark pit. She saw a vision of a great city sinking into the ocean and knew she had caused it. How long she stood there she didn't know it could be minutes or ages of this world. She woke again in her soft bed with autumn sunlight gently streaming in the window, the nightmare almost forgotten  
  
She awoke with a start and padded barefoot to the window, fear creeping over her. She pressed her hands against the glass and in the night saw a dark figure that filled her heart with terror she knew it saw her -it raised its hand toward her- and she was stricken dumb rooted to the spot. She felt she was sinking into a dark pit. She saw a vision of a great city sinking into the ocean and knew she had caused it. How long she stood there she didn't know it could be minutes or ages of this world. She woke again in her soft bed with autumn sunlight gently streaming in the window, the nightmare almost forgotten  
  
She looked down and in the grass two footprints and in them the grass was withered and faded  
  
The dark was coming on fast as they hurried home  
  
Elsie  was bored she sat as the rain pounded the Window everyone was gone and wouldn't be back tell evening. She had wanted to go out side yesterday had been a crisp fall day but overnight the clouds had blown in and quickly after came the first drops of rain, tap tap taping on the roof. The light rain turned quickly into a storm as the angry wind tried to blow the autumns leaves off and leave the trees bare and desolate for the long winter.  by which turned into  
As the wind did its best to blow the autumn leaves from the branches of the summer trees.  
  
She decided to work out she did push-ups and sit ups then on her muddy clothes to go on a run as she stepped out the wind and rain buffeted her face and she gasped Witt the cold.  
  
She almost didnt go but then she decided it would be worth it.  
  
The storm blew and buffeted against the house Elsie lay awake listening she was glad she was inside warm and snugg. But then she realized she was hungry this wouldn't do at all.  
  
"Susan, are you still awake Elsie quietly whispered.  
  
"I am now" Susan responded trying to pretend like she had been sleeping  
  
"I am too Addie" said "I like the storm it's cozy"  
  
 We should go downstairs and get a snack" Elsie said I'm hungry  
  
"What, your not full from the brownies and ice cream? Your gonna be as big as a barn if you keep eating so much" said Susan and none of the boys will like you ill come back from university and they will have put you out to pasture with the cows and the sheep!  
  
Oh please the brownies were two hours ago and I'm a growing girl  
  
I'm a growing girl Elsie responded  
  
"Oh I'm sure your growing plenty" Susan said In a sarcastic voice even though Elsie was little more then a slip she liked to tease her  
  
"Well I'm sure the boys won't like you you might be pretty but your idea of a good time is doing your homework and not getting in trouble"  
  
I'd rather be wild and free Elsie replied  
  
 Remember at the church picnic you tried to study Aabd  
  
The girls all had their own room, but after Addie and Elsie started sleeping in Elsie's room and Susan joined them most nights.  
  
I'm hungry to said Addie lets get a snack and tell stories in bed.  
both her older sisters adored Addie she was sweet and shy. They also knew she was very kind hearted and sensitive so they teased each other a lot but were careful to make sure they never said anything that might make her sad. But just heaped love and hugs on their littlest sister.  
  
Oh fine said Susan trying to sound exasperated but secretly pleased .  
  
Lets tell scary stories, I know one I can tell about the little girls in a lighthouse!  
  
You will not tell that story I know that one I hate it it scares me"  
 It's just pretend kind of like how a boy would ever like someone who thinks homework and staying out of trouble is fun!"  
  
It's just pretend kind of like a boy asking you out for a date it didnt happen and it never will. Elsie said then burst out laughing at her own joke.  
Addie and elsie both laughed at her big sister  
  
They didnt mind teasing Susan because she was quite stunning and more and more she was beginning to realize it so they felt it their duty to keep her in her place  
  
Even though it was a joke Addie and Elsie had both been sad as Susan had spent less time going out traipsing through the woods with them. She wanted to study at the university of edingburouhh and had been increasingly  more studious.  
  
They snuck quietly down the stairs careful not to make a sound the moonlight played shadows on the walls all was quiet. The moonlight came through the window casting shadows of the rain drops on the wall. Elsie watched them slide as gravity pulled them downwards to the earth.  
  
and gave the downstairs a different and quiet feeling.  
  
What should we get Susan asked?  
  
Hey shush look the lights on in the study.  
  
Is father still up  
  
Lets go look.  
  
Do you want to get in trouble  
  
I don't think he will mind it's not like we're little.  
  
It's not like I'm little Susan said  
  
Your not much bigger then us Elsie said her voice rising above a whisper.  
  
Well anyways I'm gonna peer around the corner maybe he just left the lights on.  
  
Elsie peered around the corner quiet like a cloud floatin across the night sky.  
  
Their father sat at the table his normally joyfyl face seemed lined With concern, his face was in his hands.  
  
Oh no Elsie said, the jovial mood  
 Suddenly gone.  
  
What's up Susan asked  
  
Elsie whispered to Susan poor father I know he misses mother terribly.  
  
We all do.  
  
She was the kindest person  
  
She was too good and pretty for this world.  
  
Lets go in Elsie whispered  
  
Are you sure  
  
Yes let's cheer him up.  
  
and all three girls slowly padded into the room.  
  
His face broke into a smile when he saw his girls. Hello he said warmly but Elsie could tell his voice was strained.  
  
He stood up abruptly and looked around distractedly Elsie walked over to him and hugged him from the side.  
  
What is it she asked?  
  
Well he said then stopped and tussled Elsie's blond hair  
  
I suppose soon you'll be getting to old for that he laughed.  
  
Never Elsie replied back. Hugging him even harder suddenly worried she might lose him too.  
  
He smiled and started again well perhaps we should go sit down on the couch.  
  
And hey he said brightening out of his reverie how about a snack.  
  
  
I wasn't sure if I should tell you this he went on slowly. I kept it to myself about a week now. But I thought I should tell you. It's strange I don't think it means much in fact I'm confused about it and what it means, probably nothing mind you.  
  
  
  
They found a pendulen  
  
It seems that some archaeologists were in South America.  
  
They were deep underground in some ancient ruins  
  
And it's late shouldn't you girls be in bed I know it's the weekend tomorrow but its he looked over at the great clock on the wall, 1230 am!  
  
Susan was hungry again Elsie quipped.  
  
Addie laughed and there father said that sounds like Susan while looking at Elsie.  
  
You little wretch  
  
Elsie couldn't sleep Susan said she was hungry  
  
When are you not hungry there father laughed.  
  
And I couldn't sleep because of the storm Addie said but I like it it's cozy I don't know what I love more the rain on the roof or when the wind blows and it tip taps on my window.  
  
But tonight's more like a roar and a bang bang bang wake up! Wake up! Go eat! your hungry! On the window Elsie said.  
  
So really it's the storms fault I'm still up and realized I was hung, err Susan was hungry  
  
Elsie said  
  
Yes it is a bit loud why don't we make a fire and listen to the storm and definitely need snacks.  
  
They all cuddled on the couch in front of the warm fire cracking an throwing it's cozy light on the room.  
  
Susan came in with hot cocoa and warm cookies I'm glad we had some dough left over she said.  
  
Yes it is a good thing Elsie replied.  
  
Thank you Susan  
  
  
  
  
  
There was a young lad he was shy and often spent his time daydreaming about a girl when he should have been studying. Try as be might he couldn't talk to get he got too tongue tied.  
  
He couldn't believe anyone could be so kind and beautiful she lit up everyone she went in.  
  
Even the gods bowed their heads in reverence.  
  
And there was a madcap young man.  
  
Oh father Susan said her voice quivering  
  
The girls crowded around and hugged him.  
  
  
  
We don't know what it means exactly  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
Threats  
In prisonered gods  
Wizards trying to untether world  
Capitalists trying to exploit other world but know nothing about it  
  
  
Chapter 4  
She woke, it was dark, with a start she realized she must have fallen asleep, the pine trees seemed to crowd around her and the silent cairn seemed cold and remote. The forest felt angered like she had disturbed something sacred something she had no business being around in the first place.  
  
She got up and stood for a minute to gather her thoughts, she felt light headed. Angry crows gathered thick in the trees above her, scolding her  
"Intruder, intruder, leave!"  
At least that's what she imagined they sure seemed unfriendly.  
  
As her head cleared she began to hurry down the now darkening path. She felt scared and tired and confused. It was a cold night so she knew father would have a large fire going in the fireplace. The thought of warm cocoa by the fire made her feel a little less scared as she picked up the pace; the wind blowing through her thin blue dress and light sweater.  
  
The windy forest path was a couple miles from her house and she began to hurry to make it back before it was totally dark. The great trees stretched all around her and swayed in the wind.  
  
The evening shadows grew darker and as fear settled over her  
She thought to her self "I'm just being silly it's just as safe now as when I started out up here in the bright autumn daylight .  
  
Dark thoughts and faded scratchy memories pressed around her as she stumbled home on the darkening path.  
  
What was that dream she had had? It kept pressing on her just out of memory  
  
Those were strange dreams i had she thought to her self.  
  
As she approached the house she peered through the dark twilight. she realized that something wasn't right, there was no soft glow of warm inviting light spilling from the windows.  
  
As she got closer she noticed woth a rising panic other things that werent right; when she had left the grass was trimmed and everything was neat and in order and the garden and grounds were well tended. She began to walk faster and thought it was probably just a trick of the twilight. She pulled her coat closer and shivered as a cold wind blew across the path.  
  
She slowed as she walked up the Path and got closer to the house and stopped on the steps.  
  
Everything was covered in dust and spiderwebs it looked like no one had lived there for years.  
  
She was confused and started to feel a real sense of concern. As she struggled to understand what was going on. Everything was in a state of even more disrepair as she timidly walked up to the front door. She tried turning the Cold door handle but it was locked.  
  
Susan,  
  
Father,  
  
Addie?  
  
She called out timidly  
  
She tried to peer into the window but couldn't see anything. Dark was falling fast and she peered nervously over her shoulder into the blackness. She began to walk slowly around the great house trying windows and the side door, the kitchen door Blackdoor and the sun porch. All locked. The wind blew through the tall dark pines around the house, the ones that were so cozy and beautiful  when the house was full of light and happiness.  
  
The black door  
  
She began to feel more confused and panicked. How did everything get so overgrown in four hours.  
  
She stood unsure of what to do then a cold black fear settled over her. She felt she was being watched.  
  
Whose there she called out . He voice shook Terribly.  
  
Silence.  
  
Then she thought she heard a faint whisper she struggled to hear but couldn't make out any words.  
  
She stared hard at the forest it was almost totally dark but she thought she saw a darker shadow amongst the other shadows that made her blood run cold. She saw or felt something crawling towards her  
She tried to move but felt paralyzed like she was awake inside a nightmare. She knew she needed to run.  
  
Suddenly a bright light came around the corner of the house. She nearly jumped out of her skin with fright but then that turned to hope.  
  
Father? She called out hopefully  
  
Eeer oo are you missy? An older man he looked like a long since retired soldier asked timidly holding a bright lantern and a large shotgun tucked under his arm.  
  
Elsie noticed he had quickly and deftly slid the rifle forward and his right hand rested near the trigger now.  
  
Please Elsie said, I live here I'm just a little girl (she almost never referred to herself as a little girl but she felt very little and afraid) and I want to find my family.  
  
He stared at her so Elsie quickly repeated herself  
  
I'm looking for my family, they were here this morning they should have been back by now.  
  
Ain't no one here this day he said slowly then after a pause followed up with you ain't no spook or a fairy are ya?  
  
I don't rightly believe in spooks he thought to himself but that sure seems like a fairy.  
  
No I'm a girl Elsie grace Simmons I love here.  
  
Now missy he said lets be honest with each other.  
  
If you live here then I reckon I'm the king of France.  
  
Are You one of the school children ya shouldn't be up here playin it ain't safe. Your other friends around ? You best call them miss. And will be back to the village with us.  
  
I live here she went on timidly I don't know who you are but I'm not playing any tricks.  
  
At that moment Elsie felt a cold shudder and thought she saw or felt a shadow at the edge of the dark line of pines behind there house.  
  
She felt paralyzed and stared in terror  
  
Who goes there!  
  
The watchmen held his lantern up again  
  
Elsie felt a little better and she was sure whatever was haunting the shadows had fled.  
  
This is a strange night he muttered to himself  
  
Eer I'm Comin closer, no sudden movements all right ?  
  
Elsie felt it was a struggle to speak but managed a faint ok.  
  
He began to shuffle forward his right leg seemed to be lame.  
  
This is a strange night he mumbled to himself. What ill bloody do for a few quid.  
  
He stopped his diatribe as he approached and seemed to become a little less cantankerous.  
  
Now miss he said you seem like a nice type but you and your friends shouldn't be up here at night this place is closed I'm afraid.  
  
I dont Thank you, Elsie said but who are you why are you at our house.  
  
They hired me to watch this place no one else want the job they said there was spooks sure the constable comes up now en then and we jaw about the weather and potatoes. But I watch the place and nurse a pint down at ee pub from time to time.  
  
Things could be worse for and old soldier and sailor with one goo leg. Then agin they could be better but I was never much for complaining life's what you make it.  
  
I shoul never have ran away to sea but that's neither here nor there whats done is done.  
  
Neither betwixt nor between  
  
You ran away to see Elsie asked  
  
Ye when I was a wee lad I was born in Scotland me ole dad was a strict type so at 14 I up and ran to see then ended up a soldier, now I'm just a caretaker with one bad leg.  
  
  
  
The caretaker  
  
There is no caretaker the constable goes up there  
  
Ey ey you sure yourself  
  
What game you playin at?  
  
  
Be off er I put a whole in you big enough for birds to fly through he was shacking terribly and Elsie was too.  
  
  
He was handsome and charming every bit a gentleman but Elsie was troubled by him. He was haughty and superior but hid it under a layer of false personality.  
  
She also felt he was capable of not doing terrible things but of making others do them as he sat in the distance holding his followers in disdain.  
  
He had a beautiful girlfriend  but Elsie felt she might be good just fooled by his supposed kindness. He seemed very controlling of her. It made Elsie smoulder I wouldn't let any man .. Or. Women treat me like that.  
  
  
  
  
Elsie sat on her bed biting her lip and pondering. She wondered if she had misjudged him. As the others had been leaving her room and conversing in the hall he had slipped it briefly I'm on your side I'm gonna get you out of here.  
  
  
Ow don't do that she said smacking Elsie sharply.  
  
Do what Elsie asked  
  
Don't play coy with me  
  
  
Psst Susan.. Susan Elsie whispered I'm worried about that bear it could gobble us up with one paw. Susan was also concerned, too concerned to point out that bear don't eat with their paws. Instead she said me too I'm glad it's gone, but well I couldn't help feeling safer with it here it did drive away those soldiers.  
  
I know said Elsie but what if it was just lucky it went after them and not us. I'm worried it comes back for us, and what do you think of Addie saying its our friend?  
  
Everybody knows Addie's a sweetheart Elsie thought and she is inside and out and they think I am too but if they could see what I'm thinking sometimes they might change there mind They laughed as Ashe smiled at the joke  
  
Long ago when the world was wrapped in shadow  
In the ages of the endless moon  
A folk walked the land  
  
Come along she said curtly as she roughly grabbed her arm  
  
Ouch that hurts Elsie said  
  
She wanted to talk back but instead bit her lip as a small tear forced its way down her face. She felt hollow  
  
Ahh what are you doing she gasped and jumped away  
  
Your a strange one and no doubt and I'm gonna see you locked up proper with  
  
  
She stared out the window as thy drove through the dirty London streets, the rain steadily came from a dull gray sky, all the color seemed to be bleached from the world Just different shades of black and gray each more forgettable then the next. She bit her lip trying to hold back the tears, she wouldn't let them see her cry. But everything shook her nerve the tall dirty buildings the trash on the unkept sidewalks, the drawn faces of the strangers as they hurried about their sad business. The stern sallow faced woman up front and the over weight driver with his dark eyes. The way everyone kept handing her so roughly and talking about her in dark whispers.  
  
Elsie leaned back into the motor coach seat and clinched her eyes shut hoping this was all a dream. She tried to put the pieces together but they made no sense.  
  
Where had she been for the last six months? Maybe she was crazy like the doctors and psychologists of the last three days all said.  
  
Beyond the end of the world  
  
Katie Whitney  
  
  
She didnt like him but she wasn't sure why he was charming and carasmstic. He was good looking almost too good looking and it was obvious he knew it.  
  
Ms acted sickeningly sweet to Elsie around him and it made Elsie cross,  
  
Elsie sat on her hard bed and stared through the bars covering the small window; through the window she saw gray sky that matched her mood. She was in a small room with a hard bed two chairs and a wood table.  the bed was old and dirty and she didnt wanna sit on it let alone sleep in it. eventually exhaustion overcame her worries and she fell fitfully asleep that first night. She had checked herself for bug bites the next morning and was relieved not to see any.  
  
They had kept her in this room now for a week without telling her much. As far as she could tell the place was a juvenile detention center her boredom was punctuated by visits from stern people in suits or police officers who questioned her harshly. "Where are your parents?" Where have you been hiding? Sometimes they didnt question her sometimes they told her things. "It's gonna be much worse at your trial if you don't talk now"  
  
"Your a strange child no doubt" "you might be pretty but don't think thatwill get you any sympathy from the jury"   You better enjoy your room now you won't be living in such luxury soon!"  
  
Luxury? She thought a bare room with a bed a table and and stale bread water and something that resembled meat for most her meals.  
  
 She never cried when they were in the room but she always cried when they left. She also cried her self to sleep at night.  
  
She asked them questions to, where was her family where were her sisters she wanted to see them! We're they ok where had she been and why were they keeping her here.  
  
Yesterday a kinder policeman had come in. He was a bit over weight and spoke with a thick Irish accent. "I got a daughter just like you at home your age and all, I don't think your dangerous, he looked at the ground a lot when he talked like he was ashamed to be a part of keeping her locked up.  
  
Your a nice girl he said i bet this will turn out ok and youll end up in a nice orphanage" he meant it kindly but it brought her little comfort. She could tell he felt Sorry for her.  
  
He reached across to pat her back comfortingly then stopped with a jerk and pulled it back awkwardly back.  
  
Instead he just sighed and said I got a young one at home just like you. You done look like you'd do the things they say about you. All the same is there anythin ye want te get off yer chest.  
  
No I'm afraid not Elsie said unless you can answer some of my questions.  
  
I'm not allowed to tell you much well anything me dear. I'm sorry couldn't even if you were my own little one locked up in here.  
  
Why were you afraid to touch me Elsie asked.  
  
Afraid?  
  
He looked surprised I'm not afraid your a priso, err I mean a resident and it's against protocol.  
  
Elsie could tell he was lying and it made him uncomfortable.  
  
Also he said quietly there are some rumors ye see I didn't even want to come up here and question you but I had to and I was presently surprised your a nice well mannered young one. In another life I bet you and my little one could be right friends and I'm sorry for what your going through but there are rumors and they told me to be careful around yea.  
  
What kind of rumors Elsie persisted.  
  
He sighed I've already said touch and it's me that should be asking the questions that's why my chief sent me down here. But everything checks out and ill file my report back at the station and I'm sure things will work out ok don't you worry.  
  
But Elsie did worry and fretted she missed her family terribly and felt so alone the emptiness haunted her as she lay down to sleep that night.  
  
  
Elsie pushed the small bed to the far wall and climbed up to stare out the small dirty window through the metal bars. She looked up and could see the sun in the bright blue sky. It gave her hope.  
  
The next day was rainy and misty. She looked out the window at the gray world and sighed the hope had fled far away. Days went on and she seemed to lose count of time.  
  
 Today she had had no visitors and while she hated the visits the day had stretched on tell she was bored more bored then she had ever been before. Without a clock she had no idea of the time just dark and light were the only two tangible aspects of her life right now and emotions: worry sadness boredom occasionally hope but that was growing less each long day. The room was completely bare, nothing to write on, no books nothing to break the monotony.  She decided to exercise.  
  
She guessed it must be after six because of the fading twilight but wasn't sure. She had just finished exercising and was sitting on the bed red faced and out of breath.  
Tap tap tap. She heard a light knocking on the door.  
  
Come in she said timidly.  
  
No one had knocked before as they came in; they had simply barged. suddenly she and it made her nervous that someone would.  
  
The door opened and a kindly and eccentric looking gentleman walked in. Her worries disappeared almost entirely.  
  
Hello she said are you a professor? the man looked like a professor, with his worn tweed coat was a dead giveaway she thought: he had the look of a man that had spent long years buried in manuscripts and books deep tucked away in libraries in the quieter parts of the world.  
  
Professor he said? And how did you know that, your a smart one and no doubt about it very perceptive but They always like the smart ones if I do say so myself.  
Please sir she said, who are They?   What, whats that he responded, I suppose were getting a little ahead of ourselves he said and smiled at her.  
  
I've been following a long with your case extraordinary, quite extraordinary. He said, he had a curious habit of repeating his words  
  
Elsie felt a small glow of joy returning that she hadnt felt in months was this a possible friend who could help her?  
  
The professor went on "yes yes it's all quote extraordinary, when I was a young lad everyone thought me a bit balmy" he said leaning back in his chair. And look at me now.  
A small smile creeped over Elsie's face as she looked At the eccentric old professor with his over sized tweed coat.  
"A perfect picture of gentility" he said as he leaned back and put his hands together by placing the tip of each finger against the tips of his fingers on his other hand  
"why I'm quite sure my students must mistake me for the university president what with my suit and genteel manners"  
  
I got a chance to explore the Egyptian pyramids he rambled on abruptly changing the subject. I've got a picture actually, magical places those pyramids, people just don't understand, not at all, no not at all, it's such a shame. He paused staring off into space suddenly serious from he's earlier lighthearted manner.  
As Elsie looked at him she saw a hint of something deeper (but also elusive and difficult to pinpoint, was it nobility?) just beneath the surface of his eccentric appearance she also saw keen intelligence in his bright eyes.  
  
"About that picture though, here let me find it That picture though here look here he began to rummage through his leather carrying case. He seemed to be having trouble as he kept rummaging around and pulling out random and odds documents, old books and tattered papers that  looked like students homework all in A disheveled pile. After a few unsuccessful attempts to locate it he dumped  The whole thing out on the table. Let's see let's see it's got to be around here somewhere He moved papers around this way and that,  
  
There it is!  
  
he pulled out an old black-and-white photograph that had been weather beaten and faded by the sun. He handed it over to Elsie.  
  
"Oh my" Elsie said you were quite handsome when you were a young man.  
  
Were!  
  
He said quite indignant Let us be careful with our verb tenses young lady. Clearly you must not have learned this yet but the verb were implies past tense, you were intending to use "are" the present tense, My looks age like a fine wine. And let's be honest there's twice as much of me to be as good looking now. He said before letting out a chuckle And patting his round belly.  
I'm sorry Elsie said not meaning to offend the man.  
Oh don't mention it he said beaming a smile at her  
 Elsie knew she really liked the scatter brained old professor. She was a perceptive girl and knew his playful batter was an attempt to cheer her up.  
  
Well you're probably wondering why I came here Would you like a cup of tea? When do the serve  tea at in this blasted place. Not exactly Buckingham palace now is it?  
  
No maybe if the palace has a basement with an old dungeon in it and I don't think they serve tea Elsie said.  
  
Oh quite right,  quite right well Let's go over to the café across the street.  
I don't think they'd allow that Elsie said  
  
Bah Nothing of the sort they'll  do what's good for them the professor said  
  
I've had first-hand experience with a situation similar to yours. It actually was in Egypt near that pyramid that's why I showed you that picture of it. I was in the regiment back then of course. At the time I wasn't a  scholar I hadn't found my true calling Not that being a soldier doesn't have its perks like Getting to wear the same thing every day, and not have people make snide comments he looked fondly at his old tweed suit coat and Elsie got the feeling he wore it quite often, possibly everyday.  
  
"Maybe you should try carrying your gun again like when you were a soldier that might prevent snide comments" Elsie teased back  
Yes quite right and my students might give me a little more respect too, no more silly excuses for late papers. You see professor my great aunt twice removed d again. Third time this term, rotten luck, so I'm sure you quite understand why my papers not done And You won't be docking any points"  
  
I bet your students like you Elsie said to him.  
  
Yes probably more then they should I'm getting soft in my old age, and did you know I heard there is a rumor going about the college that you can get me to go off on tangents if you ask me questions about my flower gardens , preposterous! my lectures cover just what they are supposed to.  
Do you have a flower garden Elsie asked?  
Starts talking abou garden  
  
Elsie struggled to hold back a giggle as she realized he was going off on a tangent right now.  
  
Where were we he said, ah yes those curious Egyptian ruins. There are lots of strange places, magic if you will, around this world the ancient Druids and Egyptian priests might have been more in tune with these types of things  then we have them credit for. The whirling and clanging of machines and small everyday gossip has driven the strange, the beautiful and the magical  into the shadows.  
  
Do you believe in magic Elsie asked  
  
Well he went on choosing his words carefully.  
  
I believe in the strange.  
  
Lets just say I'm open minded but I'm a scientists and scientists like proof, well the good ones anyway.  I need some sort of proof.  
  
  
 As I was saying we were in Egypt at the time quite a wonderful place we were stationed near by and took a weekend trip to see the pyramids. It was Jamison, Charles myself and Charles sister and her friend who had come up to visit.  We really though it was going to be a grand weekend and brought our cameras and everything.  
  
We took the train out to Cairo and then got a guide to take us with camels out to the ruins.  
  
Blast it all where the d did Jamison get off too!  
  
At first we thought it was a prank we searched tell late afternoon and then became really worried. We alerted the authorities and the British consulate got involved too.  
  
Now here's the strange part the professor went on. We were all devastated he was my best mate we had been through a war together I felt the loss Keenly. I could tend to be a bit shy in my youth and he had an exciting social life there was never a dull moment in university my grades suffered a little but I wouldn't change it for the world.  
  
Well time moved on is it is inclined to do the days turned to months and then a year. We all gave up and were left with an empty hole that had once been filed with joy and companionship.  
  
He noticed a slight flush of pain and his heart broke for the blond girl sitting in front of him who had already experienced so much tragedy.  
  
He continued on well ten years went by I finished my doctorate and did a post doc it was the summer of my third year as a professor I still saw the girls and we decided to go back I don't really know why we were all kind of horrified of the places for years but we decided to go back.  
  
We checked k to the beutiful hotel with its green gardens fountains and white Walls.  
  
Lets go to the pyramids tonight chalmalebge said. Perhaps fate had taken us by the hand but we all felt we must.  
  
Well we had a lot of delays and ended up getting back to the pyramids close to dusk. We see a man walking at us out of the desert we all thought it was a specter, lady whitmore normally so poised and proper clutched my arm in fright.  
Well I'd it had been a specter that would have been less strange. It wa Jamison I'm quite sure I turned deathly white.  
  
"Where have you been he joked with his charming smile" I've been looking for you the last 6 hours! Jolly rotten to leave a fella like that if you didn't want my company you could have just said something he said with a roguish laugh.  
  
Lady anne shrieked and last out my knees gave and I buckled to the ground.  
  
Jamison lady whitmore said in a voice as quiet as death is that you? Where have you been?  
  
What do you mean well looking around this tall triangle then I crawled in for a look around, I must have been tired then I thought I think I fell asleep for a spell maybe an hour then I came out and have been looking for all of you. " he had said  
  
well I'm sure I don't need to tell you that you could have cut the tension and shock with a knife  
  
He went on "I feel maybe I got a touch to long of sun maybe we can get back, you all seem more struck by the sun then me"  
  
Jamison, lady anne went on in. Quiet whisper "that was ten years ago, you disappeared ten Years ago, where have you been and she began to sob quietly."  
  
If this is a Prank he went on you really have got me but it would be nice to all have our laugh and get back for a meal.  
  
I remember the next moment like it was this morning he took a step towards us and we all backed up in fear,.  
  
  
  
When we are exploring it one of my mates went missing he was AWOL for 8 years then he shows up again one day and hadnt aged a day. Good luck and good genes they all said As they locked him away for desertion. Not the kind of good luck I would want to have mind you.  
They agreed to lower his sentence to a year and a dishonorable discharge if he would agree to be studied. Which he did. I met up with him again and he told queer stories some of them were fascinating but some would make your blood run cold. We didnt believe him at all of course he became quite a hermit and a recluse.  
  
Of course I stayed in touch with him over the years, eventually he recanted said he made the whole thing up but I didn't believe one word of it.  
  
Didnt believe one word if what Elsie asked?  
  
Oh his recant the whole story I believe he was telling the truth and then later said it was a lie but that was a lie if that makes sense?  
  
Um I think so you believe he was telling the truth about his mysterious disappearance then later changed his story but that was when he lied.  
  
Quite right quite right the professor agreed.  
  
But Why would he do that, asked Elsie?  
  
Well it was before he shut himself off from the world I think he wanted to just go back to having a normal life.  
About a year after he was found, right after he got out of prison he started to tell outlandish tales. At this point his life was still fairly normal he came from a wealthy respected English family, his father had been knighted and everyone seemed to want to put the whole affair behind them.  
  
He started at the university in Cambridge studying physics and  history, Celtic folklore and theoretical Physics to be precise of course the choices are quote obvious what he was going after now and even then I think everyone knew the odd combination had something to do with his disappearance.  
  
I think it made his father angry he didn't study economics or business and take over the family empire. I always heard his father was a cold and distant man.  
  
We spent quite a bit of time together, I was his best mate at the time, but I was studying engineering. Everyone thought his choice was a bit odd but he began to develop far more wilder and odder traits.  
  
He still managed to put up a good front, dashing cheery a perfect English gentleman and he was quite popular.  But we spent a lot of time together and I began to see the psychological tears forming in his mind.  
  
 What kind of things Elsie said?  
  
Well he disappeared again twice right mid semester, failed all his classes. he also started to tell stories about dark shadows haunting him shortly after he started to break into people's houses he did it three times and his family managed to get him out of it each time but the third time, well that's when he got committed.  
  
When he got out after all that he renounced all his old stories and moved out into the woods, it's quite sad rally.  
Why do you think he spirited himself away?  
  
Why? The professor responded, it's difficult to say, the mind is a delicate and complicated thing. Why does anyone do the things they do? But in his case I think I know a few pieces of the puzzle. Some of them are quite obvious I think he got tired of being disbelieved he was always a very truthful man, I also think he didnt want to disgrace his family anymore. Over Time  his younger brother took his place and his family was slowly pushing him out. I also think he had grown quite sad and felt isolated. I also think he had a secret or secrets to hide. He also firmly believed his life was in danger and also anyone around him.  
  
Did you believe that, said Elsie?  
  
Hmm, I'm not totally sure and well to be honest my feelings now are that he might just be a troubled young man whose star shown to bright and he descended into madness.  
  
You think he's out of his mind? Whispered Elsie suddenly seeing her life descending down a dark and lonely path.  
  
Well yes and no the rumors made him far crazier then he was and i suppose  I'm guilty of believing them just like everyone else it's hard to separate the fanciful from the real and as he isolated himself we slowly lost contact.  I never once had a conversation with him that I wouldn't swear he was as normal as any man can be, which mind you is not saying all that much.  
  
But some of the things he said were and still are hard to swallow.  
  
And your case is much different then his what i want for you is to find your parents And let you all go back to being a family with your sisters!  
  
I think by helping you I also may learn things and after speaking here now i just want to help you.  
  
At the point the professor paused, Elsie could tell he was troubled.  
  
Well Elsie said is the story over, that's how it ends a man with such promise simply fading away?  
  
No, no not if I can help it and that's part of the reason I'm here I believe his story well I want to believe it I suppose I contradict myself. To speak plainly he always struck me as a sane man but his tales were not the tales of a same man. i also have found other stories and legends that lend credence to what he claims but I couldn't sit here and tell you I have proof and for that reason the evidence points to a crazy man.  
I have been searching for evidence and I think that you are evidence that strange things can and do happen.  
  I want to find evidence that it's true.  
  
Well Elsie said trying to take everything in, I have been known to tell stories too, but I believe them. Well I also made them up when I was younger which makes it harder for people to believe me know.  
  
How much younger the professor asked?  
  
Well Elsie replied smilingly weakly last year but that's a long time ago and they were just fairy tales but then when I really saw things I stopped making things up.  
  
Quite right, what types of things did you see? Asked the professor.  
  
Well Elsie said she suddenly felt very shy especially now that she was locked up which made her feel like maybe she was crazy.  
  
Just well I heard whispers in the forest twice and one night, well it could have been a dream but I woke and looked out the window and I saw something dark, a shadow it terrified me I woke the next morning and had forgotten all about it but the next day when I went to play the grass was withered were I had seen it, father said it was normal for their to be dead spots in the grass.  
  
Hmm did you tell him about your dream? Asked the professor  
  
No I didn't at the time it seemed silly, I just asked why the grass might be dead and he just laughed and said it was fall and that's what grass does after a long summer.  
  
Yes it is rather curious, the professor responded.  
  
What do you make of it all asked Elsie?  
  
I don't rightly know, I have some theories of course but there all rather wild. For the first time a slight cloud past over his normally confident and joyful features. He stared at the ground and sighed. But the thing is all  
I have is pieces and I haven't been able to put them together. In fact the only thing I feel confident of is that I don't have all the pieces.  
  
Am I one of the pieces Elsie asked timidly.  
  
That seemed to shack him out of his reverie, oh no no good gracious no. He said then paused.  
  
Well he cleared his throat, I suppose you are but I don't like to put it that way. To me your just a young girl who needs to be reunited with her family. I want to help my friend that's what dragged me into all this. So it is a puzzle but to me it's people I care about and that's all.  
  
You do understand he asked hopefully  
  
Yes of course Elsie said and smiled. You want to help your friend, you think we share some similarities and now by helping me you might help us both.  
  
Yes exactly he smiled, but I do hope it's not to late to help him. He has isolated himself for far to long and I haven't seen him in years it's probably Been ten or fifteen now, I have tried my best but never gotten a reponse.  
  
  
But what we need is some immediate action you shouldn't be locked up in here like this.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
Right then the door burst open it was the driver from the car with his sneering smile, visiting times up.  
  
Could we possibly have a few more minutes the professor asked politely  
  
No, he responded in a blunt manner. Elsie saw two policeman outside they both walked into the room, time to go one of them said roughly.  
  
Yes yes let me just gather my papers.  
  
No none of that one of them grabbed his arm roughly it's time to go the professor began to frantically gather his papers then accidentally spilt some in his haste, one of the officers grabbed a handful and shoved it it in the bag.  
  
Please the professor  pleaded some of these are priceless.  
  
They ignored his pleas, shoved the rest of the papers in his bag and pushed him roughly for the door, goodby Elsie he said dont give up hope  
  
  
 well you did to missing for seven months and that's hard to make up. You really don't remember anything?  
  
No nothing I was up by the cairns playing and then things are a little foggy but I woke up hurried home and saw the house all empty. She paused as the emotions got to her and tried to hold back the tears.  
  
I think it's time we went and visited him and I want you to come.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
Ms Cornelius came in all in a titter like a young (but quite annoying) fickle teenager going to a dance.  
She  was wearing far to much make up and perfume and barely seemed to notice Elsie as she flitted absent mindedlee  about the room.  
  
She suddenly seemed to realize Elsie was in the room and grimaced, here put this on and be quick about it she said as she went to check her self in the small round mirror on the wall.  
  
Elsie contemplated being stubborn and refusing but realized it wasn't worth the fight.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
There was another man wearing a black suit that didnt fit quite right. He clearly considered himself a charming gentleman.  
  
My dear girl she said in a sickeningly sweet voice, so good to have you back.  
  
Elsie glared back at her biting her tongue in anger.  
  
I understand your confusion she sad patting her on the head like a child, at that moment another man walked in it was a policeman.  
  
We're all glad your safe of course I'm on my way to the London grill, she paused as if she Expected that name to mean something To Elsie.  
  
Instead elsie just looked at the faces of the policeman ms Cornelius and the other gentleman with them.  
  
You see my dear she said youve been taken advantage of. It appears that your father had discovered some sort of a treasure and quite a bit of unscrupulous people are after it.  
  
I'm afraid that Mr. Professor took You for a fool along With his associate. Apparently he showed you some old photo of a man that never ages. Come we all know you have an overactive imagination but even that must be to preposterous for you she said Reverting back to her superior tone Which Elsie  preferred to the sweet fake one. She laughed shrilly and the other two men laughed with her.  
  
That photograph was taken recently and made to look old. They wanted to gain your confidence everybody thinks that perhaps your father showed you where that treasure is.  
  
  
He was well dressed, his dark gray suit was cleary very expensive and it was obvious from the way everyone spoke to him that he was very well respected.  
  
He seemed nice but Elsie wasnt sure hot she felt.  
  
Here let me have a moment to speak with her he said.  
  
The others left but Elsie could tell  
Ms was not happy about it but she daren't correct him.  
  
Do you mind if I sit down he asked politely.  
  
Elsie felt a surge of anger rise up and she wanted to give him a smart reply but she just stayed silent looking at him warily as a cornered prey watches the hunter.  
  
I'm sorry he said i know this is difficult but i am on your side I want to find out what happening and help you find your family and get you out of here.  
  
What is happening Elsie asked and how can they keep me locked up.  
  
He sat down on the bed and sighed.  
  
Elsie stood warily waiting to hear what he had to say.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
he stared in awe at the massive warlike army filtering silently through the dark pine clad vallry valley.  
  
  
  
CHAPTER fight  
Elsie heard the light click and saw the door slide silently open. Whose there she said timidly pulling the blankets up as if those might somehow protect her. In spite of her fear she still noticed how rough they felt. Nothing like the soft blankets of her home, and her comfortable cozy little room. For a few seconds there was no more noise and Elsie thought she imagined it. Her thoughts turned back to her cozy room and her sisters and father she started to think about how much she missed them all when  
  
Then she heard it again her insides gave a lurch as she saw the door ghost slowly ever so slightly open apparently on its own accord.  
  
It startled her terribly and She almost screamed in terror but couldn't.  
  
Now Elsie was certain the door had slid open even more and she saw or felt a shadow slip into the light.  
  
Shh she heard someone whisper, I've come to get you out of here your in danger.  
  
Two thoughts crossed her mind to scream for help and to silently trust him. She decided to trust him then run when she made it out side.  
  
It was the coldest winter they had had in ages.  
  
  
Elsie woke with a start, if she had been in her own comfortable bed she probably would have screamed, but instead she just froze itching the blankets close as if they could somehow save her.  
  
She tried to ask whose there but the words froze in her mouth. A dark shape glided in and whispered shh speak quietly.  I've come to get you out of here.  
  
your a girl! Elsie exclaimed far louder then she meant to.  
  
Shh yes she said, were you expecting a man she asked a slight trace of humor ran through her words but  
Her words seemed playful almost but Elsie wasnt quite sure.  
  
Elsie  notice she was sleepy and confused. UBy now she had sat up and was trying to peer through the dark at who it was that had come so unexpectedly into her room in the middle of the night.  
  
Elsie was still trying to decide if she could trust the stranger as the thought crossed her mind that she seemed to have a lovely voice, it would have been soothing in any other situation.  
  
  
We need to hurry we don't have much time she said now with a sense if urgency.  
  
How do I know I can trust you Alesia asked and why shouldn't I scream for help?  
  
Help, from your captors. Trust me there nothing but pawns but that doesn't make them any less dangerous. In fact your in grave danger.  
  
The more she spoke the more Elsie found herself trusting her. In any other situation she wouldn't have fine but she decided to tag along then run for it or scream for help in the street.  
  
Her voice was the last thing Elsie expected.  
  
Ok I'm coming Elsie said but I still don't know if I can trust you if you try anything ills scream for help and kick and bite and punch you.  
  
Her voice softened, I'm sure you will by there won't be any need of that.  
  
I'm tessa she said. But come if we're to get away we must go now.  
  
Elsie groped in the dark as she quickly put on her pants and sweater. She buried her face briefly in the softness of her favorite sweater, the one comforting link she had left from the life she had been so violently torn from. A brief vision passed quickly through her mind of hugging her mother after she had bought her the sweater, it had always been her favorite.  
  
She chocked back the piercing pain of sorrow and it fled away through the darkness As Tessa slowly opened the door. Once again fear grabbed her, could she trust whoever this was?  
  
Elsie saw in the dim hall might she was wearing tight black leggings and a black shirt. Elsie realized she had an athletic body and was also graceful she reminded her of a ballerina and a gymnast. Elsie tried to she her face but couldn't it was cloaked. She wore a robe and carried a short staff.  
  
She was athletic and graceful and even though and couldn't see her face she felt she could trust her.  
  
All right when we get in the hall don't make any noise. There is a car waiting for us outside.  
  
She worried she was being  
  
  
She felt she was surrounded by strong powerful rushing wind and the air felt electric full of power and force.  
  
The swirling eddies of chaos and calm colliding.  Elsie quickly felt disorientated grab ahold of me closely Tessa shouted above the raging turmoil.  
  
Elsie clutched her tightly and felt better. She was surprised how strong and powrerful she felt but also comforting.  
  
Oh no she heard her gasp.  
  
  
Her voice seemed deep and powerful everything stood still and lightning seemed to fill the air but then there iwas an exhausted pause Her voice became less deep but far wilder the electricity seemed to gather around the ground she caught a glance of get beautiful face and was shocked by the exhaustion written so plainly  
Then it felt like the gathering of a wild storm compressed into endless seconds  
  
She raised her staff and lightning split the air and then time seemed to return to its normal pace fur everyone  
  
I normally like to use my magic for growing and healing things  
  
  
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the days stretched on, no one had  come in now for 8 days but they had felt like a painful eternity Elsie was growing more and more bored and tired she felt lonely and without any motivation.  
  
Thoughts of things not turning out became fewer and were replaced with thoughts of things not turning out.  
  
we have a few things on our agenda we need to lay low disappear in fact we pulled a little power play to get you out but it was more a trick and won't last we need to let you visit your sisters to and get them out.  
  
it was hard to believe that the night before had only been a dream but it also seemed to surreal and impossible to have happened.  
  
She sighed and thought moodily of the long tedious day that faced her but then she noticed a slip of paper. She padded across to it the floor cold on get bare feet.  
  
It was crumpled and there looked like what might be blood on it. She unfolded it slowly and read what appeared to be elegant writing in a strange language and an address she could make out of a place in northern London.  
  
she decided it would be worth going there  
  
Hello he said warmly  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
Chapter 4  
Oh Addie she burst out into tears at how thin and gaunt her little sister looked. Her pretty face seemed to be lined with sadness and worry, but her face lit up as she threw herself on Elsie. Elsie hugged her tightly back happy but worried about how thin and frail she felt. Elsie realized she was crying but that Her warm tears were tears of joy now at hugging her little sister again.  
  
They sat down on the cold hard chairs at the mean little table, Elsie looked around the room which was more like a prison an realized she had it better off then her younger sister.  
  
 They sad you were dead Addie whispered quietly as if even saying the words was too terrible.  
  
No Elsie said I'm not and Susan's not either.  
  
They both sat in silence for a while Elsie's arm wrapped tightly around Addie's frail shoulders.  
  
I love what you've done to the place Elsie joked sarcastically.  
  
Elsie looked at the tight beds stacked 3 high with little room along all the walls. Do you sleep in those yes do you want to see my bed?  
  
Sure Elsie replied they went over to Addie's bed it was on the top bunk they climbed up and Elsie looked around.  
  
There was s small picture if there family smiling and happy mother and father both alive and happy fathers handsome face and mothers gentle beautiful face kind and gentle.  
  
 her smiling kind eyes and beautiful blond hair.  
  
Elsie felt chocked up and hugged Addie as she tried it stop the Tears. You look a lot like mother she said I always thought mother was the most beautiful person in the world but you might be just as pretty when you grow up she said to Addie. They leaned back in the cramped space with their backs against the wall and there heads almost touching the low ceiling which crowded down on them from atop the third bunk.  
  
Well Addie said smiling faintly I think you and Susan are both very beautiful and kind like mother.  
  
We're gonna get you out of here she whispered.  
  
I miss  
  
What do they feed you in this place Elsie asked her motherly instincts coming out.  
  
Mostly stale bread and water that tastes far to much like minerals. Sometimes some wilted vegetables.  
  
Oh Elsie Addie burst out I wish you could stay. She higher her sister tighter.  
  
Don't give up hope Elsie said. She knew they were being watched and didn't want to give anything away but she knew Addie needed something to hold into. She leaned close and whispered ever so quietly in Addie's ear "soon".  
  
Addie have her a strong smile.  
  
She knew Addie was fragile an the hopeless months had been hard  in her.  
  
So what happened to father Elsie said?  
  
Well it was terrible Addie replied.  
  
You don't have to talk about it if you don want to Addie said.  
  
No it's ok and seeing you gives me hope we can find him.  
  
We all got home and couldn't find you. Father was growing increasingly worried as the minutes stretched on. We searched the whole house over and over. Susan was terrified you should have seen her we had to stop for a few minutes for father to calm her. She was sobbing and couldn't catch her breath, it makes me ache inside just to remember. Elsie hugged her closer as she went on.  
  
Father asked me to stay with Susan in case you came back then hurried out and saddled shadow he said he was going to the cairns but he never came back oh it was terrible Addie sobbed.  
  
Susan and I sat holding each other waiting, waiting the world felt desolate and empty. Every minute hoping you and father would show uo. Some how eventually the sun rose as dawn spread its pale cold light over the world.  
  
We didnt know what to do so we went down to the police station. There was a Massive search but nothing turned up.  
  
  
They came and took us away.  
  
  
Well I'm here now Elsie smiled and were gonna all be together soon, you me father Susan. I'm sure Susan will become insufferable with out me teasing her and keeping her in line she teased.  
  
Addie smiled.  
  
Oh Elsie she said I keep remembering all the nice times we used to have. I feel like I'm too young to reminisce she smiled. Yes Elsie said I guess it's ok though it's portably just easier for you.  
  
Addie giggled.  
  
I miss the seasons, well celebrating them with everyone father tilling the fresh soil in the spring  
  
  
  
The thing is they found her ring, her wedding ring or at least one very similar to it her and fathers initials are engraved in it.  
  
Oh wherever did they find it Addie exclaimed!  
  
 Well that's the Curious part some scholars found it in Antarctica  
  
Antarctica?  
  
I don't understand Addie replied  
  
  
CHAPTER  
  
  
  
We know about the dark creatures following you were trying to keep you safe.  
 Walks in the evening with mother and father as the days grew longer the bright summers as the grass and hills become golden swimming and playing in the river.  
  
  
Oh yes Elsie said and then the fall my favorite season of them all the brilliant leaves gathering in the harvest pumpkins and  apple cider.  
  
Yes and then the winter the cozy evenings by the fire sledding and romping through the white snow covered hills, I do wish we got more snow in England.  
  
The world really can be a beautiful place.  
  
Yes, when you have those you love beside you Elsie said.  
  
And we're going to get them back she said firmly.  
  
I don't want to give you false hope but James told me something curious. You know how I  disappeared but was fine? Well she paused well he thinks that we should try to find mother.  
  
Oh Elsie! You mean it?! Addie exclaimed her  eyes shining bright with hope.  
  
Yes but it's a small chance but well I thought you should know. We all need to cling to hope.  
  
  
  
Dragon civilization  
Shape shifters  
Elves  
Dwarves  
Trolls  
 goblins  
  
Three worlds  
Real world aliens future  
Real world fantasy world  
Maybe these two the same  
  
Pure fantasy world  
  
  
The two worlds are tearing apart but they are bound together the dark matter between the two works like a form of gravity. The danger is that we fear the pull is forcing the earth out of its orbit and towards the sun we also fear that it is not an accident but is an intentional act to destroy this world.  
  
Who would do that Elsie whispered.  
Who? Whom? what? We're not sure we think it may be a dark entity that was banished from this works ages ago. A god if you will, but that being set up this tragedy and we fear others are continuing it.  
  
Why would they do that? Well we think they feel they are helping they want to let out those being imprisoned eons ago in the depths of time.  
  
  
  
  
They think there doing good to save the world from expiation.  
  
She felt they were sailing through space and time the air felt strangely charged. Everyone was quiet lost in there own thoughts.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
they are chasing down the bad guys  
  
susv  
  
  
  
CHAPTER  
He pulled out a curious looking case with a look of reverence written across his aged face. Elsie looked nervously over at the professor, he too sat enraptured.  
  
Professor smith sat quietly staring at the curious and ancient box. It was covered in what appeared. To be strange runes and heliographs. There also appeared to be some sort of ancient writing on it. The wood was dark and aged looking.  
  
It could have been her imagination but Elsie felt a strange sense of electricity in the room. She also felt drawn to touch the box but also terrified at the idea of touching it. The box seemed to fill the whole room and she couldn't take her wyes away from it.  Something inside her was being strongly drawn to the box.  
She wasn't sure how long she sat gazing at the box and it quickly had filled her mind, everything else seemed to have vanished from her attention. She felt sure someone or something was trying to communicate with her.  
  
A vision faded scratchy lingering on the edge of memory, twilight pinpoints like stars and a feeling of warmth and comfort but that fled a nightmare tore into get mind she struggled her arms were bound.  
  
a bright light was shining in her eyes voices echoed around her she felt panic and struggled her arms were bound to her sides she tried to scream panic crushed upon her she tried to scream but her mouth was bound.  
  
  
the memory fled and felt happy she was aware of Bright green grass and water.. A creek bright beneath the sun.  
  
Then a feeling of evil crept over her she was being watched.  
  
She felt she was seeing some one else's visions something that had or would happen.  
  
The memories fled.  
  
Something cold and sharp pressed into her arm and then warmth on her hand.  
  
It was in this reverie that She felt a gentle hand on her arm and realized she was leaning out towards it, about to touch it, professor smith was gently but firmly holding her back,  
  
She felt shacky and was resting on a couch staring up at the ceiling in the safe cozy office of professor  
  
Everyone was crowded around her anxiously  
  
I'm fine she smiled  
  
Would you like some juice  
  
Oh yes please I felt fine she said again but She did still feel weak.  
  
  
please forgive me he said it does have a curious draw and I am not totally convinced of its safety.  
  
Elsie sat back red faced and embarrassed by her impudence. I'm sorry she said I really am that was rude of me, she couldn't believe she had almost touched such a rare and valuable artifact.  
  
Don't mention it he said with a smile. I know you meant no harm and I don't show the case often; and anyways you helped confirm what I already suspected.  
  
What do you suspect the professor asked,  
  
well many things but the one to which i was just referring had to do with the draw the artifact and its contents have on people, some individuals seem to be more drawn to it then others but everyone seems to be pulled in by it also the pull seems to increase the longer your around it.  
  
But he added excitedly its not the box that's important but rather what is inside it that's so curious and strange.  
  
The box is simply used to contain it buy the story of the box is rather strange too. It was smuggled to me. The explorer who found it is in prison for murdering the entire expedition.  
  
Oh my Elsie said.  
  
Not too many details now James.  
  
Right right I'm sorry he said  
  
It's ok Elsie said  
  
Well I don't believe the whole narrative but we will get into that later for now ill discuss the contents of the box.  
  
Knossos  
  
I spend time researching it but feel that it May be risky to engage in prolonged research that involves directly handling or viewing the item.  
  
 Do you think it's dangerous Elsie said?  
  
I do he said but not for short periods of time. I still run experiments on it about an hour a week and I usually have one of my students keeping on eye on things.  
  
Have you found out anything curious the professor asked?  
  
Sadly I don't feel that I have found anything conclusive.  
  
we got excited originally we thought it was radioactive we went into the lab one evening when we thought it would be nice and quiet  
  
detected a faint gamma  
  
But it turned out it was just a careless graduate student  
  
Isn't that dangerous  
  
What the radiation  
  
It was just a check source  
  
He was in the middle of an experiment and was at Lunch when we went to his lab.  
  
  
  
  
  
It's not radioactive during one experiment we thought that we had potentially detected a gamma with around a 663 Kev energy deposition. We thought that night be a cesium isotope which emits at 662 Kev but the next times we ran the experiment  
Nothing turned up.  
  
but I think that be  
  
 physical contact greatly increases the draw. I think that's the  the ms  may have negative effects on the mind. Unfortunately my sample size is one, me.  
  
Smith went on, For that reason I never handle it with my bare hands. I did at first a number of times but it burned itself into my mind I couldn't stop dreaming and thinking about it. I would wake in a cold sweat strange visions haunting the fringes of my memory.  It began to worry me an I grew concerned I was losing my mind.  
And it's not just the box but the writing and the contents of the box that seemed to cause these strange effects.  
  
It is a good thing I was teaching that term I missed there straight lecture and one of my graduate students found me almost past out clutching the box. He said I was muttering something in a strange language. I asked him what it was and he said he didn't write it down he called the paramedics. Grad students these days are rather worthless, didnt wrote down what I was saying bah.  
Smith covered the box and leaned back in his chair and smiled. Of course the other scholars all screamed it was a ridiculous hoax.  
  
Ok I asked them then can I let some undergraduate students come in and touch it as part of an experiment.  
  
Preposterous the administrators in their  
  
  
You didn't mention this before the professor said, everyone said it had been a medical condition.  
  
Well yes I'm sorry for misleading you regrettable but necessary smith and really if you think about it did I mislead anyone? Should I tell the dean my condition arises from a curious box? And if you believe that i mislead you that would mean you believe this box was capable of something extraordinary, magical in fact. Do you believe that?  
  
Hmm yes I see your point the professor replied it is a bit far fetched. So what do you believe this box is?  
  
Hmm well I don't like to talk about it, I am rather enjoying my tenure and wouldn't my stayin around as an emeritus but I don't think they would keep a lunatic or a scientific fraud about the place.  
  
I do believe it is otherworldly.  
  
I understand said the professor. How did the box come into your possession?  
  
Ah yes it was an expedition to the Artic, we were studying diatoms,  of course I'm a physicist turned archaeologist so diatoms are not of particular importance to my research the expedition was mostly biologists and one chemist interested in the composition  of ice cores.  
  
Why did you choose to go james asked?  
  
It was a manuscript that I had the fortune of analyzing I think the two are related, can we see it james cut in.  
In his excitement he always became blunt but his glowing face and eager manner made it impossible to be offended by him, he clearly meant no harm his brain just lost touch with social graces.  
  
And what do other scholars say?  
A hoax.  
What about the effects?  
A placebo.  
  
  
They have been researching the area for quite some time all the way back to the ill fated Langford expedition, this was thirty years ago mind you and the failure to turn up anything afterword left everyone deeply disappointed. Though I must say the subsequent expeditions were not without scientific merit.  
  
What happened Elsie said feeling herself strangely drawn into the story.  
  
Right well ill just start from the beginning And trace out the whole story. The expedition sailed for South America In June, and mind you this was thirty years ago. They reached the port city of.  
  
  
she's sad Elsie said  
  
Who is sad?  
  
I'm not sure um I don't know  
  
A young girl I think I don't know I just I think she a  
  
  
  
CHAPTER  
Elsie reached our slowly and took hold of the locket. She held the delicate gold piece gently in her hand as a wave of emotion washed over her.  
  
She struggled to hold back the Tears as the memories came back of the locket around her mothers slender neck and her blond hair spilled around it. The sense of security and love she felt when mother held her close and she felt nothing could ever hurt her and nothing could ever go wrong.  
  
She felt a gentle hand on hers and looked up to see Susan her eyes were very moist and she reached over and clutched her sister tightly.  
  
I miss her so much she whispered.  
  
Me too Susan said.  
  
Elsie didn't look up but they way her voice shook she knew she was crying too.  
  
Ehh hmm  
  
Byzantine gently cleared his throat. Girls I don't want to give you false hope but there is a resin we showed this too you.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
CHAPTER  
Scholars fairly skel  
Artic expedition find one trapped in ice  
  
Elsie felt nervous and excited in the predawn glow of the chilly morning. The airfield was bustling as last minute preparations were made for the dangerous artic expedition. Elsie pulled her hood tighter feeling pale and self conscious she hadnt had time to properly do her hair. And not getting enough sleep always made her feel pale. She looked at herself in the mirror that morning and thought I need to get out in the sun more often.  
  
Susan came in looking beautiful and wide awake like she was going to a fancy wedding, Elsie rolled her eyes and tried to think of something smart to say but couldn't she was far too tired.  
  
She quickly got over it as she watched all the excited energy and bustling of the expedition about to leave.  
  
Addie stumbled sleepily into the hangar, she looked like a beautiful pale ghost hidden beneath her great overcoat.  
  
Hi addie Elsie said did you get breakfast.  
  
Oh I don't feel hungry quite yet Addie replied.  
  
Some of the expedition leaders wrte talking they all looked brave and strong. They were mostly from Oxford and edingvrugh university.  
  
  
A young dashing looking gentleman came over he was tall and skinny but muscular and had the look of an English gentleman. He moved with careless ease and was smartly dressed and looked wealthy. He also looked cold and haughty as he focused intently on the loading of a large wooden case.  
  
Lord Byron so glad you could make it! The professor embraced him warmly.  
  
Lord Byron spoke in a thick English accent and moved with athletic and careless ease. Ladies do glad you could make it he shook there hands all warmly and beamed a wide dashing smile at them.  
  
Elsie felt a little nervous hello she said my name is Elsie nice to meet you. Elsie though maybe he was nicer then she imagined he seemed very friendly and his smile made him seem much more approachable.  
And I'm Susan she said pleasure to meet you.  
  
Addie sat quietly in the folds of her great cloak, this is Addie Elsie said.  
  
Lord Byron someone called, got to run I'm sure will be fast friends soon will be spending a lot of time together.  
  
So, Elsie said your a lord? That does sound rather fancy its a shame your nit a night sir Byron has a nice ring to it.  
  
Elsie Susan said he is a knight he was  knighted last year the prof told me.  
  
Titles are meaningless he joked. They all boarded the airship and were soon off soaring above the English Channel. Lord Byron came over with some scones and milk any one hungry he asked cheerfully.  
  
I am Elsie said what about you she asked Addie?  
  
Oh yes please I'm very hungry now. These are delicious Susan exclaimed so fresh.  
  
Yes I picked them up this morning from my favorite bakery, unfortunately we won't have that conscience for long.  
  
A slim and beautiful lady waked in. She looked elegant and delicate  as soon as she noticed them she quickly turned and left.  
  
I tried to talk to her earlier but she didnt seem to want to have anything to do with me.  
  
What Elsie blurted out how could anyone not want to talk to you! She was really starting to like the English gentleman  
  
Well give it a few days he joked I'm sure you'll be quite sick of me.  
  
I do have quite a bit of energy, I was quite the terror as a youngster My parents didn't know what to do with me.  
  
Where are the professor joked. When did this change. I heard about the recent prank you pulled. You really Are quite the ringleader when it comes to making trouble.  
 That is true he laughed, my father was glad ill be up in the artic, Byron stood up doing his best to look stuffy and dignified.  
  
The artic. What the dither are you doing in the artic.  
He stood with his arms folded behind his back.  
  
Well he went on imitating his father At least you'll find it difficult to cause trouble up there nothing but snow and blasted ice. I don't know why you won't be reasonable and settle into banking like your older brothers.  
  
The professor laughed that is a good impression of your father.  
  
The girls all laughed too though they didnt know his father they could imagine a dignified English  banker.  
  
The funny thing is, he went on in his normal voice.  
  
My grandfather was quite the rouge and adventurer. He made out fortune but in his youth he was in and out of prison, lost his temper at a commanding officer and, plunk picked him up and tossed him into the sea.  
He was dishonorably discharged and ended up in a military prison.  
  
I love him though he wasn't a bad sort or a criminal just fiery and full of pasison. My mother says I take after him, but I have yet to end up in prison and I hope to keep it that way.  
  
It was a nice night for sailing, the dead were calm and it was a surprisingly warm night, they sat on the deck bundled in blankets and sweaters Talking and drinking warm cocoa and tea. The professor came out with a plate of warm cookies and freshly cut apples.  
  
Anna backed these he said for us he said.  
  
Is she coming out? Lord Byron asked perhaps a little too quickly no one caught it but susan who cast a knowing glance at Elsie who was too busy with her own love interest, the  
Plate of cookies.  
  
Oh my those do look delicious she said.  
  
No james said she said she had some reading to do and was going back to her bunk.  
  
Ah righto Byron said trying to hide his discouragement those do smell delicious your quite right.  
  
Well if you all going to be polite I'm gonna help mylsekf Elsie said grabbing one with a smile.  
  
Everyone else took one too. Oh my these are delicious Elsie said.  
  
I quite agree Susan said. What do you think Addie Susan said.  
  
Good Addie said with a smile. Elsie knew she would say more if there were less people around.  
  
I could see why being a professor would be nice Susan said. Going on cruises summers off not worries.  
  
Oh hold up a minute james laughed. You might not be paid for the summer but that doesn't mean you won't be working a lot or faculty want a 11 month appointment.  
  
  
Yes and don't forget those frayed students sleeping in your class and forgetting thier homework Benjamin said with a sigh.  
  
  
And piles of data  
  
Mountains of data  
  
And trying to get tenure said Jonas the youngest member who was still only a year into his post doc.  
  
I wouldn't change it for the world though James said.  
  
Me neither they all quickly agreed.  
  
What's that Addie said she pointed to the night sky where a strange blue light was glowing in the distance.  
  
  
  
  
  
They think there doing good to save the world from expiation.  
  
She felt they were sailing through space and time the air felt strangely charged. Everyone was quiet lost in there own thoughts  
  
The girls snuggled into their bunks. The seas were relatively calm and peaceful. As Elsie came in from brushing her teeth Addie was already curled up covered in blankets.  
  
Oh you look cozy Elsie said Addie smiled at her I am and the blankets are perfect it does get cold up in the artic.  
  
Well I don't think we're to the artic yet I imagine its going to get much colder.  
  
Susan walked in hi su Elsie said. Hello Susan said as she flopped down on Addie's bed. You sure look comfortable Susan smiled.  
  
We were just talking about that Elsie said when we are camping out on the ice it's going to get very cold.  
  
I know I'm a little worrie Susan said but I am glad we wi be with such seasoned explorers.  
  
Oh guess what Addie said poking her face out from under her covers. Her blond hair was wild and beautiful.  
  
I talked to Anna I helped her back the cookies.  
  
What! Susan and Elsie both exclaimed.  
  
What's she like  
  
Is she nice  
  
She hasn't said one word the whole trip.  
  
Ya I thought she was a snob who thinks shes to smart for everyone else.  
  
I went to Harvard Elsie said drawing out her words and trying to look conceited.  
  
Yes Susan said she thinks she is too good for lord Byron.  
  
And I don't think you can find anyone more handsome them him.  
  
Except for father Elsie put in.  
  
Yes that's true Susan chimed in.  
  
No she is really nice Addie said I think she is shy.  
  
How did you meet her Elsie asked. Ell I went I to the Kitchen to get a snack and she was starting I back them.  
  
We didnt say anything at first then she said that she thought I was lucky to have two older sisters. She said she was an only child and her parents were both old when she was born and she was raised by her grandma.  
  
Now I want to talk I get Elsie said I wonder if she is still awake.  
  
When I walked by her room it looked like her light was still in susan said.  
  
Well that settled it elsie said jumping out of bed.  
  
Come on Addie she said as she went over to her little sister.  
  
Ok let me out on a sweater I'm cold. Addie grabbed a sweater and Elsie and Susan did too. As the ship sailed further towards the artic the nights were becoming increasingly chillier.  
  
Ok everyone ready susan said.  
  
Well maybe we shouldn't Elsie replied suddenly feeling shy.  
  
Will be fine Susan said.  
  
Maybe we could bring her something Elsie mused that way it's no like we're just barging in.  
  
Something like what, a pony Susan said with a faint smile she tried to hide.  
  
Elsie rolled her eyes yes lets being her a pony I'm sure there all out grazing on the upper deck.  
  
I was thinking more along the lines of a nice snack.  
  
I would love some warm cocoa with whip cream Addie said.  
  
They patterned out into the ships narrow halls as they made their way Aup to the galley.  
  
It sure is quiet in here tonight elsie said everybody must be upstairs riding the ponies.  
  
It's not called the upstairs on a ship susan said.  
  
Elsie rolled her eyes again then went on mischievously all I know is were in the basement and we need to go upstairs to the kitchen.  
  
Susan ignore her come on let's go.!  
  
Elsie knocked timidly on the door she wasn't feeling so bold anymore.  
  
Come in a pretty voice said from the other side of the door.  
  
Elsie timidly opened the door I hope we didnt wake you?  
  
Oh know she laughed im a night owl.  
  
Then she added quickly who is we?  
  
Oh Elsie said just me and my two sisters.  
  
Oh come in come in anna stood up and opene the door. Hi Addie she said warmly.  
  
We brought you some coca Addie said.  
  
Oh you girls are too sweet she said.  
  
Elsie and everyone sat at the ships rails staring out at the frozen artic town. People live here she asked incedullouslly?  
  
Yes professor james replied. They get around with sleds but it is a very remote village the island can only be reached by ships. But even though it's remote it's a fairly large little city and there are some fun shops we can visit.  
  
As you can see its a fairly busy port for gold miners adventures and cargo ships.  
  
Elsie felt a little nervous about getting off with all those rough people who might be living there. She realized the ship was starting to feel a little like home with their cost little bedroom.  
  
At that moment Addie came up on deck looking like a little blond Eskimo with her thick fur coat surrounding her face like a mane.  
  
Hi Addie Elsie said. Addie smiled Back what a strange city that is. Where are we?  
  
Susan said I'm not sure but somewhere getting closer to the artic.  
  
  
Ya and I think we are going to go ashore soon Elsie said. Some of the crew were working to ready the bit as it approached the rustic looking harbor.  
  
Lord Byron came over looking dashing and adventurous. Wanna go ashore and look around be asked?  
  
Yes the girls all exclaimed. Well that's not particularly true Susan looked a little unsure, It is safe she asked a little timidly.  
  
Oh of course he laughed. Well I suppose it can get a little rough but wi be fine he smiled. They climbed aboard the smaller boat and two of the crew rowed them to to dock. They then climbed up the ladder to the large and aged wooden peor. The city spread out before them wooden bushes and shops that sheltered in the small valley.  
  
the rugged and pine clad mountains rose ominously around the small mountain town. The front of the town was fill of Peirs and small shops.  
  
The mountains were covered in fog and higher up snow capped peaks towered above the beautiful and remote scene.  
  
  
Steep mountains covered in pine and fir forest towered around the little port town. Higher up the trees were wreathed in clouds and mist that rose to the gray skyline. Quite a site Elsie said taking it all in as they stood atop the pier they turned and looked ou  at the sheltered bay full of ships and boats.  
  
I can't believe anyone lives here Susan responded it seems so remote but it is very pretty so rugged.  
  
Yes I think there is some charm for some people in being Away from things, the pioneer spirit as the Yankees would say. I find it a bit appealing but i think ok more of an expeditionary person, it's nice to get out in the solitude but it also feels good to get back.  
  
So and you should see it in the winter lord Byron said. They get a lot of snow here.  And it's very isolated also for a couple months it's dark all year round.  
  
Oh I don't know if I'd like that much dark Elsie said.  
  
Yes but they also get about a month of sun.  
  
Well at the sake of sounding difficult I'm not sure id like that either Elsie laughed.  
  
I agree Byron said its fun to experience though. We're going have some long dark nights before were safely on the other side of our adventure. And even if you prepare dr it it's still a bit rough. Good companions are critical to keeping your spirits up.  
  
They headed off the dock and into the interesting town. It reminded Elsie of a fort somewhat with it's remote location.  
  
It was fun looking at all the strange buildings and shops and adventurous looking people.  
  
There is actually  a really delicious restaurant here that we can go to when we get hungry.  
  
I hope that's soon laughed Elsie I should have eaten more breakfast Byron pulled out his watch well it is 1 already definitely lunch time. Who else is hungry?  
  
I am both Susan and Addie jumped in. Well that makes four of ya said Byron it's off to lunch!  
  
They made there way up a street that wound up the hill. They shops were surprisingly well kept up be brightly panted  
  
It's pretty nice here susan said.  
  
Ya I'm. Little less worried about food poisoning now Elsie laughed.  
  
You'll love this place Byron said trust me he smiled.  
  
Then he tried to nonchablty say so when you asked anna to come what did she say.  
  
Susan gave Elsie a quick sly smile.  
  
Then said she had some reading to finish to finish and said she would come later.  
  
Quite right.  
  
Ah did she say would want to meet us , I oh don't want her to feel left out.  
  
She didnt say Elsie said feeling a bit bad.  
  
Well no matter Byron said Elsie thought it seemed like he was trying to seem cheerful but she couldn't tell.  
  
The best minute he was back to his normal self as he began to describe the food choices they had. There stew is amazing especially on a cold artic day like today.  
  
Oh that sounds delicious Susan said so they have good bread?  
  
Oh yes Byron said enthusiastically the best all made fresh. They reached the place it was warm and inciting. They sat at a nice booth in the back.  
  
They ordered the stew and fresh warmed bread for everyone.  
 After the meal they went looking at some of the other shops on the street, they were full of all kinda of interesting things.  
  
Addie found a small beautiful telescope that she couldn't put down, look at this Elsie she said.  
  
Susan and Elsie crowded around oh that is wonderful. It's a shame it's so expensive.  
  
Yes Addie sighed I think I'm gonna save up and get one.  
  
You'll have to save you allowance for Elsie scrunched her face trying to concentrate two and a half years.  
I think it would be worth it Addie said.  
We could look at the stars. There so lovely and far away.  
  
I know Elsie said I've always loved the idea of them.  
I think I'm gonna try to save up and get one Addie said thoughtfully.  
  
Talking about there allowance made them all realize they missed there father. I hope we find father soon. Me too Susan said.  
  
Think of how much fun it would be he gather were with us.  
  
Elsie sighed. Will find him again I'm sure of it.  
  
Addie carefully set the telescope back and they walked over to where Byron was browsing the apparel.  
  
I think I'm gonna buy this he said, holding up an enormously  ugly flannel shirt.  
  
Eww Elsie said without thinking.  
  
Elsie! Susan jumped in, mind your manners  
  
You don't like it Byron laughed here's the thing, he lowered his voice in a conspiratorial manner. Where were going there's not a lot of people or ladies but there is a lot of cold and this is just the type of thing I would want for that.  
  
He smiled broadly holding it up.  
  
What do you think he said holding it up to Susan. Well she said, it is rather, er lovel well it does look like it would keep you warm.  
  
Warm and single Elsie laughed.  
  
Even Susan tried to hold back a laugh.  
  
What about anna Elsie burst out with out thinking then clapped her hands over her mouth.  
  
Susan grabbed her Elsie you brat!  
  
Addie tried to hide a giggle.  
  
That settled it Byron said I'm buying it for sure. Like I said no one I need to impress.  
  
They went up to the shopkeeper a rather burly women, oh my that is lovely she said.  
  
Thank you Byron said.  
  
They went out side and Byron said oh wait one second. He went back in the shop. And came out with a package. He handed it to Addie.  
  
What's this Addie asked her heart rising at the shape of the long circular package. P  
  
Open it Byron beamed with joy.  
  
Oh no you don't have to buy us anything both Elsie and Susan exclaimed.  
  
We can share it! Addie said  
  
No no he laughed I got this lovely coat and Addie got something we all need a surprise besides I won't be able to buy anything for mounts I gotta get it out if my system.  
  
Well that is very kind of you Elsie said.  
  
Great it's settled he said as he put on his new flannel coat. How's it look. He was so handsome and dashing he looked good in anything. Well Elsie said its a little better then I expected.  
  
As Susan and Elsie went about the store exclaiming in joy he leaned over to Addie and whispered can you keep a secret  
  
Yes she said.  
  
Well I know it's really quite hideous, a monstrosity of fashion. Which is why I plan to wear it around my father at all times especially at fancy events.  
  
Addie giggled I think I'm starting to like it.  
  
They might the girls talked  
  
Oh look at this Susan Elsie called from across the store holding up a beautiful globe. With this will never be lost again. Susan laughed yes and you could for it nicely in your back pocket.  
  
Hmm yes that's true Elsie said maybe I should look for something practical for the trip.  
  
Oh I know what I am going to get Susan said holding up a beautiful coat that looked both stylish and warm.  
  
I like that Elsie said. I think I wanna get the same thing but in this color she said holding up anothe style of one.  
  
Lord Byron Susan called I think we found what we want.  
  
Are you sure it's ok?  
  
Oh yes he said in fact I insist.  
  
And now I say we should head to the markets  and load up on some fresh provisions and snacks.  
  
They all piled into their bunks for the evening,  well that was a fun day  Susan said. They were all sitting on Addie's bed curled up in their warm blankets and snacking on the candy they had purchased in the market.  
  
This chocolate is really good I think it has orange in it, hey we should see if anna would like some.  
  
That's a good idea Addie replied enthusiastically.  
  
Ill get her Elsie said my jumping up by with her blanket still earlier tightly around her.  
  
She hurried lightly out the door and down the hall padding with her bare feet on the cold ships floor. I should have grabbed my slippers she thought to herself. She was quickly at Anna's door and the might was on. She knocked quietly.  
  
Come in her soft and beautiful voice rang out.  
  
Hello Elsie said shyly she still wasn't totally comfortable around anna, she seemed so stylish and quiet and intelligent. But she felt of she got to know her, maybe she had misjudged her. She seemed so kind the last time they had spoken.  
  
Elsie gathered her courage,  do you like candy? We got some in the town and wanted to share it with you do you wanna come down to our cabin?  
Addie and is cabin Susan had her own side rolls but she is with us she blurted out all at once.  
  
Anna smiled oh thank you I'dive to. They both quickly padded back down the cold hall into their room.  
  
Hi girls anna said cheerfully.  
We missed you today Susan said you should have joined us!  
  
Yes I should have she laughed I got ashore for a little while.  
  
What! You should have joined us Elsie exclaimed.  
  
I looked for you she said I want ashore very long though.  
  
Want some chocolate  Addie said. We have orange flavored, caramel, mint dark chocolate all kinds.  
  
Anna's face lit up oh yes please she smiled I love candy it's my weekness.  
  
Ya lord Byron bought them for us. An he bought me this Addie said pulling ou a cloth case and showing anna her telescope.  
  
Are you sleeping with it Elsie asked.  
  
Yes Addie said I'm rather excited about It.  
  
Oh your adorable Elsie said giving Addie a hug.  
  
Anna smiled I wish I had sisters growing up.  
  
Well it's not all fun and games Elsie said giving a knowing look towards Susan.  
  
Susan caught the look why you little brat she laughed.  
  
Is he stuck up he seems rather conceited.  
  
Oh no he is really nice and kind. He bought us all really nice gifts today.  
  
Look at that james stood looking in awe at the bright green landmass towering above them.  
  
I don't believe it Byron mumbled this is impossible.  
  
This isn't on any of the maps Anna said. This is just supposed to be ice and ocean but look how green and rugged a everything is.  
  
It looks like a another world Elsie whispered.  
  
Yes I've never seen anything like it Susan said.  
  
Are we going to land there Elsie asked.  
  
Yes yes we have to james said.  
  
The ocean became treble lent and the waves choppy.  
  
Some people get caught between the two worlds and disappear for a whole and some forever.  
  
Big attack on city  
  
Sanctuary where connect  
  
Why would they do that Elsie whispered.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
GARDEN  
  
go to mr potters  
Sees Japan reservation  
Meets Tessa  
She comes  
Find out about sisters  
Meet parliament  
Meet Sisters  
meet expedition  
Get sisters out  
Meet minister  
On the run o  
  
chapter  
This list imperfect  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
Chapter 5  
She was nervous as they drove up the bumpy dirt road to mr potters house. It was a nice night even though it had been quite hot that day, uncomfortably warm in fact the kind of late fall day where the summer tries to flex it's muscles a few last times afraid of being forgotten as the months (days slowly) fade to winter. Now it was cooling off, the sky was mostly blue but scattered clouds were drifting in from the west she stared as the setting sun set them to brilliant shades of pastels pinks and whites.  
  
I wish we were going to a wedding she broke the silence with.  
  
A wedding he replied?  
  
Yes with lanterns hanging from the trees and dancing late into the night. And everyone would comment why miss Elsie what a fancy car your arriving in, and I would reply thank you very much it belongs to my chauffeur mr professor.  
  
The professor laughed you can call me by my last name or first name if you would like  
  
Ok she said, and this is my chauffeur mr Charles she joked using his last name.  
  
Yes weddings are lovely he said quite lovely i also like graduations I like to see all the students in their fine robes and all the lovely family's so proud and happy and everyone dressed up.  
  
Oh yes  , Elsie said and the best part of weddings and graduations the punch and the cake! I think I love sparkling raspberry punch the most.  
  
Elsie paused suddenly serious again I do hope everything goes ok, he's not, not dangerous is he?  
  
No, no I don't think so, i hope not, strange, cracked, sad eccentric but dangerous no  all though I haven't seen him in quite sometime in fact maybe you better wait in the car he said.  
  
Oh no your not leaving me out of the action! she responded  
  
Ok well all the same I do hope we get there soon id rather we speak to him while it's still light out  
  
Why is that she said?  
  
Well mostly because the night can play games on us and our fears can make us see what isn't there.  
  
All the same, oh would you look at that here is our turn. He slowed abruptly and turned up an overgrown looking lane dense on both sides with trees and bushes and thick undergrowth. At one point they passed what looked like the remains of an overgrown garden. It looked sad and lonely in fact the whole area had a forlorn and forgotten feel to it.  
  
Elsie peered out the window as they bumped up the road it felt like they were leaving civilization all together.  
A wild forest began to grow around them and  after about 15 minutes  of climbing and bumping up the road it opened up to a meadow with a worn out looking house. Overgrown blackberry bushes grew all over one side and the whole place had an air of disrepair.  
  
Elsie reConsidered the offer to stay in the car.  
  
Well the professor said, doesn't look to promising now does it?  
  
No Elsie said and the dusk is creeping upon us fast I hope he is quite sane. She doubted anyone sane would live by themselves in the old house they had arrived at.  
  
The professor opened the car door and Elsie heard the crunch of gravel as he stepped out into the rocky driveway.  
Elsie opened her door and together they walked with trepid steps up to the house. A cool evening breeze blew around them as They ascended the rickety stairs to the yellowish house with its faded and peeling paint, at the top they both stopped.  
  
Ohh my the professor said, look at the view,  
Elsie turned and over the tops of the woods saw the great ocean stretched out before them. It's beautiful she whispered, just think what wild lands lay out there so far away.  
  
Yes the professor replied  
  
They stared quietly at the view the setting sun lit the ocean and hung glowing orange setting both the sky and ocean alight with shades of orange reflecting and  
  
You know Elsie said, I always wanted to have an adventure but I pictured it quite different then this.  
  
Yes the professor agreed a wise author once said that  
  
Yes and i suppose being locked up is hardly an adventure but right now I'm nervous and I'm scared but theirs also beauty.  
  
  
They sat in silence as the sun touched its feet slowly into the great ocean. It seemed to shake them both out of their reverie as they turned slowly on the creaky front porch. The professor knocked on the door, once twice, three times and waited. No response.  
  
Nothing  
Silence  
  
The professor tried again, this time louder  but still no reply.  
 They waited and waited it felt like an eternity,  
  
  
Well i suppose ill give it one more go, we may have wasted a trip up here.  
  
Elsie felt relieved but also faintly disappointed she wanted to meet the man who shared such a similar experience but was also afraid of what she might learn.  
  
The professor knocked loudly for the last time and they both waited.  
  
Well the professor started then they heard a cranky muffled voice, I'm coming!"  
  
 The rusty door handle turned and the door opened slowly to a dark interior.  An aged man slowly opened the door his movements were slow and fit his aged appearance.  
  
"Mr potter!" she exclaimed in a whisper  
  
Well I see you know me at any rate though I don't know you he said gruffly.  
  
She barely noticed his gruff manner what she did notice were his eyes,  
Alive bright piercing even beautiful all the more shocking given the wrinkled skin and decrepit appearance of the man before them. He was dressed in an outdated  black suit and had a old rifle in his hand.  
  
Elsie hung nervously back behind the professor she had grabbed ahold of his coat without even realizing it as she tore her eyes away from his gaze she noticed how decrepit and ran down the place was.  
He was still clutching his rifle, begone He said in a heavy English  accent ill call the constable this is private property. His voice sounded tired and aged.  
  
You know him the professor said?  
  
  
But James the professor said don't you recognize me?  
  
Ehh he said taking off his glasses, why if it isn't Charles the rumors running out, need to come up here and stir up some more?  
  
No no nothing of the sort james I never meant you anything but happiness and I've always tried to believe you, even when I feel you had lost faith in your self.  
  
James stood staring at them, oh i recognize you your that Simmons girl aren't you?  
  
Yes sir Elsie replied still clutching the professors suit coat.  
  
Your sister  doesn't seem to think much of me she scare easy?  
He broke into a harsh laugh that sounded quite insane.  
  
Well Elsie said pausing for time as she tried to decide how to go on without offending him. Susan can be bit shy around her elders she said.  
  
James, the professor broke in with (a calm authority in his voice) more authority then she had ever heard from him. The girls been through a lot her and her whole family, in fact that's the reason for this whole visit.  
  
James stared at them intensely with his bright piercing eyes.  
  
I'm sorry but I don't want to talk and now if youll excise me, bang! He slammed the door.  
  
Well I think that went rather well the professor said with a slight hint of sarcasm.  
  
James he called aloud, I know your a good man and not time or loneliness could ever take that from you. This girls lost her family and been through a lot and If there is any decency left in you you'll give us a few minutes of your time and will be in our way.  
  
They waited. The door slowly turned on its rusty hinges, well blast it come in he said.  
  
Chapter 6  
I suppose you'll be wanting tea he said gruffly?  
  
Elsie shared a quick look with the professor that seemed to agree that they wouldn't want any food or drink that he would have in this old place.  
  
They walked out of the parlor through a dim dark and dirty hall. The carpet was old and brown and dirty and the walls were grimy with dirt and use. The old floor boards crèaked beneath their feet.  
  
She could only imagine how dirty and decrepit the place would look if there was more light but there wasn't it was just dark and dismal.  
  
They got to the back of the house (which was quite large) and sat down at a small dirty farmhouse table. There were two windows that were grimy with what looked like years of  
Dirt and filth. The curtains were pulled shut and with the setting sun their was very little light.  
  
I'm not sure i want any of his tea Elsie whispered to the professor the second he was gone.  
  
I don't blame you the professor said ill se what I can do if anything just leave the tea cup in front of you, I feel like he would be offended easily.  
  
He sure is a strange one Elsie whispered back,  
  
Dont worry the professor replied seeming to grasp the deeper meaning and fear in her whisper. You two are quite different he said. But inside the professor felt Aa slight twinge of doubt. He saw more alike in the two then different both bright, attractive and likable. He vowed to himself to do everything in his power two keep Elsie from ending up like James; and if possible to help james recover some of the life and promise that had slipped away from him leaving him isolated and forever alone. Tormented and alone.  
 As he was thinking these thoughts  
He tottered back in with three cups  
  
He sat down wearily. Well I suppose I should tell you the full truth, I'm afraid you won't find it nearly as adventurous or engaging as the long years have made it seem, or for that matter my own embellishments.  
  
I've made some mistakes, he began slowly while playing with the handle on his tea cup; spinning it one way the slowly turning it back on the small saucer.  
 I often think about what drive me to them. I think that the root of it was that I always wanted attention, my father was a hard man and he drove me relentlessly when I was young.  I could never earn his approval I was just a piece of flotsam drifting about and underfoot. I never really felt like I fit in.  
But James Charles interrupted, you were always the most popular person growing up everyone adored you! Think of the fun all of our friends the adventures we had. We were all so close.  
 James paused for a while, "You can develop curious habits as a child that stay with you your whole life. "  
Anyways I have better things to do then talk to you to so ill hurry up my story and then I'm afraid you need to leave.  
 At that moment Elsie heard a Strange tap on the window, she turned to look and also Noticed  an anxious look from James. She also noticed something else his movement was quick and rapid. She was surprised by his sudden movement.  
  
He continued to stare out the window then carried on with his story it was obvious he was trying to act like nothing had happened.  
  
Like I said I was young and stupid and quite frankly tired of the military.  
I came up with a wild plan to disappear I felt like it would solve all my problems. I could get away from the military,  and I felt it would make my father and family realize they loved me and wanted me around.  
  
Would you like some more tea he said? Elsie realized with horror she had been drinking from one of his dirty cups. What was even stranger the tea was some of the best she had ever had She quickly thought well if I'm gonna get sick I mylse well have some more.  
  
He seemed to guess her thoughts it's from the orient he offered I have a collection from all over the world.  
  
Yes please that would be kind of you she said.  
  
She noticed the professor had been drinking his too.  
  
And I suppose you'll be wanting more to he said gruffly to James. But Elsie sensed a slight pleasure in his voice she though maybe he was glad they liked his tea.  
  
Yes please James replied. If its not to much trouble.  
  
Of course it's too much trouble he replied again crankily but your here so I can't very well turn you out like a bunch of beggars.  
  
As James left the room she whispered, half joking were both Gonna die I bet he has never washed those cups.  
  
Yes Charles joked back but the tea is good I suppose their are worse ways to go though I would have preferred something a little more heroic myself but all and all it seems rather fitting for an Englishman, or woman .  
  
he went out the the Dirty and dark hall attached to the kitchen. The second he was gone James snapped up and began to pace around the kitchen.  
  
Elsie didnt pay him much attention she was busy staring at her empty cup of tea and wondering if she should eat the scone.  
  
She wondered if he had cooked it the thought made her not want to try it, she decided to smell it and it smelt delicious a hint if orange with small pieces of chocolate in it.  
  
She decided to take a nibble and it was amazing.  
  
She realized she was starving and quickly began to eat the whole scone, it was one of the best she had ever had and she wanted to ask where he got it was afraid to find out he had Made them in his dirty kitchen.  
  
she was engulfed in her thoughts when she noticed that he was back in the room.  
  
And just like that he had ghosted back into the room quieter then a shadow.  
  
James nearly jumped out of his skin when he realized and he quickly sat down.  
  
James seemed flustered and quickly sat down.  
  
Charles had a wry smile on his face but the only thing Elsie noticed was a plate heaped high with scones raspberry and also orange he said gruffly as he banged them them down on the table faded through the ages of time.  
  
Charles went over and pulled the shade and lit two small candles.  
  
They smelled strange to Elsie almost otherworldly.  
  
  
but while he was tall commanding his real personality was as different as night and day from his gruff persona.  
He was shy and quiet but kind and warm. There was an air of sadness about him that made Elsie want to hug him.  
  
  
So basically i set the whole thing up, I hadn't planned to but the opportunity presents itself in Egypt and in a Heath pounding moment that was both freeing and terrifying I slipped away.  
  
When you weren't paying attention I snuck out the back I had a guide put a camel. I rode back to the city and caught a steamer for America. I sailed west and spent time gold mining, as you can see from my place I didn't have much luck he said wryly. I planned to come back after a year but I ran into some legal trouble and spent 9 Years in jail. I found out through some friends you planned to go back to visit the pyramids and decided to show up. It was all a big joke to me but my time in prison had been rough and I had grown jaded  I had 9 long Yeats in jail to make up my stories.  
  
  
But I was homesick, not they the states are a bad place  
Prof asks. Question and catches his lie  
 There are words for people like me and I'm still sane enough to know there not nice.  
  
Well that's the whole truth and now if you'll excuse me I'm rather busy this evening.  
He stood up and walked them to the front door and out to their car. He hobbled on his came but made it down the steps then shuffled alongside them to their car.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
just a minute if you'll excuse me he said and please do stay put in the kitchen. Elsie noticed his face when he said this it appeared to be drawn with fear and strain. I didn't realize it had got so late and now if you'll excuse me. Ill be back Elsie noticed he moved quietly almost like a cat.  
  
They went back through the dim and dirty hallway now almost black from the setting sun that had fled the world of the living.  
  
as Elsie stepped on the porch the first thing she noticed was how strange a night it was. It was dark and starless she realized the clouds must have rolled in. It didn't feel like rain though the night felt brooding like it was watching her. As she stood there the feeling grew and she looked around nervously but didn't see anything just the dark shape of the solloiute of the pine trees rising tall agains the night sky.  
  
She felt a sense of dread and she was almost sure it was emanating from the woods to the left.  
  
they stood on  the porch he had lot small he had lot small strange candles that traced a pathway to their car the candles were arranged in a circle around their car.  
  
Elsie gulped nervously maybe he is cracked she thought she glanced up nervously at James but his look seemed to say don't say anything.  
just ignore it will talk later.  
  
Now James went on please do stay inside your car until your back ok the main road. It's been a strange night.  
  
  
  
Elsie felt a thrill of terror run down her spine.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
He hovered around them Elsie also noticed he was clutching something in his right hand and that he seemed rather tense.  
  
No one said anything as he walked with them.  
  
the professor opened Elsie's door for her and she settled into the nice comfortable car.  The car felt familiar and safe especially given the woods around the house which now seemed more foreboding in the dark.  
  
As Charles got in on the driver side  James said, i would stay in the car tell your long past the woods, and  Charles I do hope you can forgive me? I never meant any harm to anyone I'm an d tried man who still hasn't seen the folly of his ways.  
  
James the professor responded I've always admirer you ever since we were kids and that hasn't changed, good night to you will be safe and I think we will be in the car tell we get back to London, I don't particularly fancy a night stroll this evening.  
  
Right james responded, well Good evening to you both he said to them both and then, bang. The door closed abruptly and they were out of the cold chilly air. Safe and snug in the car.  
  
Once the doors were closed they started their bumpy trip down the dirt road. Elsie looked in the rear view mirror and saw him watching them from the porch. Then they rounded a sharp curve and the pine trees abruptly hid him from view.  
  
They were both silent with their thoughts both thinking through what has just occurred.  
  
Eventually the professor said, what did you make of all that?  
  
It was very strange Elsie said pensively. His talk about the woods and not getting out made me a bit scared. Though everything is scary in a dark forest. When will we reach the main road? Elsie said trying to keep her voice steady. She knew she was being a bit silly but the long day and visit had left her a little jumpy.  
  
I think any minute he responded  Ah yes here comes the turn up ahead now.  
  
When they were back on the main road and had picked up some speed Elsie brought up something that had been bothering her, Did you see how quickly he turned when their was that noise on the window?  
  
Yes I did the professor said.it was very strange it didn't fit his decrepit appearance, I also noticed something else  
  
What was that said Elsie?  
  
Well his left ear had no hair on it, I'm sure Susan would have been rather disappointed  
  
Elsie laughed yes she is rather fond of ear hair.  
  
The laugh quickly turned to a sharp stab of homesickness she suddenly wanted to cry she missed her sisters and father and mother so much.  
  
The professor, who was always more perceptive then his absent minded mannerisms let on quickly said we are going to get them back  
  
Thank you Elsie said, they were quiet again until they had driven a ways, now they were passing quickly by the lights of a small village .  
Then something suddenly came back to her did you notice his eyes? So bright so alive, they didnt match him either!  
  
Oh definitely they stood out to me the second he opened the door. they seem to be growing brighter and more piercing with age. No, i feel there is something more about James then he is letting on.  
  
I'd love to get the truth out of him. But it's hard i have a had a number of meetings with him over the last twenty years and he has always been very closed off, tonight was the most open he has ever been. Well since before he disappeared he was very open to me when we were younger.  
  
They were back on the main highway and traveling at a good pace on the nice smooth pavement. Elsie leaned her head against the window and stared at the passing scenery her mind full of thoughts.  
  
Finally she brought up another question that had been bothering her, I wonder what he is so afraid of?  
  
Yes the professor it was rather obvious wasnt it? He clearly is a recluse and maybe our visit triggered something, it could very well be that his mind is slipping, there are a lot of signs that he is not quite right so some paranoia and delusions  would be a rather unsurprising outcome from that.  
  
He paused and Elsie waited in silence she could tell something was going through the professors head.  
  
eventually she queried him as her patience began to run out? What are you thinking about she said?  
  
Well hmm,  well it's rather uncharacteristic  of me I don't know if I should say he smiled a conspiratorial smile.  
  
Oh tell me Elsie said I won't judge.  
  
Ok well I used to be quite a huntsman back in my youth, only for.  
  
Your gonna shoot him! Elsie jumped in with.  
Oh no no good gracious no, is that what you think of me?  
  
Elsie laughed I was kidding but come on you did kinda set yourself up for that.  
  
So the professor went on, what I was going to say was I was thinking of setting up a deer stand down at the edge of his driveway to see if I notice anything suspicious.  
  
I have some graduate students that would probably love a break from collecting algae blooms.  
  
That's a good idea Elsie said normally I wouldn't approve of spying but I feel this is a rather unique situation and I feel he is up to something too.  
  
Nothing for a solid week. He was about to give up when one of his grad students arthur had some exciting news.  
  
Well arthur said I was sitting there eating some cold bangers and mash I don't recommend it. He said. Well the boredom was pretty bad I had a penny dreadful by it was a bit dul too. Well I see a great limousine pulling up the driveway. I hopped on mu moped and waited.  
I followed them to the airport very carefully and watched the gentleman get out.  
What did he look like Elsie said?  
Oh a cranky old man too hat cane ya know the like.  
  
  
James sat hunched over he looked like a defeated man.  
  
Elsie felt a little sorry for him. He seemed both shy and reticent and rubbed his hands on his trousers in a nervous manner. While nervous his movements were swift and sure; not the movement of an elderly man.  
  
I do ask your forgiveness he said in a strong clear voice, strong And yet somehow faltering. What I intend to tell you is the total truth, the truth as I know it or at Least as I perceive it to be.  
I will be totally open i just ask for your understanding. I an to tell you everything I know and also what I suspect. I will also fill you in on what i have learned.  
Like I said some of this is conjecture from my research.  
  
The first thing is my disappearance. No matter what I have said throughout the years is what I will say is the total truth according to my perception of the events. The tome between when I disappeared and when I was found again seemed no more to me than at most a could hours. I remember clearly falling asleep and I thought that at most an hour had gone by. I remember thinking it was strange that I had fallen asleep I had just sat down for no more then what I thought was a few minutes to rest my eyes.  
  
When I came back out and saw everyone I was still feeling a bit Groggy but totally clueless as to what had happened.  
  
I used to wonder if I had imagined the whole thing. But things have happened since then that Leave no doubt that something did and is still happening,  
  
 That day I had no more recollection of time passing I thought an hour or two at most had gone by. I was shocked and terrified when the reality I had been missing ten years hit me. Not only that but I knew no one believed me. I began to question my own sanity. Where had I been that whole time? I still do question my sanity.  
  
Sitting in that military prison was one of the darkest times of my life  
  
Elsie was surprised by how intensely he talked and by how young he looked at times.  
  
So all of that is true at least according to my own understanding. At the time I had no idea where I had been even know I don't fully know but I do have some strong guesses.  
  
When I got out I felt my life was in shambles my father had been a military man himself, served in India and had risen to colonel before leaving to join the family business.  
  
The first thing I did when I got out of prison was to go back home but my family wanted nothing to do with me. I think my mother would have reconciled but my father believed me a coward and a disgrace, I was about to be deployed on a rather dangerous assignment and the rumors were that I was a coward. I've still got four white feathers sitting besides my bed; my life goal to get them taken back. But I've rather failed at that.  
He paused and sighed running his hands through his long hair. Elsie noticed the roots of his hair were dark black.  
  
She realized james had come out of his stupor and caught her looking so she quickly looked away.  
  
I think that something, he paused searching for the right words, I think that something happened while I was away. I believe I may have slipped away from the chains of mortality.  
  
He paused with a far away look on his face  
  
I don't believe this chains anymore bind me. For how long I don't know but something has happened to me.  
  
Elsie took the moment to share a look with the professor that seemed to say, he's mad, quite mad.  
  
All the comments more alarming Elsie thought since he has moments of such clarity and sanity.  
  
The place that we would call Atlantis and their angry they believe that by severing the ties to our world  
  
Have you heard Cortez he went on?  
  
James paused seeming to be most in his own thoughts. Elsie looked out the window at the Oceanside in the distance.  
  
  
  
Gil Pérez  
Have you heard of Perez? He said abruptly changing the subject.  
  
Noboth Elsie and the professor responded.  
  
Well it's a very curious story, a myth and a legend but fairly well documented and very strange I've looked into it extensively and believe it to be the truth.  
  
He was a Spanish solider he slipped out of time and space oh and this was a while ago the 16th century.  It started out as a normal evening for Perez. It was the night of October 24, 1593 and he was guarding the Governor's palace in Manila .  
  
Something significant had happened the night before. The Governor Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas had been assassinated by Chinese pirates.  
  
Wait interjected Elsie so then why were they guarding the palace?  
  
Oh James went on because it was still a government building and the soldiers and garrison would still function as normal well mostly normal I don't quite know how the soldiers felt of they were happy he was gone or mourning his loss but either way they still maintained military protocol. It was a major event but news traveled more slowly in the 16th century.  
  
Oh that makes sense Elsie said.  
  
Well Perez began feeling ill he became dizzy and exhausted he closed his eyes to rest and when he opened them he had no idea where he was obviously he was panicked and he had potentially just deserted his post,  
  
That sounds familiar said the professor,  
  
Yes James said falling through time can have rather negative consequences on ones personal life.  
  
Well he was obviously disoriented and confused and was found by some guards on Mexico City who did not recognize his uniform. As they questioned him he frantically tried to make them understand he had been on the Philippines a few minutes ago.  
  
Well everyone was confused at first but eventually he was arrested for desertion of his post and he was also suspected of dark arts.  
  
He had told the soldiers and other people about the assassination of the governor which had happens the day before so it was impossible he would have known and been able to travel that far by the next day. Naturally when news reached Mexico City everyone was shocked. Eventually he was freed and he faded into obscurity.  
  
What do you think that has to do with you or Elsie the professor asked.  
  
  
  
He was stationed in the Philippines and in the blink of an eye was transferred to the Plaza Mayor in Mexico City. Of course no one believed him or that he had come from the Philippines.  
  
He was  
  
 they can recover what they lost.  
  
  
Also Elsie burst in I didn't believe one word about his story I'm not sure what happened to him but I don't think he sailed to america.  
  
No the professor said and when I asked him about  
  
One other thing that stood out said the professor.  
I'm bit buying one but of it, did you notice his left ear?  
  
  
Oh Addie she burst out into tears at how thin and gaunt her little sister looked. Her pretty face seemed to be lined with sadness and worry, but her face lit up as she threw herself on Elsie. Elsie hugged her tightly back happy but worried about how thin and frail she felt. Elsie realized she was crying but that Her warm tears were tears of joy now at hugging her little sister again.  
  
They sat down on the cold hard bed, Elsie looked around the room which was more like a prison an realized she had it better off then her younger sister. She pulled Addie tight and wrapped her arm around her delicate little shoulders as they both sat in happy silence at being reunited.  
  
 They sad you were dead Addie whispered quietly as if even saying the words was too terrible.  
  
No Elsie said I'm not and Susan's not either.  
  
  
I love what you've done to the place Elsie joked sarcastically.  
  
What do they feed you in this place Elsie asked her motherly instincts coming out.  
  
Mostly stale bread and water that tastes far to much like minerals. Sometimes some wilted vegetables.  
  
Oh Elsie Addie burst out I wish you could stay. She higher her sister tighter.  
  
Don't give up hope Elsie said. She knew they were being watched and didn't want to give anything away but she knew Addie needed something to hold into. She leaned close and whispered ever so quietly in Addie's ear "soon".  
  
Addie have her a strong smile.  
  
She knew Addie was fragile an the hopeless months had been hard  in her.  
  
So what happened to father Elsie said?  
  
Well it was terrible Addie replied.  
  
You don't have to talk about it if you don want to Addie said.  
  
No it's ok and seeing you gives me hope we can find him.  
  
We all got home and couldn't find you. Father was growing increasingly worried as the minutes stretched on. We searched the whole house over and over. Susan was terrified you should have seen her we had to stop for a few minutes for father to calm her. She was sobbing and couldn't catch her breath, it makes me ache inside just to remember. Elsie hugged her closer as she went on.  
  
Father asked me to stay with Susan in case you came back then hurried out and saddled shadow he said he was going to the cairns but he never came back oh it was terrible Addie sobbed.  
  
Susan and I sat holding each other waiting, waiting the world felt desolate and empty. Some how the sun rose as dawn spread its pale cold light over the world. Susan and I cried  and cried we decided to go out looking to but couldn't find anything.  
  
in the morning We didnt know what to do so we went down to the police station. There was a Massive search but nothing turned up.  
  
CHAPTER  
  
  
CHAPTER  
  
The two worlds are tearing apart but they are bound together the dark matter between the two works like a form of gravity. The danger is that we fear the pull is forcing the earth out of its orbit and towards the sun we also fear that it is not an accident but is an intentional act to destroy this world.  
  
Who would do that Elsie whispered.  
Who? Whom? what? We're not sure we think it may be a dark entity that was banished from this works ages ago. A god if you will, but that being set up this tragedy and we fear others are continuing it.  
  
Why would they do that? Well we think they feel they are helping they want to let out those being imprisoned eons ago in the depths of time.  
  
  
  
  
They think there doing good to save the world from expiation.  
  
She felt they were sailing through space and time the air felt strangely charged. Everyone was quiet lost in there own thoughts.  
  
  
CHAPTER  
He pulled out a curious looking case with a look of reverence written across his aged face. Elsie looked nervously over at the professor, he too sat enraptured.  
  
Professor smith sat quietly staring at the curious and ancient box. It was covered in strange runes and heliographs. There also appeared to be some sort of ancient writing on it. The wood was dark and aged looking.  
  
It could have been her imagination but Elsie felt a strange sense of electricity in the room. She also felt drawn to touch the box but also terrified at the idea of touching it. The box seemed to fill the whole room and she couldn't take her wyes away from it.  Something inside her was being strongly drawn to the box.  
She wasn't sure how long she sat gazing at the box and it quickly had filled her mind, everything else seemed to have vanished from her attention.  
  
It was in this reverie that She felt a gentle hand on her arm and realized she was leaning out towards it, about to touch it, professor smith was gently holding her back, please forgive me he said it does have a curious draw and I am not totally convinced of its safety.  
  
Elsie sat back red faced and embarrassed by her impudence. I'm sorry she said I really am that was rude of me, she couldn't believe she had almost touched such a rare and valuable artifact.  
  
Don't mention it he said with a smile. I know you meant no harm and I don't show the case often; and anyways you helped confirm what I already suspected.  
  
What do you suspect the professor asked,  
  
well many things but the one to which i was just referring had to do with the draw the artifact and its contents have on people, some individuals seem to be more drawn to it then others but everyone seems to be pulled in by it also the pull seems to increase the longer your around it.  
  
I spend time researching it but feel that it May be risky to engage in prolonged research that involves directly handling or viewing the item.  
 Do you think it's dangerous Elsie said?  
  
I do he said but not for short periods of time. I still run experiments on it about an hour a week and I usually have one of my students keeping on eye on things.  
  
Have you found out anything curious the professor asked?  
  
Sadly I don't feel that I have found anything conclusive. It's not radioactive during one experiment we thought that we had potentially detected a gamma with around a 663 Kev energy deposition. We thought that night be a cesium isotope which emits at 662 Kev but the next times we ran the experiment  
Nothing turned up.  
  
but I think that be  
  
 physical contact greatly increases the draw. I think that's the  the ms  may have negative effects on the mind. Unfortunately my sample size is one, me.  
  
Smith went on, For that reason I never handle it with my bare hands. I did at first a number of times but it burned itself into my mind I couldn't stop dreaming and thinking about it. I would wake in a cold sweat strange visions haunting the fringes of my memory.  It began to worry me an I grew concerned I was losing my mind.  
And it's not just the box but the writing and the contents of the box that seemed to cause these strange effects.  
  
It is a good thing I was teaching that term I missed there straight lecture and one of my graduate students found me almost past out clutching the box. He said I was muttering something in a strange language. I asked him what it was and he said he didn't write it down he called the paramedics. Grad students these days are rather worthless, didnt wrote down what I was saying bah.  
Smith covered the box and leaned back in his chair and smiled. Of course the other scholars all screamed it was a ridiculous hoax.  
  
Ok I asked them then can I let some undergraduate students come in and touch it as part of an experiment.  
  
Preposterous the administrators in their  
  
But I had a strange recollection almost like I had had a restless night of many dreams. But try as I might I Couldn't remember what they were but deep down I knew they were important to unravelling the mystery.  
  
And then slowly the dreams started to piece themselves together.  
  
  
nightmare  
  
You didn't mention this before the professor said, everyone said it had been a medical condition.  
  
Well yes I'm sorry for misleading you regrettable but necessary smith and really if you think about it did I mislead anyone? Should I tell the dean my condition arises from a curious box? And if you believe that i mislead you that would mean you believe this box was capable of something extraordinary, magical in fact. Do you believe that?  
  
Hmm yes I see your point the professor replied it is a bit far fetched. So what do you believe this box is?  
  
Hmm well I don't like to talk about it, I am rather enjoying my tenure and wouldn't my stayin around as an emeritus but I don't think they would keep a lunatic or a scientific fraud about the place.  
  
I do believe it is otherworldly.  
  
I understand said the professor. How did the box come into your possession?  
  
Ah yes it was an expedition to the Artic, we were studying diatoms,  of course I'm a physicist turned archaeologist so diatoms are not of particular importance to my research the expedition was mostly biologists and one chemist interested in the composition  of ice cores.  
  
Why did you choose to go james asked?  
  
It was a manuscript that I had the fortune of analyzing I think the two are related, can we see it james cut in.  
In his excitement he always became blunt but his glowing face and eager manner made it impossible to be offended by him, he clearly meant no harm his brain just lost touch with social graces.  
  
And what do other scholars say?  
A hoax.  
What about the effects?  
A placebo.  
  
this I've washed ashore in the artic he held up a curios glass ring. It was enshrined in a small see though case the scholar who found this decided to wear it. He also kept a journal.  
  
He paused and stood to go stare out the window. Class had just gotten out and the students were hurrying across the windswept quad as much to get out of the blustery wind as to make it to class on time. Shreds of pale blue sky could be seen through the ragged clouds. We think There is a group trying to steal these artifacts which is not surprising because they clearly possess some great powers.  
  
  
  
Elsie was not expecting such s nice house whoever they are they must be very wealthy she thought.  
  
I do hope there nice she whispered to Susan  
  
Yes Susan replied I'm glad Byron is here he seems to fit in with wealthy people.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
CHAPTER  
Scholars fairly skel  
Artic expedition find one trapped in ice  
  
Elsie felt nervous and excited in the predawn glow of the chilly morning. The airfield was bustling as last minute preparations were made for the dangerous artic expedition. Elsie pulled her hood tighter feeling pale and self conscious she hadnt had time to properly do her hair. And not getting enough sleep always made her feel pale. She looked at herself in the mirror that morning and thought I need to get out in the sun more often.  
  
Susan came in looking beautiful and wide awake like she was going to a fancy wedding, Elsie rolled her eyes and tried to think of something smart to say but couldn't she was far too tired.  
  
She quickly got over it as she watched all the excited energy and bustling of the expedition about to leave.  
  
Addie stumbled sleepily into the hangar, she looked like a beautiful pale ghost hidden beneath her great overcoat.  
  
Hi addie Elsie said did you get breakfast.  
  
Oh I don't feel hungry quite yet Addie replied my stomach doesn't know it is supposed to be awake yet.  
  
Elsie laughed ya that's how I feel and my brain doesn't either.  
  
Some of the expedition leaders wrte talking they all looked brave and strong. They were mostly from Oxford and edingvrugh university.  
  
  
A young dashing looking gentleman came over he was tall and skinny but muscular and had the look of an English gentleman. He moved with careless ease and was smartly dressed and looked wealthy. He also looked cold and haughty as he focused intently on the loading of a large wooden case.  
  
Lord Byron so glad you could make it! The professor embraced him warmly.  
  
He beamed back his bright smile removing traces of the haughtiness that his appearance seemed to show.  
  
Lord Byron spoke in a thick English accent and moved with athletic and careless ease.  
  
so your the sisters I have been hearing so much about  
  
Elsie realized she liked him a lot he seemed kind ad warm and she relaxed and felt much more at ease around him.  
  
Yes nice to meet you Susan said he shook their hands warmly  
  
There is a lot going on, quite a lot we can't talk much head but will find a quiet place were I can fill everyone in.  
  
Ladies do glad you could make it he shook there hands all warmly and beamed a wide dashing smile at them.  
  
Elsie felt a little nervous hello she said my name is Elsie nice to meet you. Elsie though maybe he was nicer then she imagined he seemed very friendly and his smile made him seem much more approachable.  
And I'm Susan she said pleasure to meet you.  
  
Addie sat quietly in the folds of her great cloak, this is Addie Elsie said.  
  
Lord Byron someone called, got to run I'm sure will be fast friends soon will be spending a lot of time together.  
  
So, Elsie said your a lord? That does sound rather fancy its a shame your nit a night sir Byron has a nice ring to it.  
  
Elsie Susan said he is a knight he was  knighted last year the prof told me.  
  
Titles are meaningless he joked. They all boarded the airship and were soon off soaring above the English Channel. Lord Byron came over with some scones and milk any one hungry he asked cheerfully.  
  
I am Elsie said what about you she asked Addie?  
  
Oh yes please I'm very hungry now. These are delicious Susan exclaimed so fresh.  
  
Yes I picked them up this morning from my favorite bakery, unfortunately we won't have that conscience for long.  
  
A slim and beautiful lady waked in. She looked elegant and delicate  as soon as she noticed them she quickly turned and left.  
  
I tried to talk to her earlier but she didnt seem to want to have anything to do with me.  
  
What Elsie blurted out how could anyone not want to talk to you! She was really starting to like the English gentleman  
  
Well give it a few days he joked I'm sure you'll be quite sick of me.  
  
I do have quite a bit of energy, I was quite the terror as a youngster My parents didn't know what to do with me.  
  
Where are the professor joked. When did this change. I heard about the recent prank you pulled. You really Are quite the ringleader when it comes to making trouble.  
 That is true he laughed, my father was glad ill be up in the artic, Byron stood up doing his best to look stuffy and dignified.  
  
The artic. What the dither are you doing in the artic.  
He stood with his arms folded behind his back as he paced regally Doing his best imitation of his father (which if you know his father you'll realize is quite good)  
  
Well he went on imitating his father At least you'll find it difficult to cause trouble up there nothing but snow and blasted ice. I don't know why you won't be reasonable and settle into banking like your older brothers.  
  
The professor laughed that is a good impression of your father.  
  
The girls all laughed too though they didnt know his father they could imagine a dignified English  banker.  
  
The funny thing is, he went on in his normal voice.  
  
My grandfather was quite the rouge and adventurer. He made out fortune but in his youth he was in and out of prison, lost his temper at a commanding officer and, plunk picked him up and tossed him into the sea.  
He was dishonorably discharged and ended up in a military prison.  
  
I love him though he wasn't a bad sort or a criminal just fiery and full of pasison. My mother says I take after him, but I have yet to end up in prison and I hope to keep it that way.  
  
It was a nice night for sailing, the dead were calm and it was a surprisingly warm night, they sat on the deck bundled in blankets and sweaters Talking and drinking warm cocoa and tea. The professor came out with a plate of warm cookies and freshly cut apples.  
  
Anna backed these he said for us he said.  
  
Is she coming out? Lord Byron asked perhaps a little too quickly no one caught it but susan who cast a knowing glance at Elsie who was too busy with her own love interest, the  
Plate of cookies.  
  
Oh my those do look delicious she said.  
  
No james said she said she had some reading to do and was going back to her bunk.  
  
Ah righto Byron said trying to hide his discouragement those do smell delicious your quite right.  
  
Well if you all going to be polite I'm gonna help mylsekf Elsie said grabbing one with a smile.  
  
Everyone else took one too. Oh my these are delicious Elsie said.  
  
I quite agree Susan said. What do you think Addie Susan said.  
  
Good Addie said with a smile. Elsie knew she would say more if there were less people around.  
  
I could see why being a professor would be nice Susan said. Going on cruises summers off not worries.  
  
Oh hold up a minute james laughed. You might not be paid for the summer but that doesn't mean you won't be working a lot or faculty want a 11 month appointment.  
  
  
Yes and don't forget those frayed students sleeping in your class and forgetting thier homework Benjamin said with a sigh.  
  
  
And piles of data  
  
Mountains of data  
  
And trying to get tenure said Jonas the youngest member who was still only a year into his post doc.  
  
I wouldn't change it for the world though James said.  
  
Me neither they all quickly agreed.  
  
What's that Addie said she pointed to the night sky where a strange blue light was glowing in the distance.  
  
  
  
  
  
They think there doing good to save the world from expiation.  
  
She felt they were sailing through space and time the air felt strangely charged. Everyone was quiet lost in there own thoughts  
  
The girls snuggled into their bunks. The seas were relatively calm and peaceful. As Elsie came in from brushing her teeth Addie was already curled up covered in blankets.  
  
Oh you look cozy Elsie said Addie smiled at her I am and the blankets are perfect it does get cold up in the artic.  
  
Well I don't think we're to the artic yet I imagine its going to get much colder.  
  
Susan walked in hi su Elsie said. Hello Susan said as she flopped down on Addie's bed. You sure look comfortable Susan smiled.  
  
We were just talking about that Elsie said when we are camping out on the ice it's going to get very cold.  
  
I know I'm a little worrie Susan said but I am glad we wi be with such seasoned explorers.  
  
Oh guess what Addie said poking her face out from under her covers. Her blond hair was wild and beautiful.  
  
I talked to Anna I helped her back the cookies.  
  
What! Susan and Elsie both exclaimed.  
  
What's she like  
  
Is she nice  
  
She hasn't said one word the whole trip.  
  
Ya I thought she was a snob who thinks shes to smart for everyone else.  
  
I went to Harvard Elsie said drawing out her words and trying to look conceited.  
  
Yes Susan said she thinks she is too good for lord Byron.  
  
And I don't think you can find anyone more handsome them him.  
  
Except for father Elsie put in.  
  
Yes that's true Susan chimed in.  
  
No she is really nice Addie said I think she is shy.  
  
How did you meet her Elsie asked. Ell I went I to the Kitchen to get a snack and she was starting I back them.  
  
We didnt say anything at first then she said that she thought I was lucky to have two older sisters. She said she was an only child and her parents were both old when she was born and she was raised by her grandma.  
  
Now I want to talk I get Elsie said I wonder if she is still awake.  
  
When I walked by her room it looked like her light was still in susan said.  
  
Well that settled it elsie said jumping out of bed.  
  
Come on Addie she said as she went over to her little sister.  
  
Ok let me out on a sweater I'm cold. Addie grabbed a sweater and Elsie and Susan did too. As the ship sailed further towards the artic the nights were becoming increasingly chillier.  
  
Ok everyone ready susan said.  
  
Well maybe we shouldn't Elsie replied suddenly feeling shy.  
  
Will be fine Susan said.  
  
Maybe we could bring her something Elsie mused that way it's no like we're just barging in.  
  
Something like what, a pony Susan said with a faint smile she tried to hide.  
  
Elsie rolled her eyes yes lets being her a pony I'm sure there all out grazing on the upper deck probably cold to I'm sure they would love to share your bed with you tonight.  
  
They probably wouldn't kick worse then you do Susan quipped back.  
  
Whatever you say miss blanket Steeler.  
  
Well at least for now we all  
Have out own beds. They all giggled.  
  
I was thinking more along the lines of a nice snack.  
  
I would love some warm cocoa with whip cream Addie said.  
  
They patterned out into the ships narrow halls as they made their way Aup to the galley.  
  
It sure is quiet in here tonight elsie said everybody must be upstairs riding the ponies.  
  
It's not called the upstairs on a ship susan said.  
  
Elsie rolled her eyes again then went on mischievously all I know is were in the basement and we need to go upstairs to the kitchen.  
  
Susan ignore her come on let's go.!  
  
Elsie knocked timidly on the door she wasn't feeling so bold anymore.  
  
Come in a pretty voice said from the other side of the door.  
  
Elsie timidly opened the door I hope we didnt wake you?  
  
Oh know she laughed im a night owl.  
  
Then she added quickly who is we?  
  
Oh Elsie said just me and my two sisters.  
  
Oh come in come in anna stood up and opene the door. Hi Addie she said warmly.  
  
We brought you some coca Addie said.  
  
Oh you girls are too sweet she said.  
  
Elsie and everyone sat at the ships rails staring out at the frozen artic town. People live here she asked incedullouslly?  
  
Yes professor james replied. They get around with sleds but it is a very remote village the island can only be reached by ships. But even though it's remote it's a fairly large little city and there are some fun shops we can visit.  
  
As you can see its a fairly busy port for gold miners adventures and cargo ships.  
  
Elsie felt a little nervous about getting off with all those rough people who might be living there. She realized the ship was starting to feel a little like home with their cost little bedroom.  
  
At that moment Addie came up on deck looking like a little blond Eskimo with her thick fur coat surrounding her face like a mane.  
  
Hi Addie Elsie said. Addie smiled Back what a strange city that is. Where are we?  
  
Susan said I'm not sure but somewhere getting closer to the artic.  
  
  
Ya and I think we are going to go ashore soon Elsie said. Some of the crew were working to ready the bit as it approached the rustic looking harbor.  
  
Lord Byron came over looking dashing and adventurous. Wanna go ashore and look around be asked?  
  
Yes the girls all exclaimed.  
  
It is safe right Susan asked a little timidly.  
  
Oh of course he laughed. Well I suppose it can get a little rough but wi be fine he smiled. They climbed aboard the smaller boat and two of the crew rowed them to to dock. They then climbed up the ladder to the large and aged wooden peor. The city spread out before them wooden bushes and shops that sheltered in the small valley. Steep mountains covered in pine and fir forest towered around the little port town. Higher up the trees were wreathed in clouds and mist that rose to the gray skyline. Quite a site Elsie said taking it all in as they stood atop the pier they turned and looked ou  at the sheltered bay full of ships and boats.  
  
I can't believe anyone lives here Susan responded it seems so remote but is awfully pretty.  
  
Yes I think there is some charm for some people in being Away from things, the pioneer spirit as the Yankees would say. I find it a bit appealing but i think ok more of an expeditionary person, it's nice to get out in the solitude but it also feels good to get back.  
  
So and you should see it in the winter lord Byron said. They get a lot of snow here.  And it's very isolated also for a couple months it's dark all year round.  
  
Oh I don't know if I'd like that much dark Elsie said.  
  
Yes but they also get about a month of sun.  
  
Well at the sake of sounding difficult I'm not sure id like that either Elsie laughed.  
  
I agree Byron said its fun to experience though. We're going have some long dark nights before were safely on the other side of our adventure. And even if you prepare dr it it's still a bit rough. Good companions are critical to keeping your spirits up.  
  
They headed off the dock and into the interesting town. It reminded Elsie of a fort somewhat with it's remote location.  
  
It was fun looking at all the strange buildings and shops and adventurous looking people.  
  
There is actually  a really delicious restaurant here that we can go to when we get hungry.  
  
I hope that's soon laughed Elsie I should have eaten more breakfast Byron pulled out his watch well it is 1 already definitely lunch time. Who else is hungry?  
  
I am both Susan and Addie jumped in. Well that makes four of ya said Byron it's off to lunch!  
  
They made there way up a street that wound up the hill. They shops were surprisingly well kept up be brightly panted  
  
It's pretty nice here susan said.  
  
Ya I'm. Little less worried about food poisoning now Elsie laughed.  
  
You'll love this place Byron said trust me he smiled.  
  
Then he tried to nonchablty say so when you asked anna to come what did she say.  
  
Susan gave Elsie a quick sly smile.  
  
Then said she had some reading to finish to finish and said she would come later.  
  
Quite right.  
  
Ah did she say would want to meet us , I oh don't want her to feel left out.  
  
She didnt say Elsie said feeling a bit bad.  
  
Well no matter Byron said Elsie thought it seemed like he was trying to seem cheerful but she couldn't tell.  
  
The best minute he was back to his normal self as he began to describe the food choices they had. There stew is amazing especially on a cold artic day like today.  
  
Oh that sounds delicious Susan said so they have good bread?  
  
Oh yes Byron said enthusiastically the best all made fresh. They reached the place it was warm and inciting. They sat at a nice booth in the back.  
  
They ordered the stew and fresh warmed bread for everyone.  
 After the meal they went looking at some of the other shops on the street, they were full of all kinda of interesting things.  
  
Addie found a small beautiful telescope that she couldn't put down, look at this Elsie she said.  
  
Susan and Elsie crowded around oh that is wonderful. It's a shame it's so expensive.  
  
Yes Addie sighed I think I'm gonna save up and get one.  
  
You'll have to save you allowance for Elsie scrunched her face trying to concentrate two and a half years.  
I think it would be worth it Addie said.  
We could look at the stars. There so lovely and far away.  
  
I know Elsie said I've always loved the idea of them.  
I think I'm gonna try to save up and get one Addie said thoughtfully.  
  
Talking about there allowance made them all realize they missed there father. I hope we find father soon. Me too Susan said.  
  
Think of how much fun it would be he gather were with us.  
  
Elsie sighed. Will find him again I'm sure of it.  
  
Addie carefully set the telescope back and they walked over to where Byron was browsing the apparel.  
  
I think I'm gonna buy this he said, holding up an enormously  ugly flannel shirt.  
  
Eww Elsie said without thinking.  
  
Elsie! Susan jumped in, mind your manners  
  
You don't like it Byron laughed here's the thing, he lowered his voice in a conspiratorial manner. Where were going there's not a lot of people or ladies but there is a lot of cold and this is just the type of thing I would want for that.  
  
He smiled broadly holding it up.  
  
What do you think he said holding it up to Susan. Well she said, it is rather, er lovel well it does look like it would keep you warm.  
  
Warm and single Elsie laughed.  
  
Even Susan tried to hold back a laugh.  
  
What about anna Elsie burst out with out thinking then clapped her hands over her mouth.  
  
Susan grabbed her Elsie you brat!  
  
Addie tried to hide a giggle.  
  
That settled it Byron said I'm buying it for sure. Like I said no one I need to impress.  
  
They went up to the shopkeeper a rather burly women, oh my that is lovely she said.  
  
Thank you Byron said.  
  
They went out side and Byron said oh wait one second. He went back in the shop. And came out with a package. He handed it to Addie.  
  
What's this Addie asked her heart rising at the shape of the long circular package. P  
  
Open it Byron beamed with joy.  
  
Oh no you don't have to buy us anything both Elsie and Susan exclaimed.  
  
We can share it! Addie said  
  
No no he laughed I got this lovely coat and Addie got something we all need a surprise besides I won't be able to buy anything for mounts I gotta get it out if my system.  
  
Well that is very kind of you Elsie said.  
  
Great it's settled he said as he put on his new flannel coat. How's it look. He was so handsome and dashing he looked good in anything. Well Elsie said its a little better then I expected.  
  
As Susan and Elsie went about the store exclaiming in joy he leaned over to Addie and whispered can you keep a secret  
  
Yes she said.  
  
Well I know it's really quite hideous, a monstrosity of fashion. Which is why I plan to wear it around my father at all times especially at fancy events.  
  
Addie giggled I think I'm starting to like it.  
  
They might the girls talked  
  
Oh look at this Susan Elsie called from across the store holding up a beautiful globe of the earth. With this will never be lost again. Susan laughed yes and you could for it nicely in your back pocket.  
  
Hmm yes that's true it would be a little large for my back pocket Elsie said maybe I should look for something practical for the trip.  
  
Oh I know what I am going to get Susan said holding up a beautiful coat that looked both stylish and warm.  
  
I like that Elsie said. I think I wanna get the same thing but in this color she said holding up anothe style of one.  
  
Lord Byron Susan called I think we found what we want.  
  
Are you sure it's ok?  
  
Oh yes he said in fact I insist.  
  
And now I say we should head to the markets  and load up on some fresh provisions and snacks.  
  
They all piled into their bunks for the evening,  well that was a fun day  Susan said. They were all sitting on Addie's bed curled up in their warm blankets and snacking on the candy they had purchased in the market.  
  
This chocolate is really good I think it has orange in it, hey we should see if anna would like some.  
  
That's a good idea Addie replied enthusiastically.  
  
Ill get her Elsie said my jumping up by with her blanket still earlier tightly around her.  
  
She hurried lightly out the door and down the hall padding with her bare feet on the cold ships floor. I should have grabbed my slippers she thought to herself. She was quickly at Anna's door and the might was on. She knocked quietly.  
  
Come in her soft and beautiful voice rang out.  
  
Hello Elsie said shyly she still wasn't totally comfortable around anna, she seemed so stylish and quiet and intelligent. But she felt of she got to know her, maybe she had misjudged her. She seemed so kind the last time they had spoken.  
  
Elsie gathered her courage,  do you like candy? We got some in the town and wanted to share it with you do you wanna come down to our cabin?  
Addie and is cabin Susan had her own side rolls but she is with us she blurted out all at once.  
  
Anna smiled oh thank you I'dive to. They both quickly padded back down the cold hall into their room.  
  
Hi girls anna said cheerfully.  
We missed you today Susan said you should have joined us!  
  
Yes I should have she laughed I got ashore for a little while.  
  
What! You should have joined us Elsie exclaimed.  
  
I looked for you she said I want ashore very long though.  
  
Want some chocolate  Addie said. We have orange flavored, caramel, mint dark chocolate all kinds.  
  
Anna's face lit up oh yes please she smiled I love candy it's my weekness.  
  
Ya lord Byron bought them for us. An he bought me this Addie said pulling ou a cloth case and showing anna her telescope.  
  
Are you sleeping with it Elsie asked.  
  
Yes Addie said I'm rather excited about It.  
  
Oh your adorable Elsie said giving Addie a hug.  
  
Anna smiled I wish I had sisters growing up.  
  
Well it's not all fun and games Elsie said giving a knowing look towards Susan.  
  
Susan caught the look why you little brat she laughed.  
  
Is he stuck up he seems rather conceited.  
  
Oh no he is really nice and kind. He bought us all really nice gifts today.  
  
Look at that james stood looking in awe at the bright green landmass towering above them.  
  
I don't believe it Byron mumbled this is impossible.  
  
This isn't on any of the maps Anna said. This is just supposed to be ice and ocean but look how green and rugged a everything is.  
  
It looks like a another world Elsie whispered.  
  
Yes I've never seen anything like it Susan said.  
  
Are we going to land there Elsie asked.  
  
Yes yes we have to james said.  
  
The ocean became treble lent and the waves choppy.  
  
Some people get caught between the two worlds and disappear for a whole and some forever.  
  
Big attack on city  
  
Sanctuary where connect  
  
Why would they do that Elsie whispered.  
  
  
  
  
  
Chapter 7  
The first thing she noticed about him was how sad his eyes looked, not hollow or empty they had a fire and a spark of life hidden deep down but sadness seemed caused them to be buried deep down. He was tall and looked to be powerfully built but it was difficult to tell with his flowing robes.  He looked handsome but it was also hard to tell with his long hair and beard. He also looked ageless his long beats made him look older but he looked like younger features could be hidden beneath.  
L She knew at once he was a wizard  
  
Chapter 8  
Id never been there but my father had. He said it was a land touched by the gods. They built an advanced civilization  
Strange and beautiful trees and creatures, great gardens and tall cities all shining white, vast libraries and scholars.  
Deep magic ran through their whole civilization some say they are descended from the gods there are other rumors that the land existed in different worlds at once  
  
Chapter 9  
Her voice seemed deep and powerful everything stood still and lightning seemed to fill the air but then there was an exhausted pause Her voice became less deep but far wilder the electricity seemed to gather around the ground she caught a glance of her beautiful face and was shocked by the exhaustion written so plainly  
Then it felt like the gathering of a wild storm compressed into endless seconds  
  
She raised her staff and lightning split the air and then time seemed to return to its normal pace fur everyone  
  
I normally like to use my magic for growing and healing things  
  
  
  
  
  
Chapter 6  
Elsie woke up she was cold and felt stiff and sore. Something that felt like ice was  
pressed against her face making her uncomfortable and at the same time almost  numb. She pressed her hands  
down to push her self up and something painful burned into her palms. She opened her eyes  
and realized she was lying in snow and ice. It took her a few minutes to gather her wits and  
remember where she was, though she realized she had no idea where she was.  
  
As she stood up shackily she looked around at the vast expanse of giant mountains surrounding her. They  
looked rugged and forbiding. She realized she was in a mountain valley surrounded by snow and ice clad mountains and jagged precipices, some appeared to have rugged trees, mostly bare but with a few evergreens buried under the white of snow. From where she stood the  
valley was fairly level but sloped up towards the mountain ranges encircling it. She guessed that in the summer the valley was probably briefly covered in grass and she saw a pine forest in the direction of what she believe was the setting sun. Thought it may have been rising she was not sure at all what time it was. Now in the winter the whole place was just ice rock and snow and barren trees and evergreens.  
  
Suddenly she realized neither of her sisters were any where nearby, they had been what felt like minutes earlier.  
"Addie! Susan!" she called out. "Where are you?" She felt a rising panic as she looked around hoping for a site of color or movement.  
She had forgotten how cold she was with the cold fear of not knowing where her sisters might be. She also knew that none of them  
were prepared for the deep snow and cold that would be coming soon as night fell.  
  
She stood motionless for a few minutes listening to the sound of silence, a whole world  muffled by snow. She decided to head towards  
what looked like small forest rising far off on the slopes of the mountains to the west. She guessed it couldn't be more then  
4 or 5 miles and hoped that she would be able to find her sisters. She also hoped that on higher ground she  
could perhaps see movement or spot something to help her find them.  
  
She started moving through the snow drifts and had made some progress, occasionaly yelling out for her sisters. She had not gotten very far when she saw with a rise of joy what appeared to be some blue up ahead. She broke into a run hoping it was Addie's dress.  
  
 As she got closer she saw with both dread and hope a small body huddled on the snow. "Addie, Addie" she screamed as she ran up. She  
stumbled through the snow and reached her sisters body, She picked her up and clutched her to her chest, she was still breathing but her tiny frail body was limp and motionless. "Oh Addie, please wake up, please wake up" she said as tears began to form and freeze on her face. She clung to her in a hug feeling totally lost and afraid.  
  
She knew that they were someplace remote and that she would have to figure out something to keep them both warm. The only thing around  
them was snow. She sat there and it felt like time had stood still as she clung to Addie hoping to warm her little sister with her body heat.  
  
It was when hope seemed to be fading out that she felt or sensed she was being watched. She turned slowly and against the rising ground  
behind her she saw a figure, she instanly knew was a dwarf. His face and eyes were far to wild to be human. He was clad in rugged  
furs, fur boots and a blue cloak. He held a enourmous double bladed battle axe and sat staring at the sisters, his large beard jutting out ferousciosly. He was a forbidding presence, it seemed a great viking warrior had suddenly walked out  
from the pages of history.  
  
He said something unitelligble and Elsie responded somewhat shackily from a combination of cold and fear,  
"Please, can you help us my sister is freezing to death." At the moment she suddenly felt like they were not going to freeze to death and it might be more likely they would meet a much quicker and more violent end.  
  
The dwarf responded in a rough voice slowly, "Are you a spirit?"  
  
"A spirit" Elsie replied?  
Elsie woke up she was cold and felt stiff and sore. Something that felt like ice was  
pressed against her face making her uncomfortable but almost numb. She pressed her hands  
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and it might be more likely they would meet a much quicker and violent end.  
  
The dwarf responded slowly, "Are you a spirit?"  
  
  
"A spirit" elise said somewhat confused. "No, I am just a little girl" (Elsie seldom refered to herself as a little girl but  
in the current circumstances it felt appropriate to her) "My sister needs help, can you help us?"  
  
The dwarf didn't seem to pay any attention to her response. "Are you a ghost then" he said?  
  
"No" Elsie said, I am a girl and this is my sister we are lost and cold"  
  
The dwarf continued to stare at them both. Elsie noticed he also had swung his shield around as if getting ready for a fight and he had raised his battle axe his whole body seemed tensed for sudden movement.  
  
"Sounds like something a spirit would say" the dwarf muttered.  
  
he shook his head a number of times then began to trudge noisly towards them. He approached loudly but also  
warily, as if the two sisters were a pair of wild dragons waiting to devour him.  
  
He came close puffing and blowing and stomping through the snow like a great noisy freight engine.  
  
Elsie felt a little hope but also worry as she stared at his bright battle axe.  
  
As the dwarf approached his manner changed a little, Elsie realized he was scared if that was possible for so fierce a figure.  
  
She decided to try to put him at ease.  
  
"Thank you" she said, my sister and I are lost and our other sister Susan is lost somewhere too.  
  
The dwarf didn't respond as he moved closer.  
  
When he got close enough for his axe to make short work of both of them he stood irresolute.  
  
"well he said, "If you are going to do something you better now, other wise I am going to try to help your sister"  
  
"Ok, thank you!" Said Elsie.  
  
His mannerism changed as he dropped the axe and quickly went to work he pulled off his large fur  garment and tenderly wrapped Addie in it.  
  
It reminded Elsie of a father and a small child.  
  
She also saw a flash of concern cross his small face.  
  
"here he said" Handing his other coat to Addie "no sense two of you freezing to death."  
  
"Thank you Elsie said.  
  
He muttered, "how did two of you get so far up in the mountains with no packs or warm clothes"  
  
He looked quickly at her out of the corner of his eye with a dark work as if his old suspicions were coming back that they were some  
kind of fey or spirit children or something worse trying to lure his guard down him in.  
  
"Your sister is in bad shape" he said I am gonna give her some YYY. We dwarfs like it for when we want to get a little rowdy, it also does a good  
job of warming you. Normally I wouldn't give it to a child but you sister looks like she could use a little warmth and a little rowdy spirit.  
  
He pulled out a thick and strangely shaped bottle and poured some into Addies mouth. Though his words were gruffly spoken his movements were full of concern.  
  
Addie sputtered a little and weakly opened her eyes. Elsie screamed out in joy, "Addie, Addie!" She grabbed her sister and pulled her close into a tight embrace. "Don't squeeze her to death the drwarf said not unkindly as he suddenly began cleaning something from his eye and muttering to him self in some strange and harsh language.  
  
  
As she laid her back down across her legs Addie smiled weakly at her. Elsie suddenly felt she could understand how the dwarf could mistake them for ghosts  
Addie looked pale and beautiful like a spirit frail and fragile, delicate and pale yet beautiful.  
  
Elsie looked over as the dwarf brushed something from his eye, was it a tear? She couldn't be sure but she managed to stop the flood of her own tears unleashed by all the emotions running through here.  
  
Her joy was short lived though as she remembered Susan was still out someplace in this vast mountain range.  
  
We have to find my other sister she said.  
  
We're gonna need someone to find us soon if we don't get to warmth and shelter He replied  
  
We can't leave Susan out here Elsie responded with panic in her voice.  
  
No we can't the dwarf said but we need to get you to warm then ill go back out and look for her.  
  
Oh thank you! Elsie said is there a city nearby?  
  
The drwarf laughed a short barking laugh. Yes if your up for a good 20  
days march and that's assuming it doesn't snow, if the snow comes you could be lost forever, but you'd freeze long before forever ever got here.  
  
oh no what will we do Elsie said.  
  
Her questions and mannerisms showing she had already lost most of her fear of the drawf and had come to rely on him to get them out of their situation.  
  
Well he said I'm traveling to a ziggurat it's a secret of my people so ill have to blindfold you as we get close but we will be safe and warm there, then ill load up on supplies and go back out to look for your sister.  
  
Oh I hope we can find her do you think we can Elsie said. Her words slurred together she had a tendency of speaking fast when she was excited or nervous.  
  
Well he said ill do my best and this snows a dratted bother but it will make picking up her trail up that much easier.  
  
Good it's settled then Elsie said we can both go and head out in different directions.  the dwarf was about to contradict her and say it was far too dangerous  but he could sense her steely resolve. She might not be a ghost but there was something far deeper then the small blond girl sitting in front of him showed.  
  
He decided to take a different tactic because he knew she was far too exhausted and he knew someone not used to these mountains could get lost easy and there were dangerous and dark things that haunted the night.  
  
So instead he said I think you would be better off tending your sister Susan and I would much prefer to come back to both of you warm and safe.  
  
Well I guess your right Elsie said how far is this place?  
  
It's a couple hours march from here he responded as long as it doesn't start to snow but it seems like a clear night so far but the weather can be dangerous and unpredictable in the mountains and these mountains in particular are particularly inhospitable. Even if we hurry it will be dark by then so we best get moving and make the most of the remaining daylight.  
  
He stood up abruptly picked up Addie and said well you ready for a night march? If you get tired you can ride on my back.  
  
I don't want you to carry both of us Elsie said, I'm not a little girl I can walk through the snow just fine.  
  
Oh ho ho so now your not a little girl not too long ago I seem to recall differently the drawf teased at her.  
  
Well that is true Elsie laughed. And if you didn't have to carry Addie I would  
take you up on your offer because I feel exhausted but I don't want to slow us down and I fear for Susan and the sooner we get back the sooner you can look for her.  
  
Righto said the drwaf lets move were making for the dark line of trees ahead. They set off trudging through the snow and speaking little they were both exhausted and the drwarf had his weapons fear and Addie he was carrying. He also had been setting a hectic pace (even for drwaves) and hadnt had much rest or sleep in a week, he had been relying on reaching the ziggurat for safety and rest and had been concerned of being caught in a blizzard.  
  
They hadnt been walking more then a half hour when, well maybe we should check in on Susan.  
  
Susan woke up she was cold and disoriented. She way laying on her back stating up at a beautiful pale blue winter sky. She felt to shacky to move but the cold was eating through her clothes so she pushed her self up and gazed at the massive and forbidding mountains all around her.  
  
She was in the same mountain valley that both Addie and Elsie were in but she didnt know it at the moment she felt terribly small and alone.  
  
I wish father were here she thought he would know what to do, but the thought didnt help her it just made her feel more alone and confused.  
  
She decided to look for Addie and Elsie and called out to both of them when she had a curious feeling she wasn't alone. She turned slowly to her right and didnt see anything and spin all the way back to her starting place only seeing a range of far off mountains cloaked in snow in every direction.  
  
She felt the panic leaving and though to her self, I'm just being silly and I need to stay calm. She had the thought a moment to soon because she realized with dread that on the far ridge their was a bear staring right at her.  
  
For a minute she felt her knees go weak and she felt too paralyzed to move. She snapped out of it and begin to run and stumble through the snowdrifts. It was painful and hard the snow was deep and it was exhausting work. She didnt dare to turn and see if the bear was after her she just plunged onward tell he kinda began to burn. She ran about 20 minutes when she stumbled and plunged to her knees in a snow drift. She caught herself with her hands and the cold snow shocked her hands. She sat gasping for air as she turned. She didnt see the bear anywhere and for a moment she felt her heart lift in hope but it didnt last Long the bear was definitely stalking her. It was close but not too close and had come up in front of her blocking her way.  
  
She wanted to cry and lay down in the snow but the thought of Addie and Elsie out ther somewhere alone made her feel fierce.  
  
She started running and the bear would trail her sometimes cutting her off sometimes letting her run. She realized with fright the bear was toying with her she knew it could catch her whenever it wanted but she refused to give up, luckily it was forcing her toward a forest of dark trees and she though if she climbed a small one maybe it would leave her alone.  
  
She had been running (and walking when she couldn't run anymore) for what seemed like hours, in reality it had been closer to about 45 minutes and she had covered a lot of ground in spite of the snow and icy covered valley.  
  
She had covered another mile and thought maybe the bear had given up but when she turned to look she saw it still behind her. But something ahead caught her eye thee figures walking ahead in the snow.  
  
She begin to call out as they got closer bear! bear! She relied that it was Addie and Elsie and She felt relief her sisters were ok, but then she realized she was leading a bear right towards them.  
  
They had seen her and were racing towards her a stranger was carrying Addie and she felt worry rush over her, was she ok?  
  
Susan Susan! Elsie screamed your ok!  
  
A bear! A bear is chasing me Susan screamed. The next few moments were all confusion Susan and Elsie embracing In a quick hug. And then Susan pointing at the large bear coming over the snow drifts towards them.  
  
At this moment the Drawf showed that he was both capable and brave he said hello you just be Susan in a calm voice handed Addie to Elsie and like lightning had Drawn his battle axe and shield and was striding towards the bear. He had out his shield up and was crouched  down low.  
  
Addie said oh please don't hurt the bear  
  
He yelled at the bear and crashed his axe on his shield. The bear seemed to lose interest it had risen up briefly then dropped down and ambled off most likely looking for easier prey.  
  
"Oh Susan I can't believe you were Chased by a bear, how brave of you and you too mr drwaf!"  
  
The girls hugged again while Elsie explained how they had met the drwarf and that they were hurrying to get Addie warm.  
  
After the chaos and fear everyone felt even more exhausted but they kept on. The drwaf encouraged them all and stayed behind with his axe out keeping a protective eye over the group. The dark was coming fast and by the time they reached the trees the evening had arrived. Luckily there was a full moon but still the forest seemed errie and quiet with just the sound of their breathing and the crunch of snow under their feet.  
  
If you were a bird on a branch in the forest (you probably would be wishing you had flown south for the winter) but if you hadn't  you would have seen four figures marching through the moonlight night not clad at all for a snowy night. In fact a bird was watching, silly humans, they won't last long, but a dwarf, a dwarf should know better he thought as he fluttered off.  
  
And the bird was right they were all getting cold and the heat from their running and marching had left them damp and now it was beginning to freeze on them.  
They took turns carrying Addie and were all soon feeling almost catatonic.  
A wind also picked up and chilled them to the bone.  
  
They marched on through the still forest as the bright moon reflected upon the snow covering the dark and silent forest floor.if they had been staying at a mountain cabin they would have enjoyed the walk and the dark blue of the evening sky and the strange light reflecting from the moon that made the dark pine and for trees quite visible.  
  
They began heading steadily upward as they approached the foothills of the mountain range. The mountains rose abruptly from the valley and the  
dwarf said encouragingly, "were almost there then we can get warm and a warm meal going.  
  
Oh I'm so hungry said Susan  
  
Me too replied Elsie "and cold" and right as she said that a wintery blast of wind blew through the trees and cut through their clothes chilling them to the vibe.  
  
After that they fell silent with their own thoughts,  all their energy spent. Clouds had begun to roll in and the moonlight was fading out. It was becoming harder to see and Now it was just one painful step after another. They had reached a rocky place and began winding their way up a slim path that was steep and covered in snow. Sometimes Elsie would stumble and have to catch her self with her hands in the cold snow. The last time she had stumbled she couldn't get up but lay panting too cold and exhausted to move.  
  
The drwaf gently helped her up "were almost there he said, your doing great I would say lets take a break but we really need to get to shelter.he looked up at the sky worriedly, the first small drops of snow were beginning to fall from the ominous clouds gathering across the western peaks far far above them.  
 from inside a warm cabin it would have been a beautiful night as the snow gently began to fall but out alone in the wild it was perilous.  
  
ok Elsie said as they continued their march. Out of the corner or her eye Elsie thought she movement in the trees to the right and it got her thinking about what other creatures may be up here besides bears. She decided to ask the drwaf at Least it would help pass the time.  
  
"You mentioned things worse then bears up here. What types of things she got out between tired pauses."  
  
Oh ho ho be replied so being tired cold and hungry isn't enough you want to be scared too?  
  
Well Elsie said letting out a small laugh maybe it will take my mind off of it.  
  
That's true the drwarf said well actually this valley and the mountains around here are fairly safe in fact that's the first bear I have ever seen in these mountains, im sure there are lots but they usually keep their distance from us.  
  
 Evil things generally don't come to this particular range but they do roam these mountains. In the lower foothills far from here their are goblins that hunt and prey on unsuspecting travelers. Before the fair folk died out these mountains were mostly safe but the goblins will pass over them from time to time and deeper creatures and spirits have been haunting them.  
  
There are far more evil and dark places the black mountains are so dark and dangerous no one will go near them. About 100 years ago a large and warlike group of drwaves set out to establish a mine in their lower hills. The expedition went badly they were haunted by nightmares from the very start. A small group of drwaves went Mad attacking and killing many of the other drwaves before they were subdued. That was a strange occurrence the aggressive drwaves had no recollection all had the same story that they were attacked by dark spirits and were fighting them off. A few days later they woke up and over half the party was dead, and not just dead it was a rather gruesome seen not fit for the ears of young children on dark nights.  
  
How far away are these mountains Susan asked.  
  
Oh quite far from here no need to worry but their evil influence has been spreading across the land.  
  
I should have kept my month shut said Elsie only half joking.  
  
I'm sorry the drwaf said, I should have saved those wild tales my father was one of the drwaves that survived. They ended up setting up another expedition to the north on an entire continent of nothing but snow and rock and ice. The place is still almost totally empty. The shifting ice can trap and crush even great ships. And the temperatures and Blizzards are life threatening.  
  
quiet beneath the moon  
  
but a group of dwarves set out to mine the southern mountains. Some early explorers had found evidence of precious stones and also good sting metals for smithing and building. It awoke a fire in their dwarvish hearts far hotter then the Ice and snow that covers the lands.  
  
they built great ships and filled them with good and supplies and set out. I've heard it was a wonderous site. Not the least of which you don't see lots of dwarves on ships.  
  
 It was a rugged life for them but they all got fabulously rich. The great trader ships manned by humans and dwarves would come for the precious metals and stones every summer. With them they would bring food and tales of the outside world. My father said after the first year it was quite enjoyable they lived far underground and it was warmer down there my father was an adventurous soul and him and some of the more hardy dwarves would venture out and explore the continent.  
  
One night a group of about 15 of them were surrounded by strange glowing lights in the distance. They were all scared witless and lit a large fire everyone stayed awake watching the lights circle around them.  
  
Some of them swore they heard laughter, my father says he heard something but he thinks it was the wind.  
  
what do you think it was said Susan.  
  
Well I'm not rightly sure maybe something natural maybe creatures from the stars maybe some ice beings that live  down there.  
  
My father and some of the arcane researchers think there maybe a warm spot somewhere on the continent where trees and grass and forests are but no one has ever found it. It was mostly handed down from old legends legends older then the drwaves.  
  
Oh another thing said the dwarf, there the night will last for months in the winter and the sun won't set for most of the summer, it's very strange and fascinating.  
  
I wish there wasn't so much trouble id love to go exploring up there.  
  
I have some stories I can tell when we are safe and warm but we are in a very remote corner of the mountains long ago the drwaves mined these mountains my ancestors built were we are going to. We are in the blue mountains and right now the biggest threats are snow and cold and freezing or starving to death. That's part of why wee are safe most people even goblins won't come this far up here.  
  
that's very interesting Elsie said. I'd love to see that place.  
  
Addie had regained conscious a little and am said weakly I wouldn't mind either, if you would remind carrying me mr drwaf.  
  
They all laughed and both Elsie and Susan felt a pulse of joy and warmth as their hopes rose that Addie would be ok. The drwaf was glad too but he was also concerned the snow was now falling heavily and be knew they were on the verge of all freezing to death. As hardy as he was he knew he was at the end of his strength. His muscles burned and he felt shivers overtaking his body from the cold. He had had a much longer journey up into the mountains and hadnt eaten in 3 days.  
  
  
Addie said I feel warmer and better now I can walk. Her voice sounded weak and faint and the dwarf looked at Susan and Elsie questioningly.  
  
Are you sure Addie? Susan said.  
  
She didnt respond and hung there like a little rag doll. Both Susan and Elsie felt concerned for her again as they continued to trudge up the steep mountain path as the snow blew around them. It was coming down thickly now, blowing and swirling and making it difficult and treacherous to hike up the steep path.  
  
It would have been the type of storm that would be lovely to watch from inside a warm house with a fire burning bright and mugs of warm cocoa. But it was a terrible night to be out in. The wind picked up and the icy chill it drive felt almost angry as it pounded against them.  
  
Elsie felt totally numb, like she would fall over at any second and never rise again. She was about to fall over when Susan beat her to it, she just went to take a step and fell face first into a snow drift. The drwaf and Susan couldn't rouse her and the dwarf had a very concerned look on his face that was almost hidden behind the snow clinging to his beard.  
  
Finally they got Susan to her feet and staggered on.  
  
It began to feel like that's the only world Elsie had ever known just picking up one foot and setting it down further up the path. That and overwhelming exhaustion and cold. He clothes were soaked through and the wind ate away at her skin.  
  
She felt like she was about to give up when the dwarf gave a shout muffled by the snow but quite clear.  
  
We're close! That large stone on the left marks the entrance. They turned off on a side path sheltered by cliffs, the snow and wind were less here and the snow wasn't as deep. They walked between the Rock walls and soon came to a dead end. Elsie felt her spirits fall and Susan said quietly, were lost. Her voice was full of exhaustion and despair.  
  
  
No no the dwarf said excitedly as he fumbled for a key in his pack he had handed Addie to Elsie and pulled out a key. He fumbled as he tried to put it into a small hole and Elsie noticed his hands were almost blue he had given his gloves to Elsie and Susan and his hands had been exposed as he carried Addie.  
  
She realized how selfless and kind the dwarf was caring so deeply for strangers. He managed to get the key in and he shoved hard as the Rock wall  moved inwards. It wasn't the whole wall but simply a small part that was a door that perfectly matched the Rock face.  
  
Then the next thing Elsie knew she was inside a small dark narrow cave. She had to duck to avoid the low roof and she felt a pang of disappointment it was out of the cold but still freezing and dark. Then she thought what a brat I'm being at least will not die in here.  
  
Susan said oh it's lovely.  
  
Elsie knew she wasn't being honest and thought she would make a good diplomat or politician she was about to say so when she realized again she was just tired and irritable and she also realized how glad she had been to see Susan earlier that day so she said nothing.  
  
She cheered up quickly when the dwarf said my dear you most not know dwarves very well this is just the back door follow me. He led them  
all hunched over through a number of passageways and pulled out another key at what appeared to be another dead end in the cave wall.  
  
The key clicked and turned and they stepped inside the dwarf reached over and flipped a small switch and they saw they were at the foot of a stairwell hewn from the solid rock.  
the stairway was much longer then Elsie expected and she realized she was they were climbing up the inside of the mountain itself.  
  
Like I said we came in the back door the actual place is higher up we are almost there.  
  
They were all still dead tired but it was warmer in here and there was no snow too so they all found strength to keep going up the long stone staircase. They stopped at a landing where the dwarf used another key to unlatch a steel gate. This one wasn't hidden but was a strong defense against any intruders that had made it this far.  
  
Finally they had reached the top and went through the last door. All the girls were completely amazed by the inside it was beautiful and elegant but also cozy they had stepped into a a staging area coats of amore and sword and axes were along one wall.  
  
They moved out if this room into a large and well furnished kitchen.  
  
Oh it's lovely gasped Elsie  
  
It would be lovier if there was food Susan joked.  
  
Ill get on that the drwaf said. This place is well stocked with food. Will feast like kings tonight.  
  
Seeing the dwarf in the kitchen made him look even more fierce and warlike.  
  
He led them out of the kitchen to a beautiful dining room that had a table that would seat about 20 people (or drwaves)  
  
they then passed into a large gathering room elegantly decorated and went up a flight of steps they walked over luxurious carpet and came to a small cozy hall with 5 doors. The dwarf opened one door to a small cozy room with a bed and a table and a large comfortable looking chair. He went over to a window and said  
  
You probably have had enough of snow but these rooms are actually on the eastern side and are built into the mountain precipice. He opened the window and they had a beautiful view of the valley far away in the distance. They also saw the snow had picked  up intensely and had turned into a blizzard  
  
Now for the best part the dwarf said. Each of these rooms has a bathroom with a luxurious bath. He opened the side door to a room with a bath. I started the heating furnace when I came in so you should be able to take a hot bath any moment.  
  
Yay the girls all shouted nothing sounded nicer to Elsie at the moment. And ill be right back said the dwarf. The girls all laid down on the bed and Susan said I'm not sure i ever want to move again.  
  
I agree said Elsie, well no actually I disagree I think I could a manage to move into a hot bath.  
  
Elsie put her arm around Addie who was laying quietly she was awake but still looked rather pale and thin.  
  
I'm glad we all found each other said Susan. Yes me too said Elsie it really is lucky.  
  
At that moment the drwaf came in smiling broadly. I've brought some clothes normally dwarvish women would wear them but you can wear them while your wet clothes are drying.  
  
You can all take asking a bath as you want I am going to go down to the kitchens and whip us up a meal fit for a fairy queen!  
  
I picture a fairly queen eating lettuce and maybe some water and light Elsie joked.  
  
Ok for for a drwaves warrior he joked back but if legends hold true  the fair folks magic was Only rivaled by their cooking abilities.  
  
The dwarf left them and Elsie went to draw a bath for her and Addie will you be ok Addie she asked?  
  
Yes I'm feeling much better she replied and a warm bath will really helpline you could just help me to the bath.  
  
Yes of course said Susan and Elsie at the Same time.  
  
You can use the bath in this room so you wont have to walk as far.  
  
Elsie stripped off her wet and still mostly frozen clothes and settled into a hot bath she thought it was one of the nicest feelings she had ever experienced she sighed contentedly as the water warmed her body.  
she let the warm water soak over her and slowly warm her body. It was so comfortable she almost fell asleep but she caught herself and say up straighter. She couldn't believe how good the water felt as it slowly warmed every inch of her cold and tired body.  
  
As they warmed up they all began to realize how hungry they were.  
  
Addie finished first and she still felt weak but she felt much better she toweled off and put on a dress and blue sweater the dwarf had brought her it fit better then she expected she tied a chord around her waist to make it fit a little better and she decided to go say hi to the drwarf  while she waited for her sisters.  
  
As she headed down stairs she was greeted with a delicious smell of cooking.  
  
hello mr drwaf she said, that smells so good and also Thank you for carrying me all that way and for being brave and saving us from the bear.  
  
The dwarf was brave at facing most things but compliments were something he was not good with. He got nervous and stammered into his beard it was nothing and besides he said I've carried a lunch sack that weighed more then you but will remedy that once my meal is done .  
  
Can I help you she said?  
  
Sure he replied you can peel these carrots.  
  
There was a small wooden table with chairs around it and Addie sat down she had started to feel a little light headed and she took a minute to stabilize herself.  Are you ok the dwarf said noticing she seemed a little light headed.  
  
Yes I'm feeling much better she said a little tired but some food and sleep will do wonders.  
good well I think your going to like what I'm making, it's a good thing we keep this place so well stocked.  
  
  
Addie smiled  
  
well the dwarf said you all seem a lot less ferocious then when I first met you the dwarf laughed, he was busy stirring a pit and quickly moved over to a large mixing bowl.  
  
Oh Addie laughed ferocious? you must be teasing Elsie and I aren't exactly intimidating.  
  
Yes the dwarf said talking a meant off from his stirring  I wasn't excepting to find two young girls in so remote a place I thought for sure you were spirits or something darker.  
  
well we are just ordinary girls Addie laughed but how we got here is a strange story.  
  
I suspect as much said the dwarf. Well no worries my plan is tonight we relax eat dinner and then rest by a fire we have all been through a lot. Then tomorrow when we are good and rested (and after a big breakfast of course) we can share stories and decide what our plan is.  
  
That sounds good Addie said at that moment Elsie walked in her dress was far to Long and she pulled it up as she walked  
  
Hi Addie she said she was so happy Addie was ok she went over sat right next to her putting an arm around her skinny shoulders.  
  
That smells good Elsie exclaimed what are you making? I'm starving! Can you imagine if we were all still out in the snow? It would be awful how did you know about this place? We're you coming here on purpose  
She blurted out  
  
The dwarf waited patiently for her to finish all her questions. Well he laughed I'm making a lot if things or actually a feast and also dessert. It's a surprise though but it's almost done  
  
oh please tell us tell us Elsie said  
  
Haha well if you can't wait I can tell you he said good naturedly.  
  
Elsie felt kind of guilty kind of like when you don't out what your present is supposed to be. She also realized the dwarf was very kind and she didnt want to take advantage actually she said we can wait ill try to guess by smelling things.  
  
That's a good game he said  
  
I smell garlic Addie said and onions and I think maybe steak cooking I also smell raw carrots.  
  
You smell carrots Elsie asked I didn't know you could smell raw carrots Addie pointed over at the cooking area and said also I can see them and I helped cut them up.  
  
Oh Elsie laughed  
  
At that moment Susan came down she had taken longer then everyone else and she looked like she was going to a fancy party. (She got the nicest dress which gave her a bit of an advantage).  
  
You do know we are in the middle of no where Elsie teased her, were you planning on steeping out tonight? Maybe gonna do the fox trot with the bear which seemed to take an interest in you.  
  
Well if I remember right the dwarf mistook you for mountain trolls maybe if you  spent a little more time looking presentable you wouldn't scare people. Susan retorted  
  
He didnt think we were trolls Elsie exclaimed he thought we were fairy folk which are known for their magic and Beauty right mr dwarf.  
  
Eh what's that the dwarf said pretending he hadnt heard so he wouldn't have to take sides. He also opened the oven and pulled out a delicious looking loaf of golden bread it smelled delicious and set all their minds on food.  
  
We're just about ready to eat the dwarf said  
  
I can help set the table Susan offered oh I can help too Elsie and Addie chimed in together.  
  
That would be just fine thank you the drwaf said.  
  
The girls said good night to th dwarf and headed towards their rooms upstairs  
  
The dwarf had doubt them some comfortable sleeping clothes which they put on. It's strange we are so high up and yet still underground Susan said.  
  
Yes I rather like being underground inside a mountain.  
  
And what luck we ran into such a kind dwarf if we hadnt we would have froze or starved to death.  
  
Its a good thing I'm so tired Susan said otherwise I don't think I'd sleep a wink. I feel like a have stumbled into a fairy take. A rather rough one given how forbidding those mountains are.  
  
But there so beautiful Elsie said I don't think I've ever seen mountains so pretty and yes they are rugged I feel we maybe be up for a rough trek out of here.  
  
Yes and I would imagine we would need to bring food and camp supplies I think he said its many days tell we would reach a city. And if it snows like it's doing now we would need to be well prepared.  
  
Yes it would be a rough hike but the drawf seems very capable and he made his way up here ok with limited supplies so I think we can so it.  
  
What do you think Susan?  
  
Susan?  
  
 Elsie said  
  
I think she fell asleep Addie laughed quietly it has been a rather hectic day.  
  
Ill say Elsie replied  
  
Do you think you would rather be in an adventure or read about one Addie asked.  
  
Well right now being in one has been rather exciting but if we were still  outside in the snow I think I would say reading about one.  
  
Yes that what I think Elsie said also when you hear about an adventure the unpleasant situations are seldom as bad as when you have to experience them.  
  
I do hope we can find father soon Addie said  
  
Me too Elsie replied I'm sure we will, I miss mother a lot too Addie responded Elsie didn't respond for a little and Addie wondered if she had drifted off to sleep.  
  
Me too she finally said sometimes the sadness almost feels like more then I can bare. But I'm glad we have each other but i miss mother everyday she was so pretty it's hard to talk about, but the wound never go away. I'm glad I have you and Susan and father is be lost without you.  
  
Madison  
  
  
  
she paused then went on and you need to stop scaring us if anyone else is going to get hurt or sick it's my turn its rather selfish of you always making everyone else worry about you.  
  
Ok Addie replied I suppose I could  be a little less selfish I do tend to hog up all the sickness attention.  
  
Did you hear that Elsie asked her voice suddenly full of excitement and mischief.  
  
I think so Addie replied stifling a giggle  
  
I'm pretty sure Susan just snored Elsie responded oh oh I do hope she does it again think of the fun we could have teasing her.  
  
I didn't know she was a snorer. That must be something new of think of the fun we can have teasing her she whispered.  
  
Both girls lay still and breathless hoping Susan would make another noise.  
  
Eventually Elsie said disappointedly I think it was just a mumble  
  
Yes it's too bad Addie giggled  
  
Yes Susan's far to perfect Elsie said she must have some flaw we can use against her I mean besides being a pest who think shes Better then everyone else.  
  
Just at that moment Susan made a loud noise and rolled over she than began to snore loudly. Elsie and Addie began to giggle uncontrollably Addie stuffed a blanket in her mouth to keep from laughing out loud. While gasping for breath Elsie said do you remember friar he was so big he broke the wood on our couch  
  
yes Addie said I did feel bad for him he was so embarrassed  
  
Yes well I bet Susan snores  
louder then him father said he didn't sleep all night one time when he shared a room with him.  
Susan's snoring had changed a little but the girls where laughing to hard to notice.  
  
The next thing they knew something came flying out of the dark and landed crash! Right on top of Elsie Addie and Elsie both screamed.  
  
there screams were stopped short by Susan's laughing "I heard you the whole time Elsie, you little monster! I woke up and heard you so I pretended to snore then I decided to attack you she said pinning Elsie down and ticking her. Addie had turned on the lights and all the girls lay laughing while Susan who still had Elsie pinned down and was sitting on top of her.  
  
Do you have anything you would like  
To say Susan asked clearly wanting an apology.  
  
Well yes Elsie said with feigned seriousness.  
  
That's more like it Susan responded with an air of dignity and waited for an apology. She was stil straddled over the top of Elsie sitting on her stomach and pinning her down.  
  
well elsie said I did make some comments about you being perfect and I'd like to say that then she blurted the last piece out in a rush that I was wrong your definitely  not perfect I hadn't seen your wild bed head in a while and forgot just how terrible you look, your poor future husband!  
  
Elsie! Susan began to tickle her again as she squirmed to get away.  
Elsie was surprised  how strong she was  and try as she might she couldnt get away. considering how graceful she was  
  
Your gonna end up a bar maiden in an old dirty bar serving drunk old sailors. And none if them will pay you any attention except when they want a drink and then theell say "hey you bar wench get me another ale" Susan said in her best sailor voice.  
  
you'll say we'll maybe the one with a patch on his eye and long dirty hairs not so bad he is only half drink but  
  
That was a pretty good impression Addie said yes Elsie chimed in you did sound pretty good.  
  
Susan sat waiting for Elsie to make another comment but Elsie didnt want to be ticked anymore so she held her tongue and tried to look innocent.  
  
The girls continued talking for another hour or so and then they all drifted off to sleep.  
  
They woke up but it was difficult to tell what time it was. Elsie was the first to get up and she padded quietly to the bathroom not wanting to wake anyone else  
  
Is that you Elsie Susan whispered  
  
Yes it is Elsie said I think Addie's still asleep  
  
I made a breakfast fit for a king  
  
Oh where is it all three girls asked at once  
  
The dwarf leaned back and patter his belly  
  
What do you think i have been doing for the last five hours he laughed  
  
Don't worry he laughed youve slept all the way into the afternoon and I (and my belly) didnt have the heart to wake you.  
  
Now before you think I'm a selfish glutton I thought we could have a light snack and since it's 1 pm we can eat a small snack then go and expire the caves and mines then will have a magnificent dinner and figure out our plans.  
  
That sounds wonderful the girls  all said. Their lunch was no too lift the dwarf had made some delicious bread and dispute what he said there was still plenty of food. He fried up more fresh sausage.  
  
We should explore he said. They went back out the backdoor and saw the deep snow coming down it looked like it hasn't stopped all night and when Elsie jumped in it it went up to her stomach.  
  
And that said the drwaf is why we will stay inside today.  
  
It sure looks pretty Addie said.  
  
Yes it is the dwarf said. He paused as clearly a thought crossed his mind the girls except for Susan didnt notice but the dwarf knew he had to leave soon on a dangerous  trip and travel a great distance.  
  
They went back inside already glad to be out of the bitter cold . Well the drwaf said cheerfully I was thinking if you feel up for it we could go explore the mines.  
Oh that sounds fun they all said we would love to go exploring!  
  
They enter mines.  
  
the caves widened out considerably as they made there way down a smooth steep road. It was about 6 feet wide and the floor was perfectly smooth.  
  
the dwarf said I've talked to lots of humans who say being by the ocean or in the woods or on a mountain makes them feel refreshed and joyful well for us dwarves give us a cave deep under ground.  
  
Susan followed up by saying but you must love the oceans and the forests and beautiful mountains?  
  
Yes the dwarf replied I do like them my mother always said we have a little fairy blood in our family line of course that's probably not true but we all do have a love for those things too, but all dwarves have a fierce desire for gems and gold and precious metals, for the shaping and forging of armor and trinquets and weapons. We also love to be deep undergoing. But we are nothing compared to the deep dwarves.  
  
Oh what are the deep dwarves Susan asked?  
  
well they are dwarves but almost as different from us regular dwarves as humans are from dwarves. They are smaller then us and much thicker. There also strong too for their size it's shocking how sting they are, there also very reclusive; they will almost never venture to the surface their terrified of it. Most of what people know of them is from some of their explorers that have ventured to the sky world as they call it. There homes and mines are far below ours but they touch in a lot of places and there are a few cities and outposts at these places where a lot of trade  goes on.  
  
Are they friendly Addie asked?  
  
Oh yes said the dwarf but their also strange and fierce and they usually stick to themselves. One of the major trade cities deep underground is khelad zilkan. It's a lovely city and usually there are drwaves and deep dwarves all about there are even a fair amount of humans at times and Long long ago some of the fair folk would come down from time to time.  
  
Who are the fair folk Elsie said.  
they had been traveling a long ways through  massive caverns small tunnels broad roads but always deeper and the tunnels seed hopelessly intertwined and complex. now and Susan whispered to Elsie I hope we don't get lost but it echoed more loudly then she intended.  
  
Oh don't you worry the dwarf laughed if We get lost ill eat my hat.  
  
Probably cause you'll have to cause will all be starving to death Elsie shot back then laughed at her joke the dwarf and everyone else also joined in.  
  
No the dwarf assured them that's one thing that I have noticed is different then humans dwarves keep their bearings far better under ground then humans. That's not to say we don't get lost I could get lost down here if I was careless but this is a relatively small mine. It touches on natural caves and that is where even a drwaf could lose his way.  
  
This is like how you might take an evening stroll near your home. You know how well your going you don't even really need to give it much thought.  
What natural caves do you mean Elsie said  
  
Oh there are huge underground places that are all natural they stretch for hundreds and hundreds if miles. Usually dwarves will Incorporate them into their own cities. Are you familiar with dwarven cities he said?  
  
No not all all Susan replied  
  
Oh well their wonderful And some are More isolated but the larger ones are usually built to take and tags of the massive natural caverns much of the deep dwarves domain is in these places. It's said you could get anywhere across the world inside of them but I don't know if that's true. There are some maps of some of the larger ones but there very incomplete and it's dangerously easy to become hopelessly lost.  
  
Even dwarves will take care when setting out on mining expeditions in these places.  
  
It's all very fascinating Susan said.  
  
Yes and of course when more for dwarves whose hearts are set aflame by the precious jewels and ores hidden beneath the surface.  
  
Of course there are dark and dangerous things beneath the surface too so you can't be foolhardy, but we won't speak of those while we are underground.  
  
They had come to a side cavern that branched out on their left the jagged opening full of boulders and uneven rocks.  
  
Ok this will be a little rough going but if we go a little ways in it will be worth it. Do you feel like it.  
  
Oh yes we do Susan said  
  
Ya I agree plus it will make us hungry for dinner then we can eat Elsie laughed.  
  
they got back and all felt exhausted Elsie realized they probably weren't all the way recovered from the day before.  
  
The dwarf could tell they were tired so he said i can make us a fine dinner and your welcome to do what you want while I am cooking. The girls were all ravenously hungry so they said oh will wait while you cook we can help to if you want.  
  
Oh that's quite nice of you to offer but you all seem pretty worn out here he said and he brought in some comfortable chairs into the kitchen for them.  
  
Any suggestions he asked?  
  
Well something warm Elsie said  
Yes some comfort food Susan laughed  
  
Ok I have just the thing e said and got to work.  
  
Addie and Elsie helped kneed the bread while Susan helped chip things up.  
  
The dwarf got pounding busy pounding steaks flat and roasted them on a grill. He then took them out and filled them with a mixture that he had made that smelled delicious full of flavors and smells like garlic.  
  
He then carefully wrapped each streak around the filling and placed them in the oven along with potatoes.  
  
Did you hear that Elsie said my stomach is saying it wants to eat.  
  
Well it's almost done the drwaf said cheerfully now we just wait but ill get some dessert going so we can bake that whole we are eating.  
  
Yay, I love dessert Addie said  
  
The girls and the dwarf ate every last bit if the dinner Elsie looked longingly back at the counter hoping she had missed something she still felt a little hungry but didnt want to be rude by saying anything.  
  
Don't worry the dwarf said seeming to guess her thoughts. I have cocoa, fresh cookies and popcorn with chocolate and nuts that I made I wanted us to have room so we could enjoy dessert while we share out stores.  
  
Elsie sighed contentedly that sounds just perfect.  
  
They all sat down in the small comfortable room in the giant seats they were all exhausted from their hikes so the warm fire and cocoa with cookies was the perfect ending to a long day. Elsie had insisted they all go jump in the snow and it was dark and cold and the snow was even deeper. They were all feeling still chilled and even a little Hungry by the time they settled into their oversized chairs.  
  
Addie was so tiny she had curled up in hers like a cat and Susan covered her with a blanket.  
  
Look out Elsie Said as she plunged into the seat next to Susan cuddling up against her big sister.  
  
Susan pulled a blanket around both of them.  
  
Elsie realized she had dozed off she woke to the dwarf bringing a tray of fresh cookies. She sprang out if her chair like it was on fire and then stood right next to the tray waiting politely for the dwarf to say she could take one.  
  
Oh please help yourselves take as many as you want I made plenty.  
  
I'd love to fill you all in but i don't  know how much you know He gave them a questioning look but he was far too polite to ask any direct questions about themselves.  
  
Elsie looked at Susan and they shared a look that seemed to say myles well tell him.  
  
Elsie decided telling him the full truth was probably the best they could share what they know and see what he would think.  
she had some trepidation as to what he would think she didnt want him to think they were all crazy  
  
Well she started looking at Susan for help already.  
  
It's a bit of a strange story Susan said. The mood seemed a little tense as both girls were reluctant to start. Luckily at that moment Addie was reaching for a cookie but she couldn't quite reach the table they were on, she was laying on the chair with Elsie and kept leaning forward when crash! She fell off knocking the plate on top of her everyone laughed and luckily there were only two cookies left Addie got up laughing at her clumsiness does any one else want the other cookie she said her pretty  pale white face a little red from embarrassment.  
  
Ill take the one with less blanket hair Elsie laughed  
  
Here ill to get some more the drwaf said does anyone want some more cocoa  
  
Oh yes please all three girls said at once  
  
great he said ill be back soon.  
  
I can help Carry things Susan said getting up from her comfortable seat  
  
Oh thank you that's very nice of you the dwarf said.  
  
They were back shortly with a tray of cookies and and more hot cocoa.  
  
They settled in and Elsie felt more comfortable to tell their story.  
  
Well it's a bit strange she said but I don't think we are from this world.  
  
What the drwaf said next made Elsie much more comfortable that he would believe them.  
He slapped his knew (nearly upsetting his cocoa) and said hah! I knew it, well I knew something was different about you!  
  
So the old myths and legends are true there have always been stories of world walkers. And dwarves are generally shrewd and not easily tricked but when I first saw you all I just knew there was something unique.  
  
yes Susan said so we know nothing about your world at all.  
  
Oh yes well I can fill you in on everything the dwarf said.  
but first are you planning to stay here, and did you have any reason for bein up in this mountain range?  
  
Well actually we were in danger and being chased in our world we stumbled into this world by accident but it wasn't a total accident out parents went missing and some scholars we talked to thought that they might have been taken to this world.  
  
But we just got here and it wasn't a hot day where we were but it was a warm fall day and we were not dressed for this harsh climate. if we hadnt found you I'm sure we would al be dead from the cold.  
  
Yes it sure was lucky the dwarf said. Do you have any idea how to get back or how to search for your father?  
  
No I'm afrid we don't Elsie said there were two men helping us and they knew more but for some reason they didnt make it.  
  
Yes I'm not surprised the dwarf said most of the ancients txts and legends say that world walking takes great magic I my powerful wizards, sorcerers or gods were rumored to have done it.  
  
At that moment Elsie went to take a sip of her cocoa but bumped the rim spilling some down her shirt. Well I can assure you she laughed we are none of those.  
  
Everyone laughed including the dwarf but he wasn't entirely convinced.  
  
Well he said i think the best thing would be to speak with the Atlantans. They are ancient and very wise.  
  
The only bad thing is that i need to be at an important meeting and I was supposed to meet someone here but they haven't arrived  which makes me very concerned. I am going to search for them and also travel to the meeting but I am going to have to travel fast,  fast even for a dwarf. I think it will take about two weeks to get there and two weeks to get back.  
  
Are we coming with you Elsie asked?  
  
The dwarf looked a little uncomfortable it was obvious he didn't want to be rude, Susan saw and interjected do you think we could keep up? How fast will you be traveling?  
  
Well he started trying to be carful that his words didnt offend.  
  
Ill be traveling with two weeks of food, warm clothes and a tent and backup firewood so I don't starve it freeze to death. So I will be traveling with a heavy load, ill probably travel 18 hours a day. It's going to be rough but it's important I get there on time, the pace will be more leisurely on the way back. Have you had much conditioning for lot hikes?  
  
Not enough for that level Susan said  
  
Elsie looked disappointed but it was obvious she realized that Susan was right.  
  
The dwarf looked relieved but it was obvious he wanted to make sure things were ok, he was very kind hearted beneath his warlike exterior  
  
Your obviously all very spirited and I realize it is not fun to feel left out but there will be more adventure very soon and I don't know your past but I think this month would be good for you to spend training and getting into condition.  
You will have plenty of good and you can explore the caves but don't be to adventurous they are very easy to get lost forever in.  
  
And actually that gives me an idea follow me.  
  
They all got up out of their warm cozy chairs and followed him.  
they went out into the hall that led towards the underground caverns and into a side hall he uses a key to pass through a large metal gate. That gate is to keep people out if we were ever invaded dwarves always build with security in mind which is why it's so hard to conquer or overtake a dwarven city. Of course this isn't a city but it still has many layers of defense. It's never been invaded or when attacked its relatively newer and so remote and hidden its stayed quite safe.  
  
there were a few of the fair folk who knew about the place but we were peaceful with them and it was right around the time they all disappeared.  
  
It's a sad loss too.  
  
They had now entered a fairly large natural cavern. There were two small round stone towers here and a wall between them at the place where the cavern was the skinniest. A wall stretched between them with a study wooden gate enforced by metal bars.  
The two towers  were about 30 feet high and the wall between them about 20 feet high.  
  
This is the main entrance and where the place would be most susceptible to attack.  
  
Why didnt you build the wall farther up in the cavern where it's smaller and narrower Susan asked?  
  
Ah a good question he said the main reason is that the idea is that they wanted to be able to have room to shoot their crossbows and arrows and see their enemy.  
If they breached these walls we could retreat back to the smaller gates but then we couldn't really see the enemy or fight back. The other reason is we are dwarves and mining and building is what we do. When this was built the dwarves were incredibly wealthy and powerful.  
  
They had preceded across the large expanse of the underground cavern and arrived at the tower on the left side it was hewn from large pieces of rock expertly placed together and reminded the girls of castles they had seen in England and France. It was also very different because it was only two towers and a wall deep beneath the ground. The wall between the towers was about 60 feet wide.  
  
The dwarf used his key to unlock the wood door and they went in. the interior was about 15 feet with a staircase going up and also one going down.  
  
I wasn't expecting that Addie laughed as they went down the flight of steps!  
  
Me neither Elsie laughed you dwarves sure are cleaver.  
  
Thank you the dwarf said clearly appreciative of the compliment. When they reached the bottom which was about twenty feet down they came too a large room full of beds and a small kitchen.  
  
Oh it's rather cozy Elsie said. The dwarf opened a small door and here is the armory which is why I brought you all down here.  
  
The walls were covered in the most beautiful and intricate weapons and bows and armor Elsie and the girls had ever seen.  
  
Breathtaking she managed to say.  
  
Yes these weapons and armor are of the finest craftsmanship and quite valuable. I want you all to be prepared if you meet another bear or something worse.  
  
Also while I am gone it will be good to practice wearing and marching in your armor so that your conditioned when we leave. It will be immensely uncomfortable at first but when you get used to it you will feel strange without it.  
  
Also ambushes have been more frequently of late and it will be a comfort to know that a stray arrow won't be nearly as deadly.  
  
He took down a beautifully wrought piece of almost delicate looking chain mail. I think this will fit you he said as he handed it to Elsie.  
  
Oh goodness i was not expecting that! it's light she said as she took it from him, here feel this Susan she said handing the armor to her older sister.  
  
Oh my Susan laughed that is light how well does it protect you she said as she handed the armor to Addie to feel  
  
Oh don't you worry the dwarf said that is a very expensive piece that was cunningly made. It's actually quite valuable and works better then most heavier armor  
  
Elsie slipped it on over her short  
  
you look quite dashing Susan said  
  
Do I look fierce Elsie said trying to scowl and not laugh at the same time.  
  
Addie giggled  
  
The dwarf was still inspecting pieces here try this one on he said handing piece to Susan. Susan put it on but it felt a little loose.  
  
To big he said not to worry try these one he handed her another piece she put it on and it slipped on perfectly  
  
Oh you look beautiful Addie said  
  
Susan laughed i don't want to look beautiful I want to look fierce like Elsie she pulled a serious face and Elsie said hey that's pretty good you could definitely scare something  
  
Something? Susan responded something as in what?  
  
Oh maybe a small cat or a timid chicken.  
  
Everyone laughed  
  
The Elsie said well actually you do look pretty fierce like a warrior maiden.  
  
The dwarf handed a small delicate looking piece to Addie who tried it on and found it for perfectly.  
  
Oh you look adorable Elsie said going her little sister a big Hug.  
  
Thank you Addie said Hugging Elsie back. Oh but I do think I prefer hugs wothout armor on.  
  
The dwarve gave each of the girls a sword a dagger a bow and Susan also got a spear. He also gave them widen training spears and light helmets that fit under a hood.  
  
The girls looked at the larger dwarven helmets that were grotesquely and hideously fashioned.  
The dwarves have a tradition of fashioning their helmets to be as scary as possible. All except for zeeel the rabbit. During the great goblin and human wars he fashioned his helmet like a cute bunny. He would even paint it. He was so feirce and  deadly that soon the enemy would flee at the site of his mask.  
  
Interesting Susan said.  
  
I don't like arming people but the world is much more wild and dangerous now then it's been in a long time. Hopefully there will be no need to use any of these things but it will make me glad to know that you have some protection.  
  
It was getting late but the dwarf wanted to show them the basics of sword craft and how to practice.  
  
They left the courtyard and went back to the area behind the wall and towers where he showed them an archery range and targets and also posts on which to practice sword strokes.  
  
You can also practice with each other but make sure you wear your armor and don't hurt each other. He then showed them some basic defensive moves how to thrust parry and slash. They practiced on the wood posts and then practiced with him he was an expert teacher and the girls were shocked how quick he was. And whole he was a good teacher he was very gentle the girls were safer then if they were playing with a puppy. He then showed them the basics of archery and recommended they spend their time at that.  
  
The nice part of archery is you can use it to hint and keep your opponents at bay.  
  
I'm going I be gone about five weeks he said when I get back I will rest up and then I plan to hike us out of here. It will be dangerous and also a rugged and exhausting trip and we will all have to do it with our weapons and packs. I think a month should be a good amount of time to get conditioned if you go outside though be careful the mountains are treacherous and you can quickly find yourself in whiteout conditions.  
  
I actually wouldn't recommend you go far but you could practice hiking up the sheltered path that leads here. It's steep and has deep snow and if you hike up and down it once that would be a very good work out.  
  
You can also practice your weapons skills. I also think it will help you fight off boredom. Some other things you can do would be to practice your cooking and have fun making meals, there are a few books I will show you and also there are some games you will enjoy.  
  
Thank you Susan said I'm sure will be fine you'll come back to find sword maidens she said with a smile.  
  
Good he laughed and I never want to encourage anyone to fight or Become a warrior but it's good to be able to defend yourself.  
  
Oh and one other thing you can explore the caves just don't get lost down there. It would be best to do small trips and be aware of whats around you then slowly venture out. The start of this cave is less complicated then many caves. All the same about a mile in it starts to get much more complicated so you would want to be careful.  
  
After they finished archery practice and sword drills they headed back up to the main front room and settled back into their comfortable seats. They were exhausted now and all felt a little hungry. The dwarf went and got some more cookies and cocoa for everyone and they cuddled into blankets in their chairs and relaxed. They also lit a large fire which helped even further to warm them up.  
  
I have to leave tomorrow. Ill be leaving early but I feel you will all be well prepared while I am gone. You have enough food to last a couple of years so help yourselves and have fun cooking and trying out new things.  
  
Also when I come back will probably have a rather difficult hike out so it would be good to get into good shape and spend time practicing archery and your swordsmanship.  
  
The girls were all sad and reluctant to see him go and Elsie still wanted to go along with him but she knew he was right.  
  
The dwarf said I am sorry I can't bring you this time but this is going to be a very dangerous and rigorous trip. I think by this time tomorrow if I did let you come you would all be regretting it and wishing you were warm and safe and comfortable back here.  
  
We like it here Addie said I'm sure it will be fun but we will miss you  
  
Yes Susan agreed we will practice and be ready when you come back.  
  
Good said the drwarf then when we hike out we can take it easier then hopefully.  
  
We will miss you Elsie said and do be careful your self.  
  
Oh I will dont you worry he responded. I'm going a little out of my way to avoid the goblin infested parts of these mountains.  
  
The girls decided to explore the caves. We should pretend were on an adventure Elsie said.  
  
Well we kind of our on an adventure I'm not sure we need to do any pretending.  
  
That is a very good point Elsie said and come to think of it as we explore the caves I don't think I would want any more adventure, I mean isn't most adventure getting lost or fighting something  
or finding lost treasure Susan interjected  
  
That kind if adventure I could handle Elsie laughed  
  
Yes Susan said its definitely not  sitting on a couch sitting on a couch  junk food.  
  
That's true Elsie laughed all though wait a minute we have been doing a lot of sitting in comfortable chairs and eating and we are most decidedly on an adventure.  
That's a good point Susan said  
  
I like the point about treasure Addie added.  
  
yes we should look for gold Elsie said!  
  
What does gold look like said Susan?  
  
Well, it kinda looks like the color gold I wild imagine Elsie laughed.  
  
Yes but I mean in a mine is it mixed in with oar  
  
Hmm I'm not sure said Elsie  
  
We can just look for anything that we think is gold.  
  
the girls spent the afternoon exploring the caves but they did not go in very far they didnt want to get lost. They came back exhausted but decided to go look at the snow, so they trudged tiredly  up to the back door and went outside. It was getting dark and a gentle blanket of snow was slowly covering the evening world.  
  
Just think Elsie said that poor dwarf is out in this weather.  
  
I know Susan replied, he is very capable so I'm sure he is safe but I doubt he is very comfortable or warm.  
  
Even though Susan said that she was a little concerned for his safety as were all the girls.  
  
Well we should make dinner and a nice dessert. That sounds lovely said Addie. They ended up making fresh bread, steak and for dessert they  
made cinnamon roles  
  
  
after dinner they relaxed and curled up on the soft carpet  in front of a warm fire and talked together.  
  
Well we didnt find any gold Elsie said  
And we also didnt die or get lost and considering we got in better shape I'd say it was a good day. They all tool hot baths before they settled into they cozy beds. They had brought a third bed in and all slept in the same room together.  
  
They spent each say practicing at archery and swordsmanship. They also went on longer and longer hikes in the caves and would hike to the bottom of the snowy trail that led up to the entrance to the dwarven cave.  
  
Each day they would push themselves a little more and were all excited at the progress they were making.  
  
The days quickly flew by and turned to weeks.  
  
as Time ticked by still there still was no sign of him. It had been six weeks and the girls knew he had said four weeks. After the first storm things had been relatively calm but lately winter had come on in fill force, everyday the girls would hike outside to her in better shape but the fierceness of the mountains winter storms had made it almost impossible to go out. But the last two weeks had been relatively clear and they felt sure he should have been back by now.  
  
I bet he just got delayed by the snow or maybe he realized that it would be dangerous and decided to wait.  
  
Yes I hope so Elsie said but deep inside something worried her that something had gone wrong. Addie and Susan felt the same way.  
  
I think we should go out and look for him Elsie said you know he would do that for us.  
  
Yes he would but I feel he knows more about mountain travel then we do. I don't know how we could even find our way back here. And think how sad he would be if be headed back in the spring and found our lonely bones on the mountains laying in the summer grass.  
  
Yes that's true, what do you think Addie?  
  
Well she said I think we should keep exploring the caves and practicing our archer and swordsmanship and then plan to set out in the spring, she paused then said whenever that might be.  
  
They made vegetable soup with need broth and drag baked bread for dinner. After they had cleaned up they sat in their warm comfortable chairs sipping cocoa by the warm fire that Susan had made.  
  
You sure are getting amazing at making cocoa Susan said to Addie.  
  
Oh thank you Addie laughed I like doing it and the cocoa they have hear is quite amazing,  
  
I bet it's expensive Elsie mused,  
  
Ya Susan replied cocoa is only grown in warm areas and I am sure anywhere warm is far far from here.  
  
Susan yawned sleepily, well I'm gonna go get some more cocoa does anyone want some?  
  
Yes please both the other girls chimed in.  
  
The girls hasn't waited very long when Susan burst back in the room and slammed and locked it shut.  
  
Elsie was jolted out of her peaceful reverie with a tinge of fear.  
  
What's up su she said with a nervous voice.  
Someone's down there she whispered someone came in and there Hooded in a black cloak and wearing all black.  
  
Maybe it's the dwarf Addie said hopefully.  
  
No not unless he has grown and gotten much thinner.  
  
All the girls were standing now.  
  
I'm sure she saw me too Susan said. I was so scared and I bolted up here.  
  
Susan's face was white and so were the other girls.  
  
Oh no what well we do Elsie said clutching Addie. We left all our weapons down stairs I can believe we were so foolish.  
  
Well we thought we were safe here . I mean everybody is locked and bolted you saw how hard it is to get in. Susan whispered.  
  
Oh no Elsie groaned quietly.  
  
What is it Susan said.  
  
I hope they didnt take the key from the dwarf. All the girls felt even sicker at that thought if it were possible considering how worried they were.  
  
Well Susan said gliding silently over to the fire and picking up the fire poker. She handed it to Elsie and face Addie a small log and she grabbed one that was burning at one end out of the fire.  
  
Elsie could tell she was still nervous and Ashen faced but she had a steely. Resolve about her now.  
  
Should I hide behind the door and hit him when he comes in Elsie asked?  
  
Yes I think that's a good idea Susan said.  
  
what of it is a friend though Addie  said.  
  
Hmm Susan thought pensively well here is what will do ill hide behind the door and if they seem dangerous ill git them in the head. Ok we should trade weapons then Elsie said handing the medal fire rod to Susan who went and hid where the door opens.  
  
They all felt a little braver now that they had a plan. However those feelings were about to go quickly away as bang bang bang someone knocked roughly on the door.  
  
Elsie felt her knees go weak but she stood firm an tried to look brave. Susan out her finger to her lips wanting them not to make any sound.  
  
A second later they heard the worse sound they could imagine as at hey heard a key slide into the lock, click and turn.  
  
The door creaked slowly open and Elsie felt she was going to pass out from fear her shacking knees made it hard to stand.  
  
The person entering and the girls were all about to be in for a very big surprise.  
  
The cloaked stranger was shocked to see two small girls but also sensed the presence of someone else.  
  
Why your just girls one of the most beautiful voices they had ever heard came out of the dark cloak.  
almost at the same time the girls said, your a girl!  
  
They all still felt the stranger could be dangerous but she said again in her beautiful voice please step out from behit the door and ill come in. I don't want to hurt you if you truly are just girls. But who are you and what are you doing her and how did you get and how did you get in, are you with anyone else. She rattled off the questions in a quick succession.  
  
Elsie stepped timidly out fe behind the door still holding the medal poker.  
  
The stranger threw back her clock and the girls gasped it was not what they were expecting.  
  
Your beautiful Elsie said quietly.  
and she was she had perfect features and blind hair. She was also much younger looking then they expected. She looked like she was about college age.  
she looks like mother Addie whispered to Susan and Elsie.  
  
Why thank you the stranger laughed.  
She had a nice kind laugh and the girls felt completely disarmed around her.  
  
Wait a minute said firmly remembering when she had met the dwarf. How do we know your no a ghost or a spirit.  
  
Well I suppose you don't she smiled but then again how do I know your not.  
  
Elsie bit her lip not quite sure what to say.  
  
You can call me Hannah the girl said. Is that cocoa she looked longingly at the cup. Susan realized now after the fright that she looked cold and tired. Here please sit down Susan said are you hungry? Will go get you some food.  
  
Oh I would love that she said. And while we are eating we can trade stories?  
  
As they left Hannah slowly undid her cloak and loosened her sword.  
  
I think we can trust her Elsie said  
  
Me too agreed Addie  
  
Yes Susan said actually I was thinking she reminded me of mother.  
  
I thought the same thing Addie and Elsie responded. Very pretty and kind.  
  
Yes she is very beautiful Susan said, not someone you expect to see breaking into your house.  
  
Well she did have a key Elsie laughed so maybe she didnt break in after all.  
  
I thought she reminded me of a fashion model. Susan said  
  
Yes she is rather stylish looking even in a black traveling cloak.  
  
But do you think we can trust her Elsie said?  
  
Hmm Susan pondered well do we have a choice? We can't exactly ask her to leave and go sleep in the snow.  
  
Ya that wouldn't work so good Elsie said. I hope we can trust her I mean she seemed so nice.  
  
Yes Addie agreed I liked her she seems nice like mother was.  
  
When they got back to the room she had fallen asleep. She looked even prettier the girls all thought, she is younger looking then I realized Susan whispered not wanting to wake her. She woke up though and smiled at the girls. Sorry about that she laughed I must have drifted off I have had little sleep for days and not much food either. Is zz here she asked? I was supposed to meet him. Oh no he was supposed to be back Elsie said but we don't know where he is we have all been concerned.  
  
A look of worry passed over hleys face. Oh that's not told she said. He is very capable I do hope he is ok.  
  
  
We brought you some food Elsie said and Susan handed her some of the beef stew and bread they had made for dinner.  
  
Oh thank you she said and began to eat, who made this she managed to say through mouthfuls it's delicious. Oh we all did but Addie did the spices and flavoring.  
  
Oh well it's amazing she said. I haven't had a meal this good in a while.  
When she had finished eating the girls brought out cocoa and cookies. As they were going down to the kitchen to get them Elsie said she is so beautiful and elegant she reminds me of a princess, well a not spoiled princess she laughed. I feel like we can trust her to Susan said, what do you think Addie?  
  
Well she liked my food so I say yes we can trust her and laughed.  
  
I'm not sure that's the best way to judge  pretty sure ... Would like your food.  
  
As they brought the cookies and cocoa up the settled into the warm couches by the fire Addie gave Haley a blanket and she cuddled up in it. Thank you girls for your hospitality she said. If you want I could fix us breakfast tomorrow?  
  
Oh that would be nice Susan said.  
  
Also if I'm not prying I'm curious how you ended up in such a remote location?  
  
The girls all looked at each other reluctant and insure how much to reveal.  
  
Haley was very perceptive and saw the look, she quickly said its ok of your reluctant we can talk abou something else.  
  
Well Elsie said I would be ok talking about it by you might not believe us?  
  
Well I'm a fairly open person Haley said I would like to hope that I'm not gullible but all of you girls seem trustworthy.  
  
Well Elsie said there are some people who think that I make up stories and here she looked over at Susan, Susan jumped in, well I think in light of present circumstances I'm much more likely to agree with you then not and she smiled and also Susan followed up with who would believe that I got chased by a bear and lived!  
That is true Elsie laughed.  
Well anyways Elsie went on were not totally sure how we got here we sort of stumbled into wherever it is we are.  
  
When we got here we were in the range of mountains and that's when we stumbled upon the dwarf who so kindly helped us all.  
  
They were all getting ready for bed when Addie said should we see if she wants sleep in here.  
  
I wouldn't mind Elsie said.  
  
They sat around talking and the girls told her how they were leaning swordsmanship and archery. Oh we can practice together if you like  not the best she said but know a few tricks and she smiled. Oh that would be lovely Susan said and Elsie and Addie both agreed.  
  
So Haley said it sounds like your bit totally sure where you are and your also looking for your father. There is a large counsel taking place and I am planning to leave for it. I was thinking we could spend a few more data here and get all of our supplies ready then head out. It will be a difficult joinery but the wizards are very wise and I think they could help you.  
  
I think they also would be able to understand works walkers better.  
  
Are you familiar with where we are she said? This place is not very inhabited.  
  
The next day try woke up and went and had breakfast then practiced swordsmanship and went on a hike outside. It was overcast but not too snowy and they made it a little farther then headed back.  
  
I like it hear Susan said its cozy all tucked away in our little fort. Me too Addie said.  
  
They made dinner and that night all sat up in the room talking, Haley said well I am planning to join the counsel. It's a couple weeks traveling from here. I think it would be good for you girls if you joined but feel free to do what your comfortable with. It would be a little safer and easier to make the journey during mid summer but that's many months from now but the journey will be difficult so do what you think is right. I am afrid that things have been gettin steadily worse and we might not have safety like we used to have for many years.  
  
Elsie looked at Susan and Addie and their looks seemed to agree with what Elsie was thinking.  
  
I think we would like to go with you, right? She queued the other two girls.  
  
Yes they both agreed.  
  
Oh good Haley said. She looked relieved and said "I feel like we all get along really well so it will be nice having you all along. I think will plan to leave in 3 days if that works for you?  
  
Yep sounds great Elsie said, though ill miss this place and the food!  
  
yes will let's live it up while we still can Haley laughed.  
  
The next morning they all explored the caves and then winded their way up to look at the outdoors. It was overcast but the snow was not as bad and they decided they would leave in two days.  
  
They went back in and made steak soup and fresh bread and an apple pie for dessert.  
  
Exhausted after the day they settled into their nice comfortable chairs by the fire for the evening. Would you like to spend the night with us tonight Elsie asked.  
Yes you should Addie said, we won't talk to much.  
  
Oh I would love that Haley said.  
  
Will all be sleeping together in a tent soon Susan laughed so We might as well get used to it.  
  
Susan snores like a giant lumberjack Elsie laughed.  
  
I do not Susan replied to both Elsie and Haley going a little red in the face.  
 well I can sleep through anything Haley laughed.  
  
ok Elsie said I have b idea whoever is a snorer has to be on guard duty.  
  
the girls were all excited they had spent the last day packing and were leaving. Haley was a laid back traveler so far they had slept in, made breakfast and were just now getting ready to leave. It still was fairly early but Elsie was glad she felt normal she had never liked gettin up to early for trips it made her feel weird the whole day.  
  
Ill be sad to leave this place Susan said. It's nice and comfortable and feels a little but like home now.  
yes I've always really enjoyed it here, Haley replied. I have been here twice and both times really enjoyed it. Maybe will get a chance to visit the great dwarf cities in the birth. They are absolutely amazing and gigantic. But they are nice when you get used to them. They all headed up to the entrance  and locked it securely before setting out with packs full of supplies blankets tents and other things. Elsie had tried to pick up Haley's lack and was surprised how heavy it was. She couldn't barely lift it. Are you sure you can carry all that Elsie said? Oh yes I'm used to heavy packs Haley laughed.  
  
luckily they all had snow shoes which made it much easier to travel across the snow. They set out down the windy path out of the valley. One good thing is that most of the trip  wil be more or less downhill.  
  
Oh that is nice Elsie said.  
  
Also when we get out of the snow will travel through beautiful mountains and forests.  
  
They traveled for about a week through the mountain passes. Always more or less heading downwards. They passed many amazing views as they traveled. At first all they saw were rugged snow capped peaks. As they traveled further they started to spot mountain peaks in the distance that looked a little less white. The heavy snow around them also began to be less thick.  
  
Then one day as they were walkin Addie exclaimed oh look up ahead grass I see some green grass! Yay they all cheered, snow is a lovely thing but it doesn't make for a good traveling companion unless your being pulled in a sled to someplace warm. Even then if you don't have a warm destination to get to by the end of the night it can become rather unpleasant, though lovely to look at or to spend an afternoon playing outside in.  
  
That night when they stopped for camp the evening air felt a little warmer (though still not warm enough).  
  
They quickly set about their evening tasks, usually two people would work on setting up the tent and camp one person would gather firewood and one person would cook.  
Elsie was getting better at cooking but she had a tendency to burn or undercook everything.  
 when she had almost burned the dinner the night before Susan had caught her. Fathers right she has said with a laugh you don't have a very long attention span.  
  
But tonight Addie was cooking and she was very good. She also was a quick Learner from Haley about cooling over an open fire which is much different then cooking in a nice kitchen.  
  
Addie was busy preparing a small loaf of bread and planned to warm up some of the meat they had left.  
  
as They made camp there was a bright crescent moon that hung over the mountains and a few pale clouds illuminated against the dark colors of the swiftly fading sky. The smell of the camp fire was good as it filled the air around their little camp.  
  
After they had eaten they all say around the fire talking. They were getting in better shape and their bodies felt less exhausted and sore as they had the first couple nights.  
  
We should tell scary stories Elsie said!  
  
That is a terrible idea Susan replied, you do realize we are out in the middle of the wild in dark woods in the middle of the night.  
  
Oh fine, Elsie said you wouldn't want to tell scary stories if we were sitting on a crowded beach in the sunshine.  
All though Elsie said with a mischievous smile after pausing if we were about to swim id probably  wanna tell stories about sharks she said. SHark she yelled as she lunged at susan with her mouth open.  
  
Susan caught her and rolled over on top of her Elsie was laughing to much to fight back so Susan pinned her down.  
  
Does the shark like to eat dirt Susan laughed dangling a handful over her face.  
  
You wouldn't Elsie said indignantly as she began to squirm.  
  
Susan opened her hand and elsie shrieked.  
  
Something hit her face.  
  
Haha Susan laughed it was just a piece of meat.  
  
Sharks like meat Elsie said vending her head and taking a bite out of it.  
Eventually Susan let Elsie back up.  
  
Haley was smiling she enjoyed being around the spirited girls and even though they liked to tease each other it was obvious how much thu all loved each other. Haley though that love was almost not strong enough word for how they treated Addie they adored their little sister.  
  
As they settled around the campfire with cups of warm cocoa Haley told them about where they were. The whole place she said is fairly uninhibited. Which is why we don't need to be as cautious about safety as we will later. The only place where humans live is on the western coast and even there I don't think there are a lot of cities. I haven't been that way in a whole so things very well might have changed.  
  
What do you mean by humans Susan asked.  
  
Oh Haley said then paused well there are not many dwarven settlements or other civilized creatures.  
  
Oh Susan said do dwarves live here?  
  
Yes Haley said they have some if there smaller cities far in the north but there great empires lie over the seas to the far to the west. That is where many humans live and in the great continents far to the south.  
  
What are those like Elsie asked?  
  
Oh they are wild I have never been but I heard they are full of deep jungles and strange creatures.  
  
  
Has where we are ever been very inhabited Elsie asked.  
  
All the girls thought they noticed a brief look of sadness pass over her face.  
  
Yes long ago the fair folk lived here. Humans called them elves but they have all disappeared she said sadly.  
  
You can still find Some of their overgrown cities amongst the woods.  
  
Oh my Susan said have you ever been to one?  
  
Yes i have seen a lot of them she replied even though they are overgrown they are still  quite lovely. But they can feel a little sad.  
  
What are they like Elsie asked? Well there are all different kinds. Some of them are made from white stone, some of them were built in trees. They always blended in well but now over the years they have become a part of the land.  
  
How long ago Did they disappear Addie asked  
  
It's been a long time she said over 300 Years.  
  
Oh wow well I hope we get to see one Elsie said. Yes all the other girls agreed.  
  
The next morning they woke up and packed up the camp. The day was there most enjoyable day of travel yet. The snow was almost all gone and they spent the day walking through beautiful pine and fir and ash woods.  
  
They spotted fast flowing mountain steams tumbling down the hills.  
  
Pretty soon Haley said we are going to have to cross one of them and unfortunately it's doing to be terribly   cold. Most of these mountain streams are snow Melt and they are always cold and can be quite swift. The one we will have to cross is about knew deep I am making to a place where the river will be widest so that it will be shallow but to be careful will string a rope across.  
  
Will probably go slowly and string a rope across the River to be safe.  
  
Ill also go first and make a fire on the other side in case anyone falls in the cold can be deadly. We should get there about dusk so we can camp in the far side of the river.  
  
The girls all agreed this was a good plan.  
  
They continued hiking the foresty hills were rigged and at points the think undergrowth was a struggle to get through but Haley was a skilled pathfinder and they managed to stay on clear ground.  
  
Eventually they came out from the trees to the bank of a swift flowing river.  
  
  
Brr that looks cold said Elsie.  
  
It is Haley laughed I wish we could go around it but that woul take months. We arrived at a good spot from here we just need to head upstream a little. It was a but tricky heading up stream because the bank was overgrown but eventually they made it to a place where the river was fairly wide. It was still swift though.  
  
Ok Haley said its deeper then I expected so will have to be careful. I think that I will tie a rope around my waist then you girls can secure it and pull me back if the current is to strong. I can go first and build a fire then warm we can get everyone else across and make sure that can get warmed.  
  
Ahh Haley let out a small squell as she stepped in. It's cold all right she said. The girls kept a right hold on the rope and also tied one end around a tree.  
 She waded bravely forward and at one point the water came up to her waist. She stumbled and the girls yelled encouragement she finally made it shivering and cold. She stripped off her wet clothes and put warm ones on and wrapped in a blanket as she started a fire.  
  
Are you ok Susan yelled across the river banks.  
  
Yes Haley yelled back her voice shacking from the cold.  
  
Once she got the fire going she yelled back I'm gonna come back and help you girls across its deeper and swifter then I remember.  
  
Elsie yelled back no you don't have to so that you will freeze! I'm ok she yelled as she plunged back in the river.  
  
She is too nice Elsie said  
  
I know I agree Susan and Addie bother agreed.  
  
Haley came back over and fought the strong current. She was shivering with cold when she made it.  
  
Are you sure you should do this Elsie asked with concern in her voice.  
  
Yes Susan added in as she handed her a blanket we don't want you to get to cold!  
  
No it's ok she said we can just hurry and get it over the river is really swift and ill feel better If I know I helped you get across. Who wants to go next?  
  
The girls all looked at each other. I guess I can try it next Elsie said.  
  
Ok Haley said just hold on to the rope we strung across and ill help guide you to.  
  
Ready? Haley said.  
  
Yep lets do this, Elsie gritted her teeth and stepped into the water. She was barefoot because she didnt want to her her feet wet.  
  
The cold water was a complete shock oh my she gasped out.  
Yes it's cold Haley said. Once we are across you can snuggle in a blanket by the fire.  
  
They made it about 15 feet when Elsie lost her balance as the river abruptly fell the water rose up to above her waist and she felt her self going numb with the shock of cold water. The current was also strong and she felt her feet being swept from under her. She felt her legs  
swept from under her and stumbled under the water it happened so fast  and she lost hold of the rope. At that moment Haley's strain arms grabbed her and steadied her. I got you she yelled over the loud torrent threatening to drown their voices out.  
  
Elsie felt her body going numb and the feeling going away in her bare feet. She stumbled clumsily and felt Haley's strong arms steady her. The water was almost up to her chest and she felt Almost dizzy from the rushing water and it's tremendous pressure and also the loud noise. The water felt angry like I wanted to hold her head under and watch as she drowned. She kept moving forward one foot at a time and was greatly helped by Haley.she realized  Haley  
was singing a gentle song and she felt more strength.  
  
finally they had made it and she stumbled out dripping wet into the rocky bank. She clambered fully out of the water and have Haley a wet hug.  
 thank you she said through shivering teeth. She felt her whole body shivering almost convulsively. There was a wind that are right through her clothes and chilled her to the bone.  
  
they both staggered to the fire and the warmth felt delicious. If you want you can change into something warmer and wrap up by the fire with a blanket.  
  
Ok I will Elsie said. Are you sure your going to be ok she asked, worrie about Haley.  
  
Yes ill just think about how nice it will be to be warm soon. She smiled a weak smile and plunged back into  
the river.  
  
Elsie sat by the fIre with a blanket wrapped around her watching. She was worried for Haley and hopes that they would all be safe and warm soon. She rummages he cold and numb fingers though the packs and found cocoa, she then for some water and put it on so that they would have something warm to drink. Haley started back across with Addie perched on her back. They struggled across then she for Susan.  
  
Haley looked so exhausted and tired from the three trips. Ill make dinner tonight Elsie said you should reset and get warm by the fire. Elsie cooled some bread and they all sat huddled by the fire while it was warming up.  
  
Who wants to swim in the river tonight Susan joked.  
  
Oh me Elsie said with a laugh.  
  
That was cold Haley said I'm sorry we had to do that. There really is no other way around the river.  
  
Thanks for carrying me Addie said.  
  
Yes hour welcome I think it would have been too deep for you.  
  
I wish we were all snug in our beds back up in the mountains Susan said. Yes that would be nice tonight an a hot bath.  
  
At least we have a nice warm tent and blankets that we can snuggle up in Elsie said pulling the blankets tighter around her.  
  
Yes Addie said and  
  
Good night Susan I love you  night Addie  
  
Good night Haley love you, errr Elsie paused I mean I like you. There was another pause then everyone burst out laughing.  
Should I be offended Haley teased  
  
No no I'm sorry Elsie laughed.  
  
I mean I loved the warm bread we had for inner so I guess I can say I love you.  
Love is a strange word. What I mean is that you feel like family it just sort of slipped out.  
  
Well you do to Haley laughed. I suppose sleeping together in a tent will do that.  
  
They see out and it felt like they were walking through a dream. Waterfalls and small creeks fell from pine clad hills.  
  
Overall the terrain was fairly rugged and mountainous. After days and days of hiking through the mountains they they reached much gentler forested hills. They finally came to a small dirt path.  
  
it was a nice evening as they winded their way through the shadows. The warm night air was pleasant and their feet crunched on the fallen autumn leaves through the branches of the beech and alder and oaks and pines they caught glimpses of the stars far overhead. After a whole the trees opened and they were walking through soft grass tall trees spread out around them but they grew far enough apart they caught more glimpses of the night sky a rich shade of dark blue.  
  
  
It had rained that day but the clouds had started to give way as dusk fell swiftly.  
  
The stars came out bright and clear faint moonlight illuminated the scatters clouds that still lingered across the night sky.  
  
The night air smelled fresh as they quietly winded there way through the forest and trees. The tall pine and for trees stood silently like dark specters.  
  
  
Steep  mountains steep and rocky and impregnable. Pine and fir and evergreen trees grew in places where the ground was gentle enough to support them. They also caught glimpses of what looked like aspen trees high up in the mountains.  
  
This is the same range we were in earlier we could have gotten here by traveling north through the mountains but it would have taken many years if we ever could make it at all. The storms further can be sudden and violent.  
  
Now we will continue north and at some point we should hit a small road that leads to the city. There aren't ma y farms or people around here most of them live father north and west of here.  
  
Years? Addie asked  
  
well not actually Years Haley laughed but a very very long time you would be constantly trying to scale massive icy peaks of snow and rock and climb and descend cliffs. Of course there are paths and areas where the mountains are less steep but most people that cross the mountains do so across them.  
  
event then it's still not very populated. Long ago only fair folk loved here but it was always mostly oceans and woodlands and mountains. The city we are going to was built by the fair folk but when they disappeared humans took it over.  
  
Steep  mountains rose rocky and impregnable on their right hand side as they continued north. Pine and fir and evergreen trees grew in places where the ground was gentle enough to support them. They also caught glimpses of what looked like aspen trees high up in the mountains. They were traveling on a dirt path that winded through woodlands. They were still rather high up and te ground to their left slopped downwards and the grout to their right rose up to the towering mountains.  
  
Eventually the path began to descend and they found themselves in an grassy area on their left they could see more gentle mountains covered in pine and for and the towering mountains continued to rise to their right.  
  
  
This is the same range we were in earlier we could have gotten here by traveling north through the mountains but it would have taken many years if we ever could make it at all. The storms further can be sudden and violent.  
  
Now we will continue north and at some point we should hit a small road that leads to the city. There aren't ma y farms or people around here most of them live father north and west of here.  
  
they continues along and as late afternoon closed in they hit a larger road that seemed well traveled. The road turned and Elsie thought they were going to run straight into the cliffs.  
As they got further they saw that the it was a wide opening between steep cliffs and the road ran ibti that.  
  
  
Steep mountains rose on both sides and a beatific brick wall woth round towers stretched across the opening.  
  
One two three four five six seven eight towers Addie counted. That's a very long wall!  
  
Yes it is Haley said. Who lives here again Elsie asked feeling a bit nervous after being away from people for so long. She also wondered who they were and what their lives were like.  
  
I can see why people become hermits she joked.  
  
It will be fun Susan said the followed up with what are they like?  
  
Oh their very nice Haley said. Kind and intelligent. There is a beautiful university that people come to earn at.  
  
There also very prosperous. In the north there is a port city and air of trade comes in from dwarves there are also some small dwarven settlements in the north too who lay quite well for the food that people grow.  
  
As they reached the main road it was quite large. They traveled up to it and soldiers stood at attention on either side. There were also soldiers on the wall tops.  
  
As they entered the gate they saw the city was bustling with life.  
  
Trees were everywhere and quaint little cobblestone paths wound through out there were also trees everywhere so at times you felt you were lost inside a tiny forest.  
  
Haley explained it seems like a lot but there are three of these miniature forests inside the city.  
  
Steams and creeks flowed everywhere with sturdy wooden or stone bridges to get across them. I much prefer crossing streams like this Elsie said with a laugh.  
  
The forest wasn't very long but they traveled up jill to get through  it. and they emegerged on the other end. They were actually much higher up now and they turned and looked out over the valley. The people were all very friendly and would smile and say hello.  
  
What a lovely place Susan said. It would be grand to live here.  
  
Yes I agree Haley said and tonight wil be able to take warm baths and have a hot meal.  
  
That sounds lovely said Elsie.  
  
  
  
Oh my are they?  
  
Friends Haley cut him off very close friends she said with a smile.  
  
Chapter 7  
The first thing she noticed about him was how sad his eyes looked, not hollow or empty they had a fire and a spark of life hidden deep down but sadness seemed caused them to be buried deep down. He was tall and looked to be powerfully built but it was difficult to tell with his flowing robes.  He looked handsome but it was also hard to tell with his long hair and beard. He also looked ageless his long beats made him look older but he looked like younger features could be hidden beneath.  
L She knew at once he was a wizard  
  
Chapter 8  
Id never been there but my father had. He said it was a land touched by the gods. They built an advanced civilization  
Strange and beautiful trees and creatures, great gardens and tall cities all shining white, vast libraries and scholars.  
Deep magic ran through their whole civilization some say they are descended from the gods there are other rumors that the land existed in different worlds at once  
  
Chapter 9  
Her voice seemed deep and powerful everything stood still and lightning seemed to fill the air but then there was an exhausted pause Her voice became less deep but far wilder the electricity seemed to gather around the ground she caught a glance of get beautiful face and was shocked by the exhaustion written so plainly  
Then it felt like the gathering of a wild storm compressed into endless seconds  
  
She raised her staff and lightning split the air and then time seemed to return to its normal pace fur everyone  
  
I normally like to use my magic for growing and healing things  
  
  
  
  
Egypt! Everything felt so strange and different the smells in the air the warm sun and the stalls full of vendors it was like a whole nother world. The crowds ebbed and flowed through the open air market place as traders merchants and shoppers all haggled and bargained over merchandise.  
  
Elsie couldn't contain herself from pointing out all the unique and interesting things she saw.  
  
Oh look at that is he selling chickens she grabbed Addie's arm, look at that he is selling chickens.  
  
Chapter  
  
He pulled out a strange and ancient map it glass case and beautifully designed.  
  
Elsie gasped my what a pretty map!  
  
He smiled yes it's one of my prized possessions.  Lord Byron and James both crowded around.  
  
It looks like a map of the Artic with an ocean and a large landmass drawn in green in the ocean.  
  
Well that can be right james said the artics been fairly well mapped and everyone agrees that there is nothing but snow and ice and glaciers up there.  
  
What language is that written in james asked.  
  
The legends say that the machine will cause the end of the world.  
  
Chapter  
  
They sat in lord Byron's cozy Oxford apartment and watched the rain drizzle down the window pains. Elsie was curled up in a big oversized chair next to the warm fire.  
  
On the table was an assortment of goodies hot cocoa and cookies.  
  
After all they had been through it felt good to just unwind and try to forget for a little. Addie grabbed some cookies. Come sit with me Elsie said and Addie plopped down on the couch  elsie wrapped the blanket around her and snuggled next to her little sister. You sure are warm she laughed as she began pulling the blankets back over them. wrapped three large blankets over themselves.  
  
Susan yawned lazily and reached over the Plate of cookies, nearly upsetting her milk which woke her up a little from her drowsy stupor. She pulled the blanket off her head and grabbed a brownies from the tray.  
  
You sure look beautiful Elsie said with a straight face.  
  
Susan looked at her suspiciously I'm not sure if your being serious.  
Well your hair has seen better days Elsie continued seriously maybe your past your prime.  
  
Susan rolled her eyes  
  
At least I had a prime she said haughtily.  
  
Elsie! Act your age!  
  
I am acting my age she said impudently  
  
Ok well the act older then your age Addie never acts out like you.  
  
That's cause she knows I will do it. If I was gone one of you would have to act out.  
  
Lord Byron sat in his chair looking regal like a rogue prince with his unshaven face and wold hair.  
  
  
  
The first thing Susan noticed was she wasn't cold anymore. Her faced was pressed into something soft she heard birds singing and a gentle breeze shacking the leaves.  
  
She looked around in wonder she had never seen such soft and delicate green light. It filtered through the massive trees. She gazed in awe at their trunks she felt filled with awe like she was standing in a hallowed chapel.  
  
She could dimly see tiny latches of blue sky far above. The whole place felt peaceful and the gentle wind blew  with a delicious smell. The forest floor was carpeted with ferns but she saw a clearing ahead covered in short grass and dotted with small white floweres.  
  
  
She walked a little ways and saw bright green grass tall trees swayed in the gentle breeze and the soft sunlight filtered through making patterns of both sun and shade.  
  
she wandered through the forest it felt like a beautiful dream. The soft sunlight filtere  through the trees making the sun cast shadows on the grass and flowers. evening  
  
  
  
She woke she felt she had a star he strange dream  
  
But she couldn't remember it, it was all faded and scratchy.  
  
Chapter  
  
  
  
  
  
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I suppose the beauty was in the hoping even if what we hoped for never came to pass Elsie said.  
  
It still might Susan replied we mustn't give up hope.  
  
I suppose your right Elsie said.  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
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Chapter  
  
Mother Elsie hugged her mother as her mother hugged her back  
She was crying tears of joy as het mothers warmth and love spilled around them both like the gentle sun after long ages of darkness and sorrow.  
  
chapter  
Most of the world is barren ice lands and wastes people cling to the small green parts of the world.  
  
  
Chapter  
What amazed her the most was the stillness and Beauty of the island, a place of peace just the soft breeze blowing through the pine trees and the distant sound of the waves lapping against the sandy shore.  
  
It's nice here I love how calm it is Elsie said breathing in the gentle air. Yes well you can't eat calm Susan replied and I'm hungry we haven't eaten since this morning and I believe it's late afternoon the sun is setting but I have no idea where we are and what the setting sun means back in England I would know about what time it is when the sun went down.