

# The Turners of Sky Lake



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## Meet The Turners

Near the charming town of Everwood, the Turner family inherits an old cabin by the lake. They embark on a renovation adventure, but little do they know, this cabin is no ordinary dwelling. It's a whimsical entity with a mischievous spirit, and it has grand plans for the Turners.

As they peel away the layers of time, they stumble upon doors to different seasons, a kitchen with ingredients that appear out of thin air, and windows that offer glimpses into the past and future. The cabin is alive with magic, and it has a knack for orchestrating the most extraordinary events.

Meet the Turners—a multi-generational clan with quirks and comedic idiosyncrasies that rival the cabin's enchantments. Young Lily discovers a mirror that reflects her dreams, offering guidance in the most unexpected ways. Grandpa Joe, befriends a wise old owl that speaks in riddles, unravelling the threads of family bonds.

But this isn't just a renovation; it's a journey of self-discovery and healing. The cabin plays matchmaker between estranged family members, infuses laughter into tense moments, and grants them a magical key to unlock cherished memories.

"The Turners of Sky Lake" is a delightful and humorous tale of a family's journey to rekindle their bonds, not just with a cabin, but with each other. In the heart of Sky Lake, magic thrives, and the Turner family learns that every day is an adventure filled with love, laughter, and a touch of enchantment.

Prepare to be charmed by "The Turners of Sky Lake," where the line between reality and magic blurs, and the joy of family reigns supreme.

## Kicked Out



“Hey, why isn’t there any food in this refrigerator?”

Lily had just come home from work and was looking for something to eat. From the next room came the voice of her father, “What’s the point, it would just go bad and then get buried under the tower.”

“What are you talking about?” Lily closed the fridge door and walked into the room where her father and grandparents were sitting at the dining room table. There was a letter spread out in front of her father.

Ben Turner was an architect, but he hadn’t had a commission in three years. He was good, it just wasn’t a good time, the market wanted cookie cutter condos and as her father said, that was no job for a man whose passion was unique houses. His office held many blueprints that were now sitting rolled up in tubes, waiting for a chance to create something worthwhile. Lily had been hopeful last month when that renovation offer had come in, but her father hated the idea of stooping to a reno job. He’d sent the client to a kid he knew was just starting out.

Lily sat down beside her father and put her hand on his, she could tell he was depressed. She looked a question at Grandpa Joe, but he seemed confused, more so than usual. This wasn’t something he could deal with, not now. He started to tell Lily a story of when he and Emma were first married and were looking for a place to live.

Emma took hold of Joe’s shoulder and squeezed a little, stopping the story. Lily, with some vague idea of what was going on now, looked down at the letter. Emma turned it around.

“Eviction? What the hell?”

Emma nodded, “I’m afraid so, Jerry the Jerk has sold the farm so they can put in two condo towers and a bunch of townhouses. Another development of the Same As Last Time construction company.”

“But Uncle Jerry is family.”

“And he’s a greedy man. We’ve called around to the rest of the family, but nobody can talk him out of it. Money trumps love, money trumps family, with that man.”

Ben lifted his head, “Well you can hardly blame him, that much money is going to set up his retirement. Don’t be too hard on him.”

Emma snorted, flicked the eviction notice across the table toward Lily and stormed out to her garden where she would no doubt spend the rest of the evening in deep discussion with the flowers.

“Dad?”

“I know Lil, it’s going to be hard, we’ve got no savings. You work hard to support us, two old folk and a useless father. I’m so sorry it hasn’t turned out better than it has.”

“Dad, don’t be like that, the job at the drop-in centre is good, it’s steady work. There’s always going to be a place for me there. I’m an adult now and it’s great that I can help the family. You’ll find work again, it’s just a matter of getting your designs in front of the right people.”

“You are a sweet, sweet daughter, but let’s face it, the days of the architect are over. Just take a look around, everyone wants cookie cutter houses, they’re cheap.”

“They’re cheap and nasty ugly, Dad, and they fall apart because nobody builds them properly. People live in them because there isn’t any place else to live.”

Ben sighed, “Well job or not, we have no place to live, come the end of the month.”

“Look, something will turn up, it always does, right Grandpa?”

Joe Turner looked back at his granddaughter and winked, “A little bird told me it would.”

“There you go, see Dad, now I’m going to the grocery store to get some food and I’ll cook us a good dinner.”

As she got up to go, her chair fell into the crack once more, almost causing her to trip. “And who wants to live in this death trap any more anyway! The place is falling apart, Uncle Jerry may as well sell it, he hasn’t fixed a thing in years.”

Ben stood up and hugged his daughter. She had her own worries, he knew she had other plans for her life than counselling runaways and looking after the family. He just wished he could provide for the family.

As for the extended family, there may have been dozens of Turners but as a whole family, they weren’t worth much. Maybe it was the big families that kept them poor, but nobody had been able to help. Oh sure, lots of sympathy, lots of sad faces, but nobody to come up with the money to buy the place, certainly not at the price Jerry was going to get for it. No, there was nothing else for it but to find someplace else to live.

That was not going to be easy. Housing was tight, and cheap places were hard to find. Especially one with a large yard for a garden, and a shed, and space for an office, and. Who was he kidding? They were in deep trouble.

Joe looked at his son, “We’ll work it out, Ben, we really will. The family has always worked it out. Haven’t you raised Lily, provided for us, kept a roof over our heads so far?”

“So far, yes. So far. With Lily’s hard work that is.”

“Well it will happen again for us.”

“Pops, I’m happy you feel that way, but I’m not so sure.”

“Wait until tomorrow.”

“Oh Pop...”

Lily came back and made dinner, Ben cleaned up afterwards and the family went to bed. In the morning, Lily went off to work, Ben got onto his computer and did his two hours of job hunting, then got back to his project for a community centre.

Joe went off to his shed and looked out the door to watch Emma chatting with her flowers. It was a one way conversation, but she didn't seem to mind. Every so often she'd look over to make sure Joe was all right and Joe would wave back. He knew he was losing it, but today was a good day.

At about two in the afternoon the mail truck drove by but didn't stop, and Joe was a bit worried, he'd been sure there would be something to help them. Some package or letter. Emily walked over, “Look, Joe, just because your little bird told you there would be help in the mail today, doesn't mean there will be. Don't look so down.”

“No, there was supposed to be something, I swear.”

Joe turned around and sat in his chair, lost in his thoughts. Emily watched him for a moment, then softly closed the door.

About an hour later, the neighbour from down the road walked up the drive and knocked on Joe's shed door. “Joe this was delivered to us, but it's for you. There's no return address, but it looks important.”

“Thanks Sophie, I appreciate you walking it over, I've been expecting it.”

“Well I hope it's good news. You folks could use some.”

## Lilly at Work



Lily glanced at the clock on the wall, counting the minutes until the end of her shift at the youth centre. The room echoed with the sounds of teenagers chatting and playing games, but Lily's attention was focused on a new client, Jake, who sat slouched in a corner, clearly uninterested in being there.

“Lily, can you please talk to Jake?” Sarah, Lily's boss, said with a frown. “He's been giving the staff a hard time all day. We need to figure out how to engage him or at least make him participate.”

Lily sighed, glancing in Jake's direction. “I've tried, Sarah. He's not having it. It's like pulling teeth to get him to open up.”

Sarah crossed her arms. “Lily, we've got to make this work. We can't afford to lose another client, especially one as young as Jake. It reflects poorly on the centre.”

Lily nodded, her eyes still on Jake. “I get it, Sarah, but he's not here voluntarily. It's tough to connect with someone who doesn't want to be here in the first place.”

“Lily, we're all dealing with tight budgets and low enrolment. Losing clients affects all of us. You need to find a way to make it work, or...”

“Or what?” Lily interrupted, frustrated. “I need this job, Sarah. You know that. But I can't work miracles. If he doesn't want to be here, there's only so much I can do.”

Sarah sighed, “Just try, Lily. We're all in this together.”

Lily nodded, watching Sarah walk away before making herself approach Jake. She sat down beside him, offering a smile.

“Hey, Jake, still here eh?” she started, trying to sound casual.

Jake barely looked up, grunting in acknowledgement.

“I know this place might not be your first choice for spending your time, but we're here to help. Is there something specific you enjoy doing?”

Jake shrugged, his eyes on the floor. “I don't need help. I don't need to be here.”

Lily sighed to herself, “I get it. Sometimes it feels like life is throwing stuff at us that we don't want. But maybe, just maybe, we can make the best out of a tough situation. What do you enjoy doing outside of this place?”

Jake mumbled something unintelligible.

Lily leaned in, “Sorry, didn't catch that.”

“Art,” Jake muttered, still avoiding eye contact.

Lily's eyes lit up. "Art? That's great! We have an art corner here. Maybe you could give it a shot? It's a way to express yourself without having to talk too much."

Jake finally looked up, "Whaddya mean? I can talk!" but there was a flicker of interest in his eyes. Lily seized the chance, leading him to the art corner and handing him some supplies.

As they started to paint, the tension in the room eased, and a small smile tugged at Lily's lips. Sometimes, making a connection meant finding common ground in unexpected places, Like a shared appreciation for art.

The rest of the afternoon wasn't bad, Lily thought she might be getting through to Jake, at least he wasn't so hostile while they were painting.

At least the car was running well, thought Lily as she drove through the city streets. The sun was low on the horizon, casting long shadows across the pavement. The day had been a series of challenges at the centre, and Lily found herself yearning for the quiet of the drive, where she could decompress.

She pulled onto the main road and the sunset filled the windscreen, as it always did this time of year. It was beautiful, but Lily's thoughts remained grey. Thinking of her day in the centre, she thought of her resentment at having to support the family. She wondered what she could do if she was free to do anything.

The radio station switched to rap music, and Lily turned it off. She was tired, but she couldn't stop thinking of the crap that had been going on for weeks. She glanced at the rear view mirror, catching her reflection. The weariness etched on her face didn't surprise her. Her life had become a tug of war between resentment at having to support the family, and her love for them.

"Why does it always have to be me?" she whispered to herself. A traffic light was ahead, but she barely noticed. The light switched from yellow to red and Lily almost sailed through the intersection. The sudden blare of horns jolted her back to reality, and she slammed on the brakes just in time.

"Focus, Lily," she said out loud, her hands gripping the steering wheel as her heart pounded.

As her car idled at the red light, Lily talked to herself, "I don't want to be stuck in a job I hate," she admitted, the words coming once again. "I want to paint, some sort of creation. But here I am, playing therapist to teenagers who don't want my help."

The light turned green, and Lily moved forward carefully, heading for the edge of town. As she moved out into the countryside, she was happy the traffic started to thin, "But they're family," she said quietly, "I love them. I'll do whatever it takes to keep them safe and happy."

The road stretched out, Lily's hands loosened their grip, the tension in her shoulders easing. The city lights left behind, the stars began to come out ahead of her.

"I'll find a way to make it work. To find balance, I won't let this crap get in the way of the love I have for them."

The tension in Lily's shoulders began to ease. The nightly discussion with herself wound to a close and she began to look forward to seeing her family once more. She turned the radio back on and found a Jazz station to listen to.

## **Aunt Who?**

As she came through the front door and walked down the hall, Lily began to feel anxious again. She picked up on something that was happening in the house, a certain tension. She found herself walking into an ongoing discussion that had clearly taken a serious turn.

Grandpa Joe sat in his armchair, hands curled around the armrests, while Grandma Emily perched on the couch, her eyes filled with concern. Ben stood near the window, his brow furrowed, as if he were wrestling with a tricky bit of design.

"What's going on?" Lily asked, her eyes moving from one family member to the other.

Joe motioned for her to sit, "Just like I said we would, we've got a letter, Lily. A letter from someone named Isabelle Turner."

Lily took a seat, glancing at the letter that seemed to fascinate the family. "Isabelle? Do we know her?"

Emma shook her head. "No one seems to remember her. But the letter says she's a relative of Joe. She mentions a cabin and Everwood."

Ben finally spoke up. "Apparently, I've inherited a cabin near Everwood. On Sky Lake."

Lily's eyes widened. "Everwood? Sky Lake? Where's that? And why would you inherit a cabin?"

Ben shrugged, "I have no idea. I don't remember any Aunt Isabelle and neither do mom and dad. And a cabin near Everwood? It sounds like something out of a fairy tale. Especially coming right now."

Grandpa Joe chuckled. "Well, my son, sometimes reality is stranger than fiction. It seems we've stumbled upon a hidden chapter in our family's history."

Lily glanced through the letter, "So, what do we do now?"

Ben sighed, "I don't know. I mean, it could be a mistake or a prank. But if there's even a remote chance that it's true..."

Emma was sure. "Maybe it's a blessing in disguise. A chance for a fresh start, away from the problems we've been facing."

Lily frowned. "But Everwood? Sky Lake? Do we know if these places exist?"

Joe leaned forward, a twinkle in his eye. “There's only one way to find out, my dear. We go on an adventure.”

Ben sighed, “What about Lily’s job?”

Lily looked up from the letter, “Let’s find out where this place is, maybe I can commute, after all it’s a 45 minute drive now.”

Emma placed a hand on Ben's shoulder. “Sometimes, chances come at the most challenging times. Maybe this is our chance to turn things around.”

Ben shrugged, he wasn’t convinced.

“Ben, love, there's a magic in unexpected turns,” Emma began.

Ben glanced at her, “Magic, Gran? This sounds more like a fairytale than reality.”

Emma chuckled softly, “Life has a way of surprising us, Ben. This letter—it's like a whisper from the universe. A chance for something new.”

Ben sighed, his shoulders slumped “What if it's a mistake? What if there's no cabin, no Everwood?”

Emma tilted her head, “What if there is, Ben? What if this is an opportunity to step into a chapter of our lives that we never knew existed?”

“I don’t know if I can just uproot everyone based on a letter. We have responsibilities here—the farmhouse, the eviction...”

“Sometimes, the universe guides us toward a path we didn't know we needed. Everwood might be what we've been searching for.”

“You might be right, Mom, But what if we're just trading one set of problems for another?”

Emily smiled, “Life is an adventure, son. And adventures are never without challenges. But they are also where we discover our strengths.”

Ben turned to his daughter, “Lily, What do you think about what your Gran just said? After all you’re the one with a job.”

“About the letter? The cabin in Everwood? It all sounds like a dream, Dad.”

Ben nodded, “Yeah, but sometimes, dreams are what pull us out of life. Mother believes in it. Is it a chance for something better?”

Lily sighed, “That would be nice, But what if we end up chasing a mirage and lose everything we have here? Our friends? The family?”

"I don't know, Lily. The farmhouse, the eviction, that's all real, and we can't ignore it. But this letter, it's like a door that's cracked open. Maybe we should at least peek inside."

"Dad, we're talking about uprooting our lives based on a letter from someone we don't even know."

"I get it, Lily, I really do, but what if there's a chance for something more? What if this is the opportunity we need to turn things around?"

Lily still hesitated, "What about your career, Dad? What about my dreams? Is this place even real?"

Ben smiled, "Maybe it's time for a leap of faith, Lily. Let's face it, I don't have a career at the moment, so that doesn't count. It's you that has the most to lose, should we try to find an apartment in the city so you can keep your job? How about if we figure out where Everwood is, and whether there's a job for you there, or somewhere close by. Hell maybe it's just outside of town."

"It's not just outside of town, Dad. We'd know it, but OK let's figure out where it is and I can make some calls. We need to decide this soon, I'd have to give notice at work."

Lily turned to her grandfather, "How about you, Gramps? You in?"

"Damned right I am, I told you a bird said we'd get this letter didn't I?"

"Yes you did. Right then, Dad, fire up your computer and find out where Everwood is."

It was decided that Ben and Lily would go check the place out, while Emma and Joe packed. They would have to move out of the farmhouse no matter what.

The road to Everwood wound through fields and forests once they got away from the city. They were driving through small towns and seeing long gowns. There were a lot of rural folk on the farms, which Lily thought was not unexpected. She was still doubtful.

As they approached the town's outskirts, a sign welcomed them to Everwood—a quaint place that was frozen in time. It was as if the town itself was stuck in a bygone era.

"Look at this place, Lily. It's like stepping into a storybook."

Lily gazed out of the window, "It's charming, but is there a cabin waiting for us?"

The GPS took them through narrow country lanes until Sky Lake appeared on the horizon. The sight was slightly disappointing, a small expanse of water framed by bush. The water was full of reeds, it was probably a good fishing lake.

"There it is," Lily pointed to a clearing by the lake. A weathered cottage stood proudly, a testament to the passage of time.

The car crunched to a stop on the gravel path, the two stepped out, their eyes fixed on the cottage that promised so much.

“It’s...old,” Lily observed, eyeing the peeling paint and weathered roof.

Ben, however, saw beyond the wear and tear. “I think it’s got good bones, Lily. I can work with this. Remodel it, bring it back to life.”

Lily looked around. The out-buildings, though weathered, hinted at a history waiting to be rediscovered. “It’s big, can we really make it our home?”

Ben, his mind already crafting plans, nodded. “Absolutely. With a little love and a lot of work, this could be our place.”

Lily took a deep breath, the air tinged with the scent of the lake. “Okay, let’s do it. If this is legit, if Aunt Isabelle’s letter wasn’t a prank, let’s make this ours.”

They walked around a bit, peering into windows and looking across the lake. As the afternoon started to fade, Lily cleared her throat. “Before we get too attached, let’s go into town and see a lawyer, and I need to see if there’s work for me here.”

## **Meet the Mayor**

The main street of Everwood was busy. Lily and Ben strolled along the sidewalk, absorbing the charm of the town and the many tourists.

“Well, this place has character, at least.”

Ben nodded, “It’s like stepping back in time. I can see why Isabelle might have loved it here, she probably watched it grow up.”

Their first stop was the town’s diner, where the aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingled with the sound of friendly chatter.

“Morning, folks! What can I get you?” The waitress greeted them with a smile.

“Coffee, black,” Ben replied, settling into the worn vinyl booth.

Lily grinned. “Same for me, please, and a carrot muffin.”

As they sipped their coffee, they listened to the locals discussing the issues of the day. Local politics, a bit of gossip, and a surprising amount of international news.

After coffee, they headed to the town hall, a quaint building that exuded a sense of history. Mayor Greenwood, a no nonsense woman with a firm handshake, welcomed them into her office.

Ben outlined who he was, and asked for the local real estate lawyer.

“You’re talking to her,”

Ben introduced Lily and they both sat down in the chairs the Mayor offered them.

“Lily, nice to meet you both. Now, about this cottage on Sky Lake...” The Mayor trailed off, her fingers tapping on the keyboard.

“We wanted to make sure it's real, that we actually own it.” Ben explained.

The Mayor pulled up records on her computer, her eyes scanning the screen. “Isabelle Turner, your aunt a few times removed, lived there for over fifty years. I knew her well. That cottage has been in your family for generations. She came to me about handing it over to you.”

Lily's eyes widened. “So, it's really ours? Aunt Isabelle wasn't just a figment of our imagination?”

Mayor Greenwood chuckled, “Far from it. Isabelle left the cottage to you, Ben. Legally, it's yours.”

Ben exchanged a glance with Lily, a mix of astonishment and gratitude in their eyes.

“But I must warn you, the cottage needs some work. Isabelle was stubborn about preserving it, and she hadn't made many changes over the years. It's a fixer-upper, but with the right touch, it could be a gem.”

Ben's eyes sparkled. “We're up for the challenge. We want to make it our home.”

“Good. Everwood welcomes you. If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask. We're a close community, always ready to lend a hand.”

Lily spoke up, “Is there a youth centre in town?”

Mayor Greenwood nodded. “Yes, indeed. We have a fantastic youth centre, and there's also the high school. We serve not just the town but a large area around it.”

“That's great, I work at a youth centre, back in our old town. Do you think they might need some extra help?”

The Mayor's eyes lit up, “Actually, they've been looking for additional staff. We've been expanding our programs, and the demand has grown. You might be just what they need. How about I talk to the head of social services in town? I can put in a good word for you.”

“That would be amazing. Thank you so much, I really want to contribute to the community here.”

Mayor Greenwood picked up the phone and made a quick call, “Hello, Karen? Abigail Greenwood here. I have a young woman named Lily Turner interested in a position at the youth centre. Any chance we could arrange a meeting? Excellent. Thank you, Karen. I appreciate it.”

Mayor Greenwood hung up and turned back to Lily. “Karen will be expecting you. Head over to the social services office. I'm sure you'll make a positive impact. We value community involvement here in Everwood.”

Lily's eyes gleamed, “Thank you so much, this means a lot to me.”

Ben, standing by the door, said, “We're grateful for the warm welcome, and for the opportunities you've provided for us. It's been quite a day.”

“You're welcome, both of you. Everwood is a town that thrives on the spirit of its residents. I'm confident you'll find your place here. If you ever need anything, don't hesitate to reach out.”

Lily was soon in the social services office, a few doors down from the Mayor and it didn't take long to meet Karen. Lily described her experience and training, and finished with, “I don't have a resume or anything but I can email it to you as soon as I get home.”

Karen smiled, “I suspect it will be just fine, Lily, I look forward to working with you, and I'm sure you'll fit right in.”

The journey back from Everwood was filled with a subdued excitement. Lily couldn't help smiling, “So, Dad, what do you think? Are we really going to make Sky Lake our home?”

“Yeah, Lily, I think we are. The cottage may need work, but it's got character. It's apparently a piece of our family history, and with a little effort, it can be a place for all of us.”

“What about Grandpa and Grandma? Do you think they'll be up for it?”

Ben smiled, “They're excited, for sure, they see it as an adventure, a chance to be part of something new. It's like a dream for them, and being on a lake, they'll certainly find things to do in their retirement.”

“That's great, Dad. And for us, it's a chance to start fresh.”

Ben nodded. “Exactly. Maybe Sky Lake is the break we need. The lake, the cottage, it's a canvas waiting for us to paint our story.”

Lily grinned. “And speaking of stories, I think it'll be a good fit for me.”

Ben's eyes sparkled with pride. “That's fantastic, Lily. Everwood will be lucky to have you.”

The car's rhythmic hum and the gentle sway of the road soon had Lily, drowsing. The day's discussions about Sky Lake and the promise of a new beginning drifted into her dreams.

Sky Lake's shores unfolded before her, the cottage standing silent against the backdrop of nature. Lily's gaze went to the garden, where a figure, his clothes from a bygone era, worked the soil with the rhythm of a seasoned labourer.

The man's hands, weathered and sure, held a hoe, carving furrows in the earth as if in a dance with the land itself. Lily, watched each measured movement.

At that point, the man paused in his toil. He turned and looked over his shoulder at Lily. There was a familiarity, a shared recognition. The man, acknowledging Lily's presence, turned his body toward her. His lips parted, as if he was about to speak. The garden, the man, and Lily stood suspended for a long moment.

Just as the man began to speak, telling some story, the car hit a minor bump in the road, and Lily's eyes fluttered open. The dream slipped away.

Suddenly back in the car, Lily kept a feeling of the man and the dream, but the details were gone.

As they approached the farmhouse, Lily leaned back in her seat, a contented smile on her face. "I can't wait to see what Sky Lake has in store for us."

Ben nodded, "Let's hope it's good for all of us, sweetheart."

## The Family Journey



When Ben and Lily got into the farmhouse they found an explosion of trunks and suitcases had sprung up from somewhere. Ben turned to his daughter, "I guess there's no need to discuss, Mom and Dad seem to have packed us up."

Emily laughed, "You're kidding, Son, this is just the essentials, we're going to have to make several trips. Your father was convinced it would work out and he convinced me, so tell us about the place."

"Big, on the lake, it's going to need a lot of work."

Lily spoke up, "And I think I've got a job at the local youth centre already."

"That's wonderful sweetheart, Ben, just how much work is this place going to need?"

"Need? Maybe a new roof, maybe updated plumbing and wiring, we didn't get in to see it. But I suspect there will be a lot of work inside, to deal with a lot of years of nothing being done. The Mayor said Aunt Isabelle did nothing for fifty years, apparently she was preserving the place."

"Sounds like your Dad's family."

Joe turned to look daggers at Emma, "What?"

"To do nothing and find a nice sounding label for doing nothing."

"Oh, well OK you're right there I guess."

Ben laughed and Lily looked a bit shocked. She had never got used to her grandparents way of talking about each other and their families.

Emma sent Lily to the living room to sit and rest, she looked a bit tired. She cooked a late dinner for the family and had to wake Lily to come eat it. "I dreamed about that man again, the one I dreamt about in the car."

"You didn't tell me about a dream," her father said as he passed Lily a plate.

"It wasn't much of a dream, a man in the garden at the cottage, he was going to tell me something but I woke up in the car."

"Did he talk this time?"

"He said be careful, the roads are treacherous this time of year."

"The roads, they are usually fine, I wonder what... Oh, I wonder if he meant the roads back in his day, they were maybe pretty much dirt paths."

Lily looked strangely at her father, "Just a dream, Dad, just a dream."

As she said that, Emma was watching her closely, but said nothing.

After supper, Lily sent her resume and CV to Karen in Everwood, and to her surprise, got a return email almost immediately. “I hope this woman doesn’t work all hours.”

Ben nodded, “Make sure you don’t get caught up in that if she does, you know how fast you burned out in your last job.”

Lily finished reading the email, “Well she seems keen to have me start work as soon as possible. She mentions Isabelle as well, as if she was a good friend. I suppose she must have known her most of her life. Anyway, tomorrow I’ll give my month’s notice to Sarah and we can start packing for real.”

The family fell into a routine of packing during the day, and when Lily got home, she packed as well. In three days they had so many boxes and trunks accumulated, they figured they’d better start moving it all. Lily shook her head, “Where did we accumulate all this?”

Emma shook her head, “You’ve grown up in this house, so there’s a couple of decades worth of things to pack. It isn’t like when you were in school and you moved every year, leaving things behind each time.”

“Right, well I’m going to ask for tomorrow afternoon off and we can get rid of some of these trunks to the cottage.”

“Doesn’t seem right to call it a cottage if we’re going to live in it, should we give it a name?”

“A name? Will that help?”

Granpa Joe spoke up, “No name, not until we’re there and see what’s what. A house with the wrong name can be a curse.”

Lily frowned at him, but Emma nodded. Lily looked from one to the other and decided, not for the first time, her family was weird. She went off to her room and pulled down some of her old University trunks and started packing the clothing she didn’t need for the next couple of weeks.

Lily was home at noon the next day and Ben started piling luggage on top of the car. His parents had declared they were going to see the place too, so it would be a full car. With lots of rope, and many worried looks from Lily, the little band was ready to go.

As they drove out of the laneway and started toward the cottage, they decided to pull in to a fast food place for some lunch. Ben declared they would get take-out and pulled around to the side. Lily shouted, “No, no, no, no, stop!”

Ben hit the brakes, “What?”

Lily pointed up toward the roof of the car and Ben, a sheepish look on his face, backed up to general honking and laughter from the other cars in the line, and parked his own car. As he got out he looked at the pile of luggage, at the bar over the drive through, and back at Lily, who had a crooked grin on her face.

Ben shrugged, “Your old dad is losing it isn’t he?”

Lily hugged him, “Let’s go get something to eat, my treat.”

Back on the road, they encountered a detour. “It’s often like this heading to cottage country, the roads get dug up all the time, I’m sure it’s well marked.”

In the back seat, Joe looked at his son and shook his head. He said nothing but when he looked at Emily, she nodded.

They turned off at the arrow and headed away from the main route. As could be predicted, they were soon bumping along on a gravel road, then a dirt track. About the time they started down the dirt track, it started raining.

Ben leaned forward and looked upward, “Good thing we covered it all with a tarp.”

At about that exact time, the wind came up and Lily glanced in the mirror out her window, just in time to see the blue tarp flapping down the road behind them and into the bush, like some sort of giant, land based Stingray. “Stop, Dad, I see the tarp, we can get it!”

Ben slewed the car to a stop, he wasn’t worried about parking it, they hadn’t see a car for miles. The four of them got out and walked back to where Lily saw the tarp blow into the trees. Lily suddenly remembered what the man in her dreams had said. ‘That’s just stupid,’ she thought to herself.

Joe and Emma bashed into the wood, they both had their hiking boots on, while Ben and Lily dealt with mud squishing into their sneakers. The tarp was hung up high in a cedar, caught on some branches. Emily watched as her husband stomped around the tree, looking everywhere and putting his hand on the trunk to lean on the tree. Finally, he stopped and Emily nodded to herself. Joe leaned back a bit and then slapped the tree where he’d rested his hand.

Like it had been scolded, the tree shook, each branch flapping up and down, and the tarp came free to float down to the ground. As Emma gathered it up and folded it, Ben and Lily appeared. Ben clapped his hands together, “Oh, you found it, wonderful. Let’s get it back on the luggage and get out of here. I’m sure the road was mis-labelled, this can’t be the detour.”

“Sure, which way back to the car?” Emma was folding the tarp one last time and tucked it under her arm.

“What? It’s right back...”

“Did you mark your trail in?”

“We’re just a couple metres from the road. Why would I mark a trail?”

“Last one in line always marks the trail, didn’t I teach you that?” Joe looked like he was about to laugh.

“You never told me any such thing. So which way do we go, Pops? Pops?”

Lily looked worried. “So which way do we go?”

Emma and Joe shrugged and Ben shook his head.

Just then, Lily saw the man from her dream. He was carrying an axe over his shoulder and was weaving his way through the trees. “There, follow me,” she told her family.

Emma looked hard to where Lily was pointing but saw nothing. She glanced at Joe who nodded.

A short walk took them out to the road where their car was waiting. The rain had stopped and they threw the tarp back over the luggage, tucking it in good and tying it down.

Back in the car, Ben was about to turn it around when Lily, looking down the road the way they were going, said “No Dad, keep going.”

Something about the way she was looking ahead, made Ben put the car in gear and carry on that way. Not half an hour later, the dirt road became gravel and then paved and they pulled into Everwood. They drove through town with the folks on the street pointing at the pile of luggage and laughing. From town, it was a short drive out to the cabin, where once again, Joe and Emily looked at each other and nodded.

Emily said, “Yep, this is a Turner place all right.”

Ben asked, “Why do you say that, Mother?”

Joe laughed, “Can’t you feel it?”

Ben shook his head, “It feels like home to me, but nothing else.”

“That’s exactly it, Son. Yep, it’s ours, we’re home.”

## **The First Time at Home**

“OK Dad, what do you and Mom mean, it’s ours.”

His father looked at him for a long time, Emily shook her head slightly, but Joe shrugged. “There’s something here, Son. There’s always something around where we live, where we belong. It’s here.”

“What, like a place with character where we can be fond of it.”

Joe sighed, and Emily took over. “Yes, for now that’s good enough Ben. That will do.”

“Now look, I’m not a stupid kid any more, do you two have something to say to me?”

“Don’t worry about it, maybe it will become clear.”

“The farmhouse? Was it our place, a Turner place?”

“No, it was Jerry’s place and he’s on my side of the family.”

“Ma, can you get any more cryptic? If there’s something you want to tell me, just tell me.”

“It’s fine son. Let’s get these things inside and have a look around.”

Lily, having experienced similar discussions before, had gone ahead with the keys and unlocked the side door. The front door faced the lake and the side door was closest to the drive. She shoved the door open, half expecting the floors to be rotten and full of holes, but they were just fine. Quite solid in fact. She looked again and briefly saw holes. She shivered and went back outside into the sunshine, she walked around to the back of the house where she saw the remains of a garden. It was overgrown, as if nobody had tended it for several years, but there, along three rows that had been weeded, were a series of holes. Lily sat down on an old bench and closed her eyes. The holes were the same pattern that she’d seen in the hallway of the house.

“Gran!”

Emma walked to Lily and sat on the bench, “Oh, now that’s going to take some work but by the look of that soil it should be productive. Did you hoe the rows?”

“Gran I didn’t, I went into the house and saw holes in the floor, only there weren’t any, and then I came out here and there they were, the same pattern.”

“Ah, I see. Lily you knew the way out of the woods and the way here. Can I ask you how you knew?”

“It’s stupid and embarrassing.”

“And I’m your grandmother, you think I’m going to laugh at you?”

Lily shook her head and looked down at the grass, “I saw a man in my dream, he was in this garden, and when we were lost he led us out of the woods.”

“Yes, I thought it might have been that.”

“You did? What’s going on?”

“Look, you’re a Turner, that comes with some extra baggage I’m afraid.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Well for one thing, you know the voices your grandfather hears? He actually hears them, and those birds he’s talking to, they talk back.”

“Gran?”

“And I’ve been with him for a lot of years, the plants I talk to in the garden? Well they talk back.”

“OK that’s enough, it’s stressful enough with the move, without you laying those stories on me. I was tired, I dreamed and then I thought I saw the man in my dream. That’s it, it was lucky that we found our way when we were lost.”

“And the holes?”

“Damn the holes, groundhogs or rabbits, that’s how they got there. Maybe I saw them on the way into the house and they were burned on my retina.”

“You’re doubtless correct sweetheart.”

“Let’s get the baggage in the house and head on back to town, OK?”

“We’ve time to look around the house don’t we?”

“Of course we do. It’s not that far back home, and hopefully we won’t get lost again.”

With that, Lily and Emily decided to go around the rest of the house to see the outside. Lily had already been around it with her father, and spotted some outbuildings that were intact enough to maybe become an private space. Something she’d wanted since high school, her very own space.

They spotted a candidate and Emily approved of the plan, “You need a studio dear, working in the farmhouse was too cramped for you, and you couldn’t throw paint around and make a mess.”

“How are you so smart, Gran?”

“Not smart, old. Let’s check out the front porch.” With that they climbed the steps and stomped around but the deck seemed solid enough. They could see daylight through the roof though. That would need some work.

When they went in, Emily went straight to the kitchen, as if she’d been there before. There was an old wood cookstove, and Emily clapped her hands. “Just like Joe and I started with. Look, the wood goes there, that’s the oven, the burners are on top, the warming drawer is up there and that’s a hot water tank. You can cook a feast all at once and have water to wash up afterwards.”

“But there’s an electric range and plumbing.”

“Oh girl, wait until you try the wood stove, see how clean that electric oven is? Isabelle hardly used it, and another thing, on a cold winter morning, you fire up that wood stove and the kitchen becomes the warmest room in the house.”

“I’ll take your word for it. What’s through here?”

“Back kitchen, wood pile, oh yes, Isabelle was all stocked up. The room freezes in the winter but it’s dry and they’re usually a few degrees warmer than outside.”

“Look, here’s a basement door.”

“That will be the root cellar dear, yes it is. See the shelving, that’s where you keep the potatoes and carrots and cabbage and the other things you grow. Oh I’m really going to like it here.”

While the girls were exploring the kitchen rooms, Ben and Joe had found the den. It was a small room with wing back chairs, a couch and a small wood stove. Joe pointed out the size of the stove and the fact that the room was at least one room away from the outside walls on all sides. “That’s to keep the place warm, and the wing backs keep the drafts off of you.”

“There’s hot water rads though, so there must be central heating.”

“Sure, but wait until minus twenty or so and you’ll be glad of this room. The den and the kitchen will be the warmest places in the house.”

“Dad what are the grates in the floor?”

“Passive heat circulation, see how the grates are bigger in the middle and smaller around the outside walls? It used to be done the opposite of what we do now, heat up the middle, it moves to the outside and the cold air runs down to the basement. Now they put the heat ducts under the windows. Totally destroys the frost patterns we used to get.”

“And preserves the wood around the windows so they don’t rot from the condensation.”

Joe grinned, “Well yes, there is that.”

“I want to see the basement, take a look at the boiler. Then we’ll have a quick look upstairs.”

As they went down the steps to the proper basement, they discovered a relatively new boiler and an electric water heater, as well as the other door to the root cellar, where they met Lily and Emma. The four of them went upstairs and to the second floor. Everyone had fun arguing over who would get which bedroom. The one with the view of the lake was also the one where the winter winds would hit the wall, making it cold. But that view... Lily begged for the room and the family gave it to her. That left the main bedroom, furthest away from the prevailing winds for Joe and Emma, and two rooms for Ben, an office and a bedroom. A quick peek at a set of stairs up to an attic and the family decided that was enough exploring, they had to get back home and continue the packing.

Lily let the others go downstairs but she had to see the attic. She scurried up and was met by a lovely room full of old boxes and trunks. There were children in the house at one point, by the looks of the hobby horse and doll house. It was going to be fun learning what treasures were there.

## The Shaman



As Lily turned and started down the stairs, she suddenly flattened against the wall. A man was coming the other way. He had braids and a fringed leather vest. Recovering quickly from the shock, Lily stepped in front of him. “Who the hell are you and how did you get in here?”

“Injun Joe.”

Lily was unsettled, “What? Inj... do you know how inappropriate that is?”

“’S my name, girl.”

The man seemed content to stand and block the staircase all day. “So what do you want then?”

“Going to the top.”

“What right do you have to even be in the house, let alone go anywhere?”

“Always done it.”

The standoff lasted another few moments, then Ben called up the stairs, “Lily we need to go.”

“Right then Mr. Joe, up you go and then out of the house, lock it up after you go.”

The man bobbed his head and made a vague movement of his hand toward his forehead as he moved carefully past Lily. Shaking a bit, and looking over her shoulder, she flew down the stairs and out the door. “Dad did you see a man come in?”

“Nobody kiddo, except Grampa and me, why?”

Lily once again wondered if she was seeing things and so shook her head, “No matter, let’s go.”

Things settled into a routine over the next few weeks, they would load up boxes and when there were enough of them, they’d pile up the top of the car and move them to the cottage. It was usually the four of them so that they could unload and get back before midnight. Lily didn’t dare take any more time off work, they were suffering as it was, and her taking time off would be a problem. Her leaving the job would be a problem.

It wasn’t until the end of the month that they took the last of the boxes out of the old farmhouse. Cousin Jerry came to see them off at least. He had made himself scarce during the move, fearing he would get a ding on the ear from Emily. “I’m truly sorry to have sold the house out from under you, it wasn’t personal in any way.”

Ben nodded, “It’s OK Jerry, the money you got from the place should set you up for the rest of your life. Invest it wisely, don’t drink it away.”

“Louise would never let me do that, she’s insisted it go to the stocks and the bonds, whatever those are.”

“Good, listen to her. Thanks for sending us off, we’ll see you at the next reunion right?”

“I’ll be there, good thing it’s a few months away, the family is pretty mad at me now.”

“Well we aren’t, it will blow over, it always does.”

Ben shook Jerry’s hand and got into the car. They drove off down the lane for the last time and Jerry waved until they were out of sight.

## Moving In

The family hadn’t had much of a chance to explore in the last several visits to the cabin. Just drop things off and head back home. Now they had to settle in. First thing Emma did was make beds, and the first thing Ben did was head down into the basement to have a good look at the heating system. Joe was with him when Ben stood and scratched his head. “Dad, there’s no gas feed line, no propane tank, no fuel, nothing, and yet when I turn it on, it comes on. I can’t figure it out.”

Joe sort of squinted at the furnace and then said, “We need to top up the water don’t we?”

“Well yes, it’s a bit low, we’ll have to bleed the rads too, but where’s the fuel?”

“Son I wouldn’t worry about that too much, I’m sure the bill will come and when it does you’ll know what it’s using for fuel. Meantime, let’s top it up and bleed the lines, it’s getting cold at night now.”

“You know about this system, Dad?”

“Yes, it’s the same type as when your mother and I were first married. Installed by a cousin of mine, he may have designed this one too.”

“Well he did a good job, see how fast it fires up and it’s damned hot.”

“Better be, I bet this place leaks like a sieve.”

Upstairs in the kitchen, Emily was working on the wood stove. She burned some newspaper inside the wood box to make sure the flue was open and drawing. Lily watched, fascinated as Emma built a fire and lit it. It flared fast and as Emma closed the door, Lily saw waves of heat coming off the stove. She had never seen that before and her eyes got wide.

Emma noticed, “What is it, girl?”

“The heat waves, they’re so bright, I’ve never noticed that before.”

Emma put her hand on the stove, it was still cold. “Lily, we are going to have a serious talk some time soon, but for now let’s unpack the kitchen boxes and get some supper on.”

Lily tore her eyes away from the multi-coloured waves coming off the stove and began opening drawers and cupboards, getting ready to clean them.

They were clean.

“Aunt Isabelle must have been a hell of a housekeeper, Gran, these cabinets are spotless.”

“I’m not surprised, come on then get loading them up.”

Catching movement from the corner of her eye, Lily looked, but saw nothing over toward the root cellar door. She shrugged and opened another box.

By the time the girls had loaded the cupboards and the refrigerator, and carried some potatoes down to the root cellar, the place was getting warmed up. A series of bangs caused Emma to tsk and she turned the valve on the hot water rad to let the air out, which it did with a whistle and enough steam to condense on the windows. Again, Lily had no idea what she was doing, but she paid attention.

“Air in the pipes, you have to let it out and the rads will carry hot water to heat the place. Just bleed them when you hear the banging of the pipes. Then while the furnace is on it will be quiet. It’s an old fashioned heat but it’s gentle and constant. Just don’t lean on a rad or your ass will be striped.”

Emma laughed as Lily’s eyes got wide and then narrowed as she pictured her grandmother’s rear end with stripes. “Yeah, you don’t make that mistake twice, best not make it at all.”

Lily was amazed at how her grandmother seemed to have come to life. There was soon a stew on the burner, with dumplings ready to go on top. While that was cooking, Emily got some soda bread going, “not enough time for proper yeast bread” she said as she put it into the oven. Lily put coffee on, finding plenty of electrical plugs under the kitchen cabinets.

It wasn’t long before they set the kitchen table. Lily had headed for the dining room but Emma had laughed, “Dining room is for company, family eats in the kitchen.”

The boys showed up without being called, Joe saying, “Smelled the bread and stew, Emma. If I remember right, that’s the very first meal you made for me when we got married.”

“You’re a senile old man, you cooked.”

Joe smiled, “Now who’s senile, I’ve never cooked a meal in my life.”

Lily, who knew Joe was a good cook, shook her head and thought, ‘Old people.’

Ben looked at the wood stove, “You cooked and baked on that thing?”

“Sure I did, and I can teach you how son.”

Ben shut up quickly and tucked into the stew, tearing off chunks of bread to dip in it.

“Look at the boy, you’d never know he grew up in the city.”

“What?”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full son.”

## Name This Thing



The family was gathered around the kitchen table. Each of them had discovered something strange in their bedroom the evening before or that morning. Lily had discovered a secret panel by her wardrobe, Emma had pulled hers from under their mattress, Joe found a short shelf above the shelf in the master bedroom, and Ben had moved his dresser to another place in the room, finding a rod of metal tucked into the backside.

“That’s quite a collection, worthy of that TV show, whatever it was called, from years ago. They’d come in with an apple peeler and stump the city folks. None of this stuff is rural bric a brak though.”

“It isn’t, is it Joe. I don’t recognize any of these things.”

Lily turned her sphere around and around in her hand, “It seems to be heavier on one side than the other, sort of like a lawn bowling ball but it’s not that, it’s too small.”

Ben giggled, “Maybe it’s a snatch, you know, from those magic movies you used to watch.”

Lily gave him a sour look, “No button, no cracks for wings. It’s smooth and warm.”

“I’ll trade you.”

Lily handed her sphere to Ben and as he touched it, the thing split open and flipped over. It was some sort of bug-like mechanical device that crawled up onto his shoulder and nuzzled his neck. “What the hell?”

Emma reached for it but it hissed loudly. Ben reached and got the same reaction. “Maybe I’ll leave it there for now.”

Lily was thinking hard, “Did we get the wrong things? Dad your little rod here isn’t doing anything for me, again no buttons, no cracks that I can see. Grampa do you want to switch?”

“I dunno, Lily, I kind of like my fan here, it will be useful come the hot weather... OK then, let’s switch.”

As Joe got the little rod in his hand, it began to lengthen. When it got to cane length a ball opened on the end, making it a good walking stick, it stopped growing. “Well this is interesting. Does it go back to a smaller size?”

As he said that, the rod collapsed to the size of something you could put in your pocket. “It’s like an expandable baton. I wonder how much of my cane fighting I remember?”

Ben looked away from his bug to his father, “Your what?”

“Hey I wasn’t always old, Son, I was pretty good with a stick in my day.”

“What are you, a leprechaun?”

Joe's stick began to grow, and Ben's bug hissed. "Whoa there little guy, not a fight." The bug settled down and Joe's stick moved to the size of a baton with a button on the end. He looked at it and it went back to a smaller size.

"I'm keeping this one," he said as he tucked it into his pants pocket.

"That thing becomes big and rips your pants, I'm not sewing them up," his wife said.

"You don't sew my stuff anyway, woman."

Emily looked at Lily, "Wow, give a man a stick and he gets all uppity."

Lily gave her a crooked grin and offered the fan to Emma. In return, Emma slid the triangular bit of metal across the table. "You first."

Lily put the fan down on the table and touched the object. Like the other objects, it started to grow, as it got bigger and split into a pyramid shape, Lily quickly put it down on the kitchen floor. It kept growing, and shoved the table aside as it became large enough for all four of them to go into the entrance that had appeared. No, it didn't shove the table, it grew right around the legs! Lily goggled at it and then said, "Stop growing. Oh, it did. What is it, a tent?"

Emily shrugged, "See if it will shrink again, we aren't going to get it out of the room otherwise."

Lily looked at it, "Shrink." It snapped down into a small triangle in the blink of an eye.

Ben blinked, himself. "And if one of us was inside there?"

Emily shook her head, "I'll bet it wouldn't shrink, these things seem to be halfway intelligent. Let's see what my fan does, if anything."

As Emma picked up the object, it moved just like a fan, spiralling outward and getting larger. It didn't seem to be getting any heavier as it grew to about a metre across. She noticed there was a strap and a handle on one side. She put her arm through and looked at Joe. "Make your cane, dear and have a whack."

Joe grinned and pulled the stick out of his pocket, it became a walking stick and he flipped it so the ball was ready to swing into the shield. He looked at Emma who nodded, "Go ahead."

Joe did, giving the shield a huge strike, stronger than Ben would have expected. Emily didn't flinch at all. "No recoil, I didn't even feel that. What have we got here folks, some sort of military equipment from the future?"

"Or the past, or some sort of sideways fantasy world." Joe grinned, earning a sour look from his wife.

"They seem to be personal, I wonder, did we pick the wrong rooms?" Lily wondered.

“I don’t think so dear, I suspect the items were hidden randomly, I mean how could anyone know we were going to be here at all. They probably just attune themselves to the most likely owner.”

“We own them? And how did you get to be the shield maiden, Gran?”

“Have you had much experience with sword and shield dear?”

“Um no.”

Emma nodded but said no more, Joe laughed a bit and also shut up as Ben looked at him.

Looking back at his bug, Ben said, “OK you, back into a ball.”

The bug somehow managed to look hurt, but folded into a sphere. Emma said the same thing and her shield was a small circular fan once more.

Lily put the triangle to one side on the table. “Are we going to need these things? Are we going on an expedition somewhere?”

Emily shook her head, “I’ve had quite enough of those, and of these toys. It’s time to get to work on breakfast. Lily, why don’t you try firing up the wood stove, leave the ashes in place, they’ll make it easier to start the fire.”

Ben stood up, putting the ball into his pants pocket. Not, it should be said, without a thought to the lining. “I’m going to go set up my office, just yell when you get breakfast ready.”

With that he was heading up the stairs, Joe got up and went to give him a hand. When they got to the room Ben had claimed for his office, he felt a stirring in his pocket. Ben quickly took the sphere out and held it on his hand. The bug appeared and then, to Ben’s surprise, took off and flew around the room, poking into every corner. After a short time, it came back and hovered in front of Ben as if expecting something. Ben held out his hand and the bug landed and folded into a ball again. “That was weird.”

Joe nodded, “I suspect it was checking the place out, I hope it doesn’t do that everywhere you go, we’d have a hard time explaining it.”

“Especially since I can’t explain it to myself.”

“Come on, your office awaits in the boxes, let’s get them open. You know how you want to set it up?”

Downstairs, Emma was satisfied with Lily’s fire in the wood stove, “Are you going to be good, Lily? I’d like to go and look at the garden.”

“You go ahead, Gran, if I have problems I’ll call you.”

## Emma Meets Flora



“This fellow Lily wouldn’t tell me about, the gardener, what’s his deal?”

Flora nodded her head as a breeze came by. “Elias, he was an upright guy, lots of good deeds around the area. That was a lot of years ago, the Turners were one of the first families to settle around here.”

“Never heard of him.”

“From what you told me, your Joe’s side of the family seems to have split off from the Turners in this area a couple of generations back. I’ve watched Joe walking around though, and he’s a Turner all right. Feels right at home here. The land rises up to meet his feet, as they say.”

“Do you know why that is?”

“Sure, the land is yours, and you belong to the land. It comes alive when you’re here. You’re a gardener, surely you can feel that?”

“I certainly did, the first time we drove up the lane. A great big welcome.”

“We were afraid somebody else would buy the place. When Isabelle told me it was family, I was damned happy. Not being able to talk to someone would make being rooted here a pretty boring existence.”

“Can I ask how you came to be, I’ve never seen your type of plant before.”

“But you talked to your garden at your old place, isn’t that what you told me?”

“Yes, but those plants were pretty basic intelligence. ‘hungry, thirsty, oh look out a groundhog,’ sort of thing”

“Well it was Elias that bred me. I’m pretty deep rooted and every gardener since has come to talk to me each morning.”

“Elias sounds like he was a pretty good gardener.”

“Yeah. I’m told he’s still around, but I can’t see him.”

“Oh, I’m sorry about that.”

“Don’t be, we had a long life together and let’s face it, a hundred years more and I’d have been sick of him. Always reminding me how he created me, like I’d forget.”

“We all have our quirks, perhaps he was just amazed he’d done it?”

“Well it got old. So how is your family settling in?”

“Very well, thank you. But listen, before you change the subject on me, Lila saw someone going up the stairs to the attic, was that Elias?”

“He usually stays outdoors, what was this fellow’s name? Did Lily say?”

“She hasn’t said anything at all, thinks I don’t listen around corners. The fellow gave the name ‘Injun Joe,’ you know him?”

“Oh, sure, that’s Joe Loder, no more Indian than I am. He’s harmless, a bit simple some call him, but he’s a bit of a trickster. He likes to pretend he’s a Shaman.”

“What was he doing, and how did he get in without us seeing him?”

“He’s got a key to the basement door. Isabelle gave it to him. He likes to walk up to the top and slide back down.”

“What?”

“You’ll see it one of these days when you get into the attic. Apparently Isaiah Turner, a few generations back, was a fireman, he installed a pole that runs from the attic to the basement.”

“That’s a long drop, it sounds dangerous.”

“Broke his neck eventually.”

Emma giggled, “Oh dear, I shouldn’t laugh, but oh dear.”

“His wife was delighted, Isaiah was a mean man.”

“Hit her?”

“No, he was mean, cheap, he wouldn’t spend a dime if he could get away with a penny. When he died his wife made a lot of improvements to the house, including getting rid of the pole.”

“I thought you said Joe used it.”

“He does, it comes and goes.”

“I think I’m going to like this place.”

“Which means we’re going to get along nicely, listen, could I impose on you to do a bit of a scratch around my roots? I’m suffering a bit from weeds.”

“I’ll get on that after I finish my coffee, and then I’m heading back inside to start dinner.”

“Doesn’t Lily do that?”

“She’s working in town at the youth centre now, The thing is, she’s starting to look like she doesn’t get any sleep at all. She seems to spend too much time in town, they are making her stay late into the

evenings. When she gets home today, I'll tell her to start putting her art things into the shed by the garden here."

"No, no, she doesn't want to use that one, use the one away from the laneway, on the other side of the house, it's a lot less noisy. Put Joe in this one so you can keep an eye on him as you garden. I think Joe will be happy in this one, the birds like it."

"You know about Joe and his birds?"

"I've been watching him, he's tried to make friends with some, but they aren't being very friendly. I'm afraid Ollie has called dibs on him."

"Ollie?"

"An owl who thinks he's old and wise. He's half right, he's pretty old for a bird. Not as old as I am of course, but not many are."

Emma said nothing, her new friend seemed just a bit full of herself, but that wasn't a big character flaw in a flower. She had a lovely blossom for a head, especially this late in the season. Emma finished her coffee and got a hoe out of the shed by the garden, as she scratched around Flora, she heard a series of floral purrs, "Ah, oooh, yes right there, that's the spot."

Emma cleared the area around Flora and then got into the rhythm, working further and further into the garden where she found potatoes. Someone had left vegetables to grow over the summer and they looked ready to be dug and stored. The weeds had hidden the vegetables and Emma vowed to get Joe out there with a pitchfork to dig them up. It looked like the root cellar was going to be put to good use.

When she was ready to put the hoe away, Emma glanced at the sun and was surprised to realize just how long she'd been working, Lily would be home. Emma hadn't made supper, she'd been working for three or four hours, but she didn't feel tired at all.

As she headed into the house, Flora nodded once more, "See you tomorrow."

Emma waved and opened the back kitchen door, taking her shoes off and putting on some slippers, she rushed into the kitchen proper, only to find Lily and Joe setting the table. Joe was grinning, "You looked so happy scratching around in your garden that I started cooking and Lily finished it up. Go get washed and tell Ben that supper's ready."

Emma smiled thanks and went down the hall toward the bathroom. "Joe, there's vegetables out there in the garden, think you could dig them tomorrow?"

"No problem, we'll get them in. How did they look?"

"Great, better than store bought, but then again, most things from your own garden are."

"Won't argue with that. Lily can you take the bread out of the oven please, and there's biscuits in the warmer."

## The Owl's Riddle



“Joe, Flora says you should take the shed at the side of the garden for your retreat.”

Joe looked sourly at Emily, “I don’t need you to babysit me, Emmy. I’m not that far gone.”

Emily looked back mildly, saying nothing. Joe finally ducked his head, “OK it looks like a good place where I can get out of your way while you know where I am and what I’m doing.”

“It’s not like that love, but you know...”

Joe smiled, “Yeah, I know.”

Two days later, Joe was sitting in his new retreat. He’d rearranged the garden tools into the side shed, and organized the rest of the tools onto shelves and over the worktable. Someone had kitted the place out with the things you need around a farmstead, there was even a block attached to the roof beams that could be used to haul a rototiller or a lawn mower up to the workbench. ‘Whoever used the place last must have been old,’ thought Joe, right before he thought, ‘and I thank you, whoever you were.’

Each evening after dinner, Joe would retreat to his shed and sit gazing out the window. He liked the solitude and, if he would admit it to himself, he was hoping one of the birds would come to talk with him. He’d enjoyed their company at the old place and missed their skewed views on life. Frankly, he was mystified that none of them wanted to chat.

As it turned out, he discovered why, when at dusk, an owl landed on his window and said hello.

“Hello yourself, have you been scaring off all the other birds?”

“You got me. I’ve been busy with other things but I wanted you to myself. I told them to lay off while I was out and about.”

“I see, not very generous of you.”

“Look, the little bird-brains can gossip well enough amongst themselves. Me, I’ve got bigger things to do, like being the eyes and ears for Flora, her being stuck in one place. Not that she appreciates me, the vain thing.”

“Flora being the flower Emma is talking to?”

“Yes, the biggest gossip in the next four counties, and I should know, she has me flying all over the place.”

“Right, OK, and you are?”

“Oh, how rude of me, my name’s Ollie.”

“Ollie the Owl...”

“Alright, don’t go on about it. Flora the Flower named me, she’s just a little bit alliterate.”

“Illiterate?”

“Alliterate, do try to keep up, these are the jokes Pops.”

“Sorry, I’m a little bit hard of herring.”

“Let’s not, OK? I’m Ollie and you’re Joe, I know because I listen.”

“I can see that. Well nice to meet you Ollie the Owl.”

“Stop, OK? Just let it go.”

“Right, and what’s the local gossip Ollie?”

“Well the townsfolk are curious as blazes about you lot, the house has been empty since Isabelle died a couple months ago, and now they want to know who you are and how much you know.”

“How much we know? What’s that mean?”

“Ah, Flora didn’t tell you?”

“Flora doesn’t talk to me, just nods as I walk by. What is it that we should know?”

“You like riddles?”

“As much as the next man I suppose.”

“Right, well listen then.

"In Sky Lake’s heart, secrets lie untold,  
A chest of gold, a tale of old.  
Isabelle’s legacy, in stars, it’s veiled,  
Follow the cosmic trail, where mysteries prevailed.

A town’s hushed whispers, its ancient lore,  
In shadows, it beckons, behind a hidden door.  
Turner family, heed this owl’s wise plea,  
Seek the treasure’s truth, and you shall see."

Joe thought about it, “It doesn’t scan very well, does it?”

“Who cares, did you listen to what it was saying?”

“A chest of gold.”

“That’s it? What are you a dwarf, maybe a leprechaun? Is that what you heard?”

“Well, something about the stars and a cosmic trail, does it involve drugs? Emma and I would be up for that.”

“OMG Pops, is that what happened to you? Too many drugs? I’m offski. Chat you later dude, and lay off the bong.”

As the owl flew away into the darkening night sky, Joe grinned to himself. Most of the reason he liked talking to the birds was that they were so easily convinced he was senile. Emma knew better, but Ben and Lily were a bit like the birds.

Speaking of Ben, Joe wondered if he would start seeing what he and Em saw, now that he was here in this place. The poor boy seemed oblivious to the things around him, just a mugwump... was that the word folks used these days? Mugwump, yes that was it.

Joe thought once again that he needed to get a lamp in the shed, it got damned dark out here, without the moon to shine into the window. He closed the window and then the door as he turned and walked down the path to the house. Might be a good idea to tell the family about the riddle, that way Lily would have some idea what folks in town were whispering about. Small towns. Everybody minding everyone else’s business. Joe was surprised there weren’t holes all over the property if folks thought there was a treasure somewhere around here.

Might be time to check out the attic at least, there were a lot of trunks up there, more now that they’d dumped all their own. He knew that Lily had been itching to explore, but he had just been itching, the place needed a good airing and a vacuum to get rid of the dust. Maybe tomorrow.

As Joe went in by the kitchen door, he found Lily at the table, working furiously on her laptop. “What’s up sprout?”

Lily looked up, “Sprout, you haven’t called me that for years, I’ve grown up a bit Grampa.”

“You sure have, look at you working at home, that for your job?”

“They are so far behind on their reports, it just isn’t funny. I offered to catch them up, and they were happy for me to do it.”

“I’m not surprised, you charging them the hours you’re spending on this?”

“I don’t want to push, I’m happy to have the job, and they don’t pay that much less than I got in the city.”

“Pumpkin, do you want me to go talk to them, it sounds like they’re taking advantage.”

“Oh please don’t Grampa, we’re not unionized and you aren’t a shop steward any more.”

“Well, let me know if you want me to visit. Don’t stay up too late sweetheart, you’re back at work tomorrow.”

“I’ll finish this report and call it a night, Gramps, thank you.”

“Good. If they haven’t done it, it probably doesn’t need to be done for tomorrow.”

“Last year more like. Good night Gramps.”

“Good night Princess, have good dreams.”

Joe looked in on Ben in his office, he was bent over his drafting table so Joe said nothing and closed the door quietly. He walked on down the hall and crawled into his bed, Emma snorted, snuffled, bounced the bed a bit and settled down once more. Joe smiled and was asleep in no time at all.

## Discussing the Clues



The next morning at breakfast, Joe told the family about the riddle. They reacted as he expected. Emma waved her hand vaguely at him and muttered something about bird-brains. Ben heard “gold”, and Lily, typical teacher type, also worried about how the riddle scanned.

They did, however, try to figure it out. Emma went first. “The first two lines are pretty standard for this sort of thing. Location, secret, chest of gold. It’s a great hook, something to pull in the punters. Three and four are the reason for the treasure, it’s Isabelle’s legacy. The rest are just your usual mysterious ‘look to the stars’ sort of thing.”

Joe nodded, “Stars and cosmic trails, they’re mysterious things, and not very helpful for finding a treasure, more like check out your astrology predictions for today.”

“I thought you believed in all that astrology stuff? You read it in the paper every day.”

“Stuff and nonsense, I read your horoscope to figure out what you’ll be doing for the day because I know you believe in it.”

Emily swatted toward Joe’s ear but he leaned back. “A town’s hushed whispers... you can be sure that everyone for thirty miles around knows about ‘Isabelle’s treasure.’ That sort of thing runs through a place like salmonella. I don’t know, ‘Seek the treasure’s truth’ is a standard, there’s always a lesson at the end of a treasure hunt. The bit that gets me is the hidden door. That feels to me like it might be literal.”

Ben looked from one to the other of his parents, “It sounds like you two are taking this seriously. Who was this Ollie again?”

“Just a friend, don’t worry about that.”

“Well can you repeat it again slowly Dad? I want to write it down.”

Joe gave the riddle once more:

“In Sky Lake’s heart, secrets lie untold,  
A chest of gold, a tale of old.  
Isabelle’s legacy, in stars, it’s veiled,  
Follow the cosmic trail, where mysteries prevailed.

A town’s hushed whispers, its ancient lore,  
In shadows, it beckons, behind a hidden door.  
Turner family, heed this owl’s wise plea,  
Seek the treasure’s truth, and you shall see.”

Lily looked hard at her grandfather, for someone who is supposed to be having short term memory problems, he seemed to remember and repeat that poem well enough. She nodded toward Emily, “That door, could it be the attic?”

Joe grinned, "I figured you'd think of the attic. Yes we'll go up and poke around there this weekend. I'd like to see what's up there too. Might be some family heirlooms."

"Well you three go hunting around in the dust, I'm going to start measuring this place to get the renovations going."

"Dad, I thought you hated renovations?"

"We're going to be living here, we can't knock it down and put up the place I'd like to build, so yeah, I guess I have to bite the bullet, stoop to the level as it were. Thing is, I think it might be different if I'm working on my own place."

"That's the way to think about it, Dad. Make yourself proud."

Joe was a bit surprised at Ben's willingness to do renovations. He had watched his son rise in the profession, get a couple of really good commissions, and then the work had fallen away. Ben was right, there were jobs out there but they were not very interesting. Still, money was money and maybe now Ben was thinking that he owed it to Lily to get on the renovations since she was supporting the family.

He looked at his wife, thinking she might be willing to get back into the old business, but she looked back at him with such a severe frown that he dropped that thought right away. If Lily thought they could live on her salary, they likely could. She had the head for figures. Anyway, they had a root cellar full of vegetables and they were preparing the garden for next year's crop. They would get by, they always did.

Still, "It would be nice to find a chest full of gold wouldn't it?"

Lily got up, "It would Grampa, and I'm going to open the windows up there in the attic to let in some air and clear the dust while there's a breeze outside. You three stay here and decipher the clues."

With that she started up the stairs to the second floor. As she got near the attic door she thought she heard the upper door close. 'That damned man is in here again,' she thought, and hurried up the stairs.

Throwing open the door at the top of the stair, she stepped in and stopped, gasping. Injun Joe, or whatever his name was, had hold of a fireman's pole and was dropping through a hole in the floor. Lily stepped back onto the top stair and slammed the door shut. She took a moment to catch her breath and work up a good angry response. Opening the door once more she took a breath and was about to yell, when she realized there was nothing there. No pole, no hole, no man.

She sat down on a box and stared, mouth open, at the place where she was sure she'd seen that man about to slide down. 'Oh God, am I overdoing it at work? I really need to get some more sleep.'

Lily opened the windows at both ends of the attic and felt the breeze come in. She hadn't realized how stuffy the room was until then. 'Maybe it was lack of oxygen.' Leaving the room to clear out she went to the second floor landing and called down, "I'm going to bed folks, see you in the morning." and walked to her room.

Once there, she stripped and put on her housecoat, went to the bathroom and brushed her teeth. She sniffed at her armpits and decided she didn't need a shower and went back to her own room. She looked out the window toward the lake and there, briefly, disappearing around the corner of a shed, was Joe, his braids and his fringe waving at her.

Lily shook her head, pinched herself on the arm, and pulled a bottle of vodka from the back of her night stand. She took a long drink to settle her nerves, shrugged the housecoat off to fall on the floor, and climbed under her covers.

As she drifted off to sleep, her mind wandered. 'Is this what dementia is? Am I getting what Grampa has then? It would be nice to find a big pot of gold, then maybe...' Lily forced herself to think about the next day's work. If she thought about money she'd never get to sleep. Taking the bottle out again, she had another slug, carefully capped it and returned it to the cabinet, moving some lotions in front of it, and then drifted off to sleep.

## Renovation Revelations



Ben turned the laser tape over and over in his hands. Lily had bought it for him, so he could measure out the rooms without having someone to help. He appreciated that for sure, she knew he would be embarrassed to be measuring rooms with anyone, he measured things on his drafting board. Things that would be built new, all at the same time. Not fixed up and cobbled together.

On the other hand, he also knew that Lily would like him to take some of the renovation jobs he'd been offered, and maybe she bought him this tool to get him started. He turned it over again and wondered if he should feel grateful or resentful. Then he decided that his daughter was the breadwinner for the family, not him, and she'd bought him this tool, so he was damned well going to use it. He clicked it on and picked up his notebook. 'Just one room at a time,' he thought with a grin. He could do this.

"Dad!"

"What is it, Ben?"

"Can you look at these measurements? They're off aren't they? Can you hold the tape please, I think this laser thing is cockeyed."

"Sure, let's go, where do you want me?"

Joe and Ben repeated all of Ben's measurements, but they came out the same.

"Well that doesn't make sense, according to my rough measurements these rooms don't make up enough space. There's rooms full of nothing between rooms."

"Are we forgetting closets?"

"We measured them Dad, there's still space between rooms." Ben started tapping walls with the wooden end of a hammer. Plaster and lath walls are hard to figure out if there's a hollow space by sound. The walls in old houses are usually empty, insulation wasn't a thing a hundred or more years ago, but as far as Ben could tell, there were no big hollow spaces.

"Dad it doesn't make sense. I'm tempted to knock down one of these walls to figure out what's happening."

"Why don't you draft it out first Son, and in the meantime I'll start feeling around under the wallpaper to see if there's been any doors covered up. In old places like this, that sometimes happens. Let's hope there are no walls with skeletons on an old bed."

"What? What are you talking about Dad? I swear you watch too many horror movies."

"Well it was just a thought... Look here, son, see what I mean?"

Sure enough, there was the faint outline of an old door under the wallpaper if you looked at it from close to the wall. Ben looked but shook his head, "That's an outside wall, Dad, there was probably a balcony out there."

“Can’t hurt to look, can it?”

Joe took out a knife and carefully cut the wallpaper from the inside of the door frame. It turned out that there was a couple of layers of old cardboard box to stop the drafts, and then a solid wood door. Joe reached for the knob but Ben warned him. “Be careful Dad, let me go outside first and see if I can see the door from that side. Open the window and let me look first.”

“You afraid I’ll fall out?”

“I am, just wait will you please.”

Ben ran down the stairs and around the house. He counted windows and looked, and saw nothing at all. The clapboard was continuous and there was no indication a door had ever been where it looked like it ought to be.

Scratching his head, he went back in and up the stairs. “There’s no door outside, Dad, never was by the looks of it. It should be OK to open it without falling out. You should see the backside of the clapboard.”

“If you say so, Son. Hand me the hammer would you please, this thing has been nailed shut.”

Some time later, nails removed, they found the door locked. “Well we’ll never find the key for this thing.”

“Not to worry Ben, your old Dad has certain skills.” With that, Joe bent over and went after the lock with an old wire hanger. In about the time it would have taken to turn a key, Ben heard the lock click.

“Do I want to know how you did that?”

“Nothing terribly criminal Son, these old locks weren’t ever very much. We used hangers more than keys most of the time. Look, you can see the mechanism.”

“Never mind, let’s look at the backside of the wood siding, maybe we can tell if it needs replacing or not.”

Joe turned the knob and with a bit of tugging, opened the door a crack. He peeked through and then turned to put his back to the opening. “Are you sure you want to see this, Son?”

“What are you talking about, let me help you pull it the rest of the way open.”

“I can get it,” Joe stood aside and swung the door open. Ben’s jaw dropped. Outside the door was a meadow. A field that was in full spring, and at the second floor level of the house.

“No, that’s impossible! Dad did you slip me some of your acid?”

“I didn’t, Son. I did warn you.”

“Look, what the hell is this? NO! Don’t go out there, it’s got to be fifteen or twenty feet down.”

Joe threw the hammer out the door. It tumbled along on the grass. “I hate to break it to you Son, but that’s real.”

“No, it’s not. It can’t be real, we’re both tripping.”

“Not the way psychedelics work, Ben. There’s the hammer. You want to go down and see if it’s lying on the ground?”

“Wait here, and don’t go out there!”

Ben took off at a run, but when he got outside there was no hammer, and the siding was just the same as it had been. There was no door from the second floor. He stared at the spot for quite a while, walked one way and the other, thinking maybe it was an illusion, but there was no door there.

As he got upstairs, his father was sitting on the bed, idly bouncing the hammer up and down. “You went out and got it. I told you not to.”

“Son that meadow is real. I’m not surprised someone shut the door and sealed it. Most people would freak out seeing that.”

“Uh, Dad why aren’t I freaking out?”

“That’s a good question, isn’t it? You’ve seen things like this before, Son.”

“The hell I have.”

“And you ignored, suppressed, explained it away, and forgot it every time.”

“I don’t understand.”

“No, you never did, and so you refused to even see this sort of thing, but I’m afraid you’re going to have to see it here. This is Turner land, and you won’t be able to avoid this sort of thing.”

“But what is this sort of thing?”

“It’s what is here, Ben, just what is here, that’s all. Look, your mother and I should have tried to get you to see what exists beyond what you expect to see, a long time ago, but you were happy not to know. Now though, it’s time to grow up.”

“Grow up?”

“Look, I’ll close this door and we’ll finish measuring the second floor. You make your drawings and then we’ll see what there is to see, OK?”

Ben looked shell shocked. He looked at his father, at the closed door, and back at his father. He nodded and said, "OK I'll be in my office."

Joe shook his head. He loved Ben to pieces, but the boy was stubborn. He'd take a while to see what his parents had always seen.

## Lily's Morning



Lily woke groggily and opened her eyes. Seeing a mattress at floor level and clothes strewn about messily, she groaned, “Oh shit, another squat.”

“It’s not a squat, this is my apartment, Lily, and I pay rent.”

Lily groaned, and rolled to look at the other occupant of the bed. “Shit. Lou.”

Lou grinned back at her. He was one of Lily’s clients at the youth centre, she had read his file, an abusive family, in and out of jail, and an alcoholic. He was a handsome young man, tall and thin, who had a horrible start, but was trying to go clean and sober.

She’d dragged another client down with her. Lily closed her eyes and fought the urge to throw up on the kid’s bed. When the room slowed down, she carefully felt under the blanket. Naked, oh damn it all.

“Lou, can you get me water and gravol and aspirin?”

“No problem Lills I’ll be right back.”

Yes, his naked ass walked out of the room, but he sounded sober and he positively bounced as he walked. That wasn’t the usual situation. As Lou came back and handed her the water and the pills, she struggled to a sitting position. She drank the glass down and once again had to close her eyes until the room stopped spinning. She was still drunk, and hung over at the same time. Shit, shit, shit.

“Did we...”

“You were pretty insistent, I put you to bed and you hauled me in with you, wouldn’t let me go. I swear I tried not to.”

“No, no don’t worry about it. I believe you. Do I have to get checked for anything?”

“Hey, no! I’m clean.”

“And sober too, so you weren’t drinking with me?”

“No, I found you outside Callahan’s, you were blacked out. I got you back here, mostly carried you and like I said, I put you to bed.”

“Shit, I guess I’m looking for another job.”

“Why? Nobody in Callahan’s is going to rat you out, hell they won’t know who you are. Half the guys in the place probably blacked out with you. And if you’re thinking I’m going to say anything, forget it. You’re the best councillor I’ve seen around here.”

“You stayed sober?”

“Like I said, I found you around to the side of the bar. You had the sense to pass out where you weren’t seen by anyone.”

“Was, was I dressed?”

“Nobody touched you. Well nobody until me, when we got home here.”

“Lou, I’m sorry about that. I truly am.”

“Look, Lills, I’m the one who is sorry I couldn’t stay away.” Lou grinned, “But I’m sure as hell not sorry about screwing you. Even blackout drunk you were great.”

“Oh God.”

“No, no, it’s all right, look I insisted on putting on a rubber, so even if I had some disease, you’re good, and no babies OK?”

Lily looked hard at Lou. “Why?”

“Why what? Why did I pick you up and take you home? Because I’ve been there, because you needed help, you still need help. I don’t know why you’re drinking, but you need to fix whatever that is, and you need to stop drinking. But only you can decide to do that. I will pick you up out of the alleyway, I will drive you to another town, or hell, you can drink yourself sick here. I want to protect you, but I really, really hope that you decide to get sober. Look, I’ll even sponsor you to AA.

Lily was crying. She didn’t know why she drank, she wanted to tell Lou it was the stress, but she couldn’t, it was too much to compare her problems with his, her life had been so much better.

“Lilly, I know where your car is, give me the keys and I’ll bring it around here, you shower and get dressed, everyone else is asleep, so no problem. I’ll pick up a couple of coffees and some breath mints. You meet me out back and I’ll drive you home, OK?”

“Lou, you’re enabling me, you know you shouldn’t do that.”

“Girl don’t be stupid, I’m protecting your job. I’ll take you home and walk back. You can go to work later, like nothing happened. But think about what you’re doing, OK?”

Lily nodded, and found her keys, “Thanks Lou, I owe you big time.”

“You want to pay me back? You know how,” he held up Lily’s sobriety chip, it had got tangled up in her keys. Lou handed it back and walked out. Lily had that shower, got dressed and went to the back door of the apartment building. She hated herself.

On the drive home, Lily tried again to figure out what her problem was. It was frustrating, the best she could come up with was stress, but she had enough training to understand that wasn’t all of it. She wasn’t addicted to alcohol, she knew she wasn’t, but something drove her to drink herself to oblivion. She wasn’t one of these low self esteem types, hell she was the opposite. She was a perfectionist, she had to be the best at whatever she did. Maybe that was it, maybe she had to be the best drunk in the bar.

As far as she remembered, it took her less than an hour get shit-faced and black out. Less than an hour, God she was almost proud of that.

Maybe being the best was what stressed her out. She didn't know, and she had nobody to talk it out with. She went to meetings, sure, but she had nobody she was close to except her family and they knew nothing about her problem. She thought of Lou, but he was her client. No way she could talk to him about it, no more than she had been able to talk to any of her many boyfriends. The ones that came and went, never staying long.

God she was tired.

Lou looked over as Lily fell back asleep. He really did like her, but he was afraid she was going to get fired, and he didn't want to lose her. He liked her enough that he had refused to have a drink with her when they got to his place. He wanted to stay on the wagon for her. He knew the sex was nothing, he wouldn't mention it again. Hell, he'd had enough meaningless, drunken sex to recognize it when it happened. But he liked this girl. He truly hoped she would get back into the program and make it stick.

Lily woke when they pulled into the lane and quietly parked. Lou came around and opened the door to help her out, she was sobering up, but still wobbly. With an effort and a big breath, Lily straightened. "Thank you Lou, you've been a real friend." She kissed him on the cheek, instantly regretted it, wondered if he'd take it the wrong way, and tried to hide it all with a smile.

Lou squeezed her hand and in a neutral tone said, "You're welcome, please think about what I said." He checked his watch, "Gotta go, I can just make work."

As he waved and jogged down the lane, Lily felt even worse. He might be late for work because he was helping her out.

She went to the kitchen door and let herself in. Emily was there. "Hello Lily, out for an early walk, that's great. Go on up and get ready, breakfast will be done in about an hour."

"Hello Gran, yes, a walk. I'll see you for breakfast."

As Lily walked away, Emily shook her head. The girl had fallen off the wagon again, Emily hoped it wasn't for long. She would talk to the girl, but with their background, her grandparents weren't really entitled to judge. Maybe it was to be expected, with the move and a new job to adjust to. Her father ought to sit her down, but Ben didn't have a clue. Emily sighed and turned back to feeding the fire in the stove.

As Lily stepped onto the second floor, she heard noise from her father's room. She wasn't going to make it to her bedroom or the bathroom so she stepped into the hallway closet. It didn't occur to her in her confused state, that she'd never seen this door before. She stepped in and held her breath. Her father left his room and padded into the bathroom.

Lily stepped back a bit and bumped into something. Jumping a little, she spun around to look. In what little light there was that came in through the tiny window, and under the door, she made out a mirror. It was full length, and she decided she'd take it into her room.

When she heard her father go back into his room, Lily counted to a hundred, eased the door open and lifted the mirror across to her room, being careful to close the closet door. As she closed her own door, she didn't see the closet fade back into a blank wall.

Once in her room, she set the mirror beside her dresser, on the other side of the window. She tried not to, but she glanced at herself, expecting to see a mess. She saw a mess all right, but it was her in her painters overalls, and when she looked, she felt like she was sober, washed, makeup on and ready for work. She closed her eyes and turned away thinking, 'Now I'm hallucinating, great, that's been a while.'

Lily fell onto her bed and was asleep almost as her head hit the pillow. In no time at all her alarm went off and she got up to start her day.

## The Little Man



As Ben continued measuring rooms and drawing plans, he glanced out the window. There was a big shaggy dog walking calmly down the lane, but that wasn't unusual, most of the dogs in the area ran free. No, what caught his eye was the little bearded man who was riding the dog as if it was a horse. The man had a stick which he used occasionally to tap the road or the dog's rear end. The dog didn't seem to mind, his rear end was thickly covered with fur.

The man came to outside the window and looked up at Ben. He tipped his hat and gave a bit of a bow. Ben found himself bowing back. The man slipped off the dog, patted him on the head, leaned his stick against a tree and walked to the side door of the house. He must have thought Ben's bow was an invitation.

Ben went down and answered the door. The man grinned, "Howdy neighbour, nice to see new faces in the old place. I thought I'd come and offer my help with your project."

"What project?"

"Well now, I can feel that you're looking to renovate this place. I was the one who renovated it last, so I thought I'd come see what you're doing."

"Last... but this place hasn't been touched for fifty years or more."

"And?"

"And you don't look that old."

"Well thank you son, that's a real nice thing to say. My wife says I look younger than my years too."

"Um..."

"So how about a tour, I haven't seen the place in a while and since you're an architect I'd bet you've got plans drawn up too."

"Well..."

"Let's have a look, I see you took the east bedroom for your office, that's good, get the morning sun when you wake up, and then a nice even light while you work in the afternoon."

"How did you..."

"It's where I waved at you, you were in the East room. I'm guessing you weren't still in bed eh?"

The old man's eyes twinkled. Ben admitted to himself that he was easy to like. "Come on up then and I'll show you. Maybe you can answer some questions about the measurements, too."

“Oh yes, those. Don’t pay too much attention to what’s between the rooms, that’s always been a bit of mystery in the place. It only shows up when you’re measuring things. Honestly I think the house has a screwy sense of humour.”

“Sense of humour...”

“You’re not very chatty are you son. My name’s Carl by the way, and you’re Ben Turner. The gossip’s been spread by Flora.”

“Flora?”

“Friend of your mam, by now, I suspect.”

They had got to the top of the stairs and the little man looked around nodding. “Isabelle just didn’t like change did she. Look at those lamps on the wall, you’d get a fortune for them in a big city antique shop. I’d check the wiring on those if I was you, might still be post and tube.”

Ben looked at the lamps as if he was seeing them for the first time. “I hadn’t thought of that, or even noticed the lamps. I’m sort of new to the renovation side of things, more of a new building guy I guess.”

“Oh you mustn’t think of renovation as being less interesting than building new. Renovation is like a collaboration across years. In this case, a collaboration with me!” The old man laughed and slapped his knee. Somehow that didn’t seem a strange gesture, even though Ben had only seen it in old movies.

“I hadn’t thought of it that way.”

“Oh you must, and I collaborated with the fellow who built the place, and all the owners since then up to when I worked on it last. Think of it as a whole design firm! The trick is to understand how the old guys thought, what they intended, and what they had to work with.”

Ben nodded, “That might take a bit of thinking.”

“Absolutely, for sure, and that’s the fun. That’s the delight of it. Come on, show me your drawings and we’ll see what we can see.”

Ben somewhat reluctantly picked up a tube and unrolled a drawing he’d been working on. The old man stared at it for a long time. Finally he shook his head, “Do you mind some plain talk son?”

“Do I have a choice?”

Carl laughed, “None at all, none at all. Look, do you have a photo of the outside of the house? Now, look at that wall there, that thing you designed is going to look like a big goiter on the throat there. You see? I know they’re popular these days with the youngsters, but look with fresh eyes, does it add to the look of the house? You see what the old guys did when they built the place, the balance, the symmetry. Renovating a place to add that, is like putting lipstick on a pig. Well no, I misspeak, it’s like putting an ugly hat on a beautiful woman. It just don’t work.”

Ben looked at his drawing and then at the photograph, back and forth a few times. He crumpled the drawing and threw it into the waste basket.

“Now don’t be discouraged, Ben. You’re just learning the difference between a renovation and a new, fashionable building. Build that addition on a glass and steel building and it would look amazing. Sideways turrets if you will, but the turrets and peaks on this place are vertical, work with them, not against them. It’s a lot more subtle, a lot more fun than blasting things apart.”

“Carl, where did you train?”

“With my old man, there weren’t many schools for building when I was a lad. None at all around here, I learned by listening to the old guys and trusting their experience.”

“Well I can see you’ve absorbed a lot of that old wisdom. Do you suppose I could ask you to give me a hand as we go along with the renovations?”

“Sure, Ben. Now listen, I suspect we’ll butt heads once in a while, but I do know what’s behind some of the walls in the place, which are support and which you can do what you want with. So I’ll help as much as I can. Did I mention I had the help of the fellow before me?”

“No, you didn’t. You’ve given me a lot to think about Carl. I may have been looking down my nose at renovation jobs in the past. I’m going to take another crack at the drawings. Will you come by again in a few days?”

“You can bet on it. You know son, you’ve got an open mind, I think we’ll get along just fine. Who knows, maybe you’ll convince me of the beauty of sideways turrets.”

“Somehow I doubt that. One more question, that door over there, it seems to open onto a meadow, did it do that in your time?”

The old man went and opened the door, pulling out a couple of nails that Ben had put back in, as if they weren’t there. The man was stronger than he looked. Carl smiled, as if remembering something, “That’s Sunset meadows, very pretty place, was popular in my day as a courting site. I haven’t seen it in years and years. Sure, it’s been here from the beginning, nice place to take your morning coffee.”

“But how...”

“Best not to ask that question too much around here, Ben. Just accept it, or have a good talk with your Da, he might be able to explain it to you. Take it slow and work up to it, and in the meantime, enjoy the meadow, it’s a special place, always late spring, always sunny. Wear a hat, the sun is strong. If you take a girl along, wear sunscreen, there’s parts of you that you don’t want sunburnt.” Carl was roaring with laughter as he mentioned that.

Ben was a bit shell shocked, he managed to nod but said nothing. The old man closed the door gently and the nails punched back into the wood, or came half way out.

“Right, I’ll leave you to your drawing, old Whiskers and I will be on our way and I’ll drop by in a couple of days to see how it’s going. You have a great day son, nice meeting you.”

## Lily's Mirror



Lily had taken to covering the mirror in a sheet. That one hallucination had been enough. She was going to put it back into the closet, but there was no closet. Just a bare wall in the hallway. Lily put that out of her mind as quickly as she could. She didn't need more weirdness in her life.

It was several weeks later when the stresses built up again and she found herself heading for Callahan's bar. Lou had been watching her during the day and as she walked out the door, he was there with her. "Lily?"

"Bugger off, Lou. It's too damned much, Karen has given me three more clients and I'm still trying to get the reports cleaned up. I need a drink to wind down."

"Lily? What's really happening?"

Lily stopped and looked at Lou with a frown. "Did you really mean it when you said I could drink at your place?"

Lou thought for a moment. "You're going to go get drunk no matter what, aren't you?"

Lily waited.

"OK let's go to my place, you can buy a bottle on the way. And you can crash at my place, I'll sleep on the couch, right?"

Lily nodded, she pulled out her phone and called her father to tell him she was pulling an all-nighter to clean up some work. He told her she shouldn't be working so hard, and she mumbled something about it being necessary before she hung up.

"You don't talk to your family."

"Sure I do."

"Not about this, and not about what's bothering you."

Lily turned and started walking to the liquor store. Buying a bottle, she tucked it in her bag and carried on to Lou's apartment building. Lou said nothing, but walked along with her.

Just outside Lou's back door, Lily looked up the alleyway and saw the ghost again. Elias her grandmother had called him. He looked sad. Lily gave him the finger and turned to go into the building. Lou looked at Elias and went in after her.

"Who was that?"

Lily stopped so suddenly Lou ran into her back. "You saw him?"

"Sure. Who was he?"

Lily spun the top off of the vodka and took a large drink. Lou bent to retrieve the cap. "You saw him."

“Yes I saw him. Why wouldn’t I see him.”

“Because he’s a ghost, Lou, a fucking ghost. And one of the new clients had a wolf head on top of his face today. Did you see that?”

It was Lou’s turn to be quiet for a moment. He answered quietly, “Yes, I saw the ghost, and I saw the wolf head. Lily is that what this is all about? How long have you seen things like that.”

“I don’t want to talk about it, come on let’s get to your room.”

With that, the two climbed the stairs and walked through the apartment to Lou’s bedroom. He pulled in a chair from the kitchen table and Lily sat at his desk. Lou went back out and got a glass, and some juice. Lily pushed away the juice but took the glass and half filled it.

“Lily, that doesn’t work, those things are still there when you sober up. I know.”

“What do you mean, you know.”

“You’ve read my file. My mother beat me every time I tried to tell her about the strange things I saw. She told me I was making up stories, that I was a liar, that the devil had hold of my soul and she had to beat him out of me. I left when I was twelve and hit the streets and I tried not to see things, I drank and I took drugs and for a few hours they went away, but when I came down, they were still there.”

“You see them.” Lily’s voice was flat, and just a bit slurred.

“Yes, Lils, I see them damn you. They’re really there. My mother saw them too, and her mother before her. My grandmother wanted to be a witch and so she took parts of my mother to make her spells. She was shit as a witch and eventually stopped, but not before she had mostly drained whatever magic my mother could see, along with a lot of her blood and a couple of her fingers.”

Lily nodded, her councillor brain kicking in, but another part of her was staring wide-eyed at Lou. “It’s real?”

“Shit. Yes! It’s real! You’re not crazy, I’m not crazy. We see those things. My mother was crazy and so was Gran, and they’re both locked up now. Listen, give me the bottle, you aren’t imagining this and you can’t drink it away.”

Lily grabbed the bottle and poured herself another big drink. She downed it like water, and then, barely managing to drop to her knees and get over to the mattress, her eyes rolled up in her head and she passed out.

Lou shook his head. She really was the lightweight she said she was, but she’d hurt in the morning anyway. He took the bottle to the bathroom and poured it out, running lots of water down the drain after it so he wouldn’t smell it. He put the cap back on and the bottle in the recycle bin and then went back to his bed to take Lily’s shoes off and cover her. She came to, long enough to make a grab for

him, but he pushed her hands away. Jesus, he felt like a big brother, the idea of more sex with her wasn't turning him on in any way.

Lou went back out to the kitchen and made himself some dinner. One of his roommates was home and smelled the vodka. She looked at Lou who shook his head, "Not me Sal, a friend of mine who's got some problems."

Sally nodded, "Who doesn't. I'll make a salad if you want to throw another chop in that pan for me."

"Deal."

"You sleeping on the couch again?"

"Yeah."

"You can sleep with me, no worries."

"Thanks Sal, and my back thanks you too."

Sally laughed and started chopping vegetables. "You know you have a habit of finding little birds with broken wings and trying to fix them."

"Yeah, I guess I do."

"Me included, and I appreciate it, you know? I'm glad you weren't the one drinking."

"I was tempted."

"No such thing as a social drink for you and me bro, you know that."

Lou nodded, reached over and gave Sal's hand a squeeze. "You'll keep me on the wagon."

"One day at a time."

This little scene happened a few more times over the winter. Each time Lou got a bit more of Lily's story and each time she tried not to tell it. Lily would often tell Lou he was enabling her, and Lou would nod. He was, but until she hit bottom and wanted a hand up, there wasn't anything he could do except protect her. He really did appreciate her as a damned good councillor, who maybe cared just a little bit too much about her clients. She kept seeing Lou at the centre, but she wasn't comfortable about it. Lou would tell her it was fine, that he could work on his own problems with her, that he could forget about her visits to his place while they were talking about his problems.

One day at the centre, Lily mentioned her mirror. Lou suggested they go for coffee rather than stay in her office. Once in the cafe, Lou led them to a quiet corner where they could talk without being

overheard. Not unobserved, mind you, but most of those in the cafe who knew them assumed it was business.

“Lou why are we here?”

“Your office is where we work on my things, this is where we can work on yours.”

“And your apartment is where I get shit-faced and pass out.”

“OK yes, but you don’t have to sound so proud of it.”

“I’m really not.”

“So tell me about this mirror you’ve been talking to.”

Lily shrugged, what the hell, she had to talk to someone about this, and Lou wasn’t going to tell her she was crazy, not unless they were both crazy in the same way. “I found it in a hall closet that doesn’t exist, or at least it pops in and out of existence. I found it the first morning you drove me back home, and I put it in my room. I expected to look and see what a mess I was, but instead I saw me in painter’s overalls all spattered in paint, and I could feel that I was neat and tidy and dressed for work.”

“A magic mirror. Wow, why can’t my stuff be cool like that, and it talks to you.”

“Well more like it pronounces to me, sort of like a pushy mother or something.”

“Does it talk all the time, or just when you’re alone?”

“Believe it or not, it started talking when I said ‘mirror mirror’ but it never talks any other time.”

“Well that’s good. So what have you talked about?”

“I asked it about the coveralls and it told me I would do a lot of painting, be a real artist telling stories with my paintings. It told me to paint what’s in my heart. Now that was a laugh, I’d be painting Edvard Munch’s *Scream* all the time.”

“Is your heart really that black? I’m pretty sure it’s not, not from what I’ve seen.”

“Well that’s what you see, I guess. The thing seems to be obsessed with painting. I mean, I’d love to paint full time, but I’ve got to make a living to support the family. I dabble, but it’s not like I can put the time in to do a good job. And with me starting to see things again, it just makes everything harder. I’ll just stick to art therapy at the centre.”

“And that’s what you talked about when you mentioned it to me in the office?”

“No, the damned thing said I should accept who I was, and that it would help me with my spells.”

Lou went quiet. Lily looked at him and said nothing, but it felt like he was debating telling her something. Finally he sighed, “Lily you can’t use the mirror like that. Have a talk, fine, even listen to it, but don’t let it use you to do magic.”

“I can’t do magic, Lou, you know that.”

“You can see it, you can do it, but like my grandmother used my mother to try and do spells, you pay an awful price. Gran paid, Mom paid and then I paid. The mirror is responding to you, and it maybe wants something or maybe it just wants to help you, who knows, who cares, but please, don’t let it help you do magic.”

“You know about spells and things? More than just seeing things?”

“I know enough to leave it the hell alone.”

## The Treasure Hunt



Ben was walking down the hall to his office when he noticed an extra door. He looked up and down the hall and it seemed to be longer too. He had just left the breakfast table, his parents were still in the house so he yelled down to them, not looking away from the door. He suspected it would disappear if he blinked.

“What is it son, why the panic?”

“Do you see that door right there Dad?”

“Sure I do.”

“I’m going to keep looking at it, I want you to open it, and Mom, I want you to stay back.”

His mother shrugged, and Joe pulled the door open. Ben goggled, it had to be one of the rooms between the rooms, but it was filled with mirrors. Like a fun house, and reflected in one of them somehow was a massive chest.

“Do you see that? That chest?”

“Do you suppose that’s the chest full of gold, Son?”

Emily laughed shortly, “Not likely Joe, treasures with riddles don’t let themselves get found so easily.”

Ben sounded hopeful, “But we’ve been here months and the door hasn’t appeared before now. It wasn’t easy to find.”

Emily shook her head, “Well let’s go see then, I’d like to see a chest of gold as much as the rest of us.”

“Should we wait for Lily?”

Emily shook her head, “She’s out on one of her all-nighters.”

Ben hardly noticed that news, he started to enter the room, but Joe, who still had hold of the door, told him to go get a door stopper. Joe took it and wedged the door wide open. “Never trust a magic room.”

Ben managed to hear that, “A magic what?”

Emily patted his arm, “Your father just means it’s unknown, dear, best to make sure we can get back out once we go in.”

And in they went. The moment they stepped foot past the doorway, they saw hundreds of themselves and each other. But only one trunk. Ben went directly to the reflection of the trunk, then tried to look behind himself to see the actual box. It wasn’t there, just another mirror. Ben looked back and the trunk was gone from the first mirror, appearing in the one behind. Frowning, Ben went to the second mirror, turned to see the trunk and saw a third mirror.

He tapped the mirror. “That can’t happen, reflections don’t work like that.”

He looked around at all his reflections and back at the empty mirror in front of himself. “Not possible,” he mumbled.

Emily, meanwhile, started following the mirror image of the trunk from one mirror to another. She nodded, “We’re not going to find it here. It isn’t here.”

“But I can see it.”

“You’re being shown a reflection, that’s all.”

“But how can that be?”

“What do you think, dear, what do you think is doing this?”

“You want me to say magic, but it isn’t.”

“Then I don’t know what’s happening. I can’t explain it.”

Ben seemed to be angry, he followed the trunk deeper and deeper into the room, which seemed to be endless. “This is nuts, if we go much further we’ll get lost. I believe you now, the trunk isn’t in here but I’m damned if I know where it is. Let’s get out of here... Where is out?”

“This way, boys. I marked our passage with lipstick. Follow the marks on the mirrors, and best hurry up, the marks are fading.”

The three made it out before the trail disappeared, and Joe closed the door. He let go of the knob and Ben closed his eyes, he opened them again and the door was still there. “OK so the door is still with us. Dad do you think it’s one of the rooms between the rooms?”

“Not unless we’ve got a hell of a lot more room there than we thought we had. Look, son, I know you’ve refused to see what’s in front of your nose, all your life, but this is magic. Surely you believe that.”

“No, there’s no such thing, maybe a trans-dimensional portal.”

“Now who’s been reading too much science fiction.”

“Open it again, Dad.”

Joe opened the door and the mirrors were gone. In their place was a room that was somehow upside down. Furniture on the ceiling, lamps on the floor. Ben groaned, “And where is Fred Astaire dancing on the ceiling. Look, is the room rotating?”

“It’s not, Ben, just sitting there upside down.”

“Are all those things nailed to the ceiling or is gravity screwed?”

Joe shrugged and took a step toward the door, Ben grabbed his arm, “Don’t, if the gravity is screwed, you’ll fall up and break your neck.”

Taking a coin out of his pocket, Ben tossed it into the room. Sure enough, it fell to the ceiling, but it fell at a very slow pace. “Right, so we’re supposed to step in, float up top and what? Look for the treasure? Do either of you see the chest?”

Joe and Emily shook their heads, “No, but it could be tucked into a corner or in that closet over there. Do you see it Emma?”

Emily shook her head, “I don’t, but what do you suppose is through that far door? Want to bet it’s another room in some other orientation, a series of rooms all with their own up and down. An infinite series that would get us lost like the mirror room.”

Ben looked at his mother, “You’ve seen this before?”

“Not this, but similar, yes. Something, maybe the house, is trying to mess with our heads.”

“Why?”

“Who knows, maybe it thinks it’s funny. Maybe it wants to chase us away. Maybe it wants to keep us here.”

“Why aren’t I running away?”

“Your father told you. You’ve seen things like this before Ben, but you don’t believe it, you close your eyes and deny it exists.”

Ben stared at his parents for a long time. “No. Look, magic can’t happen. Maybe you two are projecting your bad trips on me or something.”

“Jesus Ben, how would that be anything but magic. Open your eyes and stop fooling yourself. Your mother and I cooked and took a lot of drugs in our time, yes, but that business put you through University. You get that? You know, I’m getting just a bit tired of you denying what’s in front of your nose and blaming us for it. Are you going in there?”

Ben shook his head. Joe closed the door and opened it again. It was an ordinary room, and in the back was the chest, just sitting there. Ben was the first to move, he was frustrated and angry now. Before Joe could stop him, he’d stepped through the door. As soon as his foot hit the floor, he floated up into the air.

“Hey Son, explain that room to us.”

Ben continued up until he bumped into the ceiling where he grabbed a light fixture. “What the hell?”

“What do you expect, a room with reverse gravity and now one without any at all. Don’t thrash around too much or you’ll shoo all the air out the window.”

“What!”

“What did you learn at school? No gravity, no air, right? How are you doing, still breathing?”

“Yes.”

“Wow, must be magic.”

Emily poked her husband in the ribs, “Don’t make fun, it’s hard for him to accept this.”

“More like impossible, I never met such a stubborn, willingly ignorant fellow. Are you sure he’s mine?”

Emily’s face clouded, “Joe Turner...”

Joe held up his hands and backed away. Emily turned to look at Ben, clinging to the lamp with terror in his eyes, “I think I’m going to puke.”

“Don’t, son, it’s just your stomach not knowing which way is up. Relax, you’re really floating, pretend you’re in the lake. Now, carefully, not too strong, see if you can kick yourself over to the trunk. Try not to kick too hard, take your time.”

Ben looked doubtful, but wriggled around until he was facing the trunk. Putting one foot on the base of the light, he let go and kicked off gently.

“Hey, you’re a natural Son, be careful when you land, you still have momentum if you don’t have weight.”

Ben turned his head, “What?”

That started a spin and he crashed sideways into the trunk. Emily slapped her husband’s arm and asked Ben, “Are you OK dear?”

Ben was hugging the trunk. “I guess so.”

“Well then open it up and see what’s in there.”

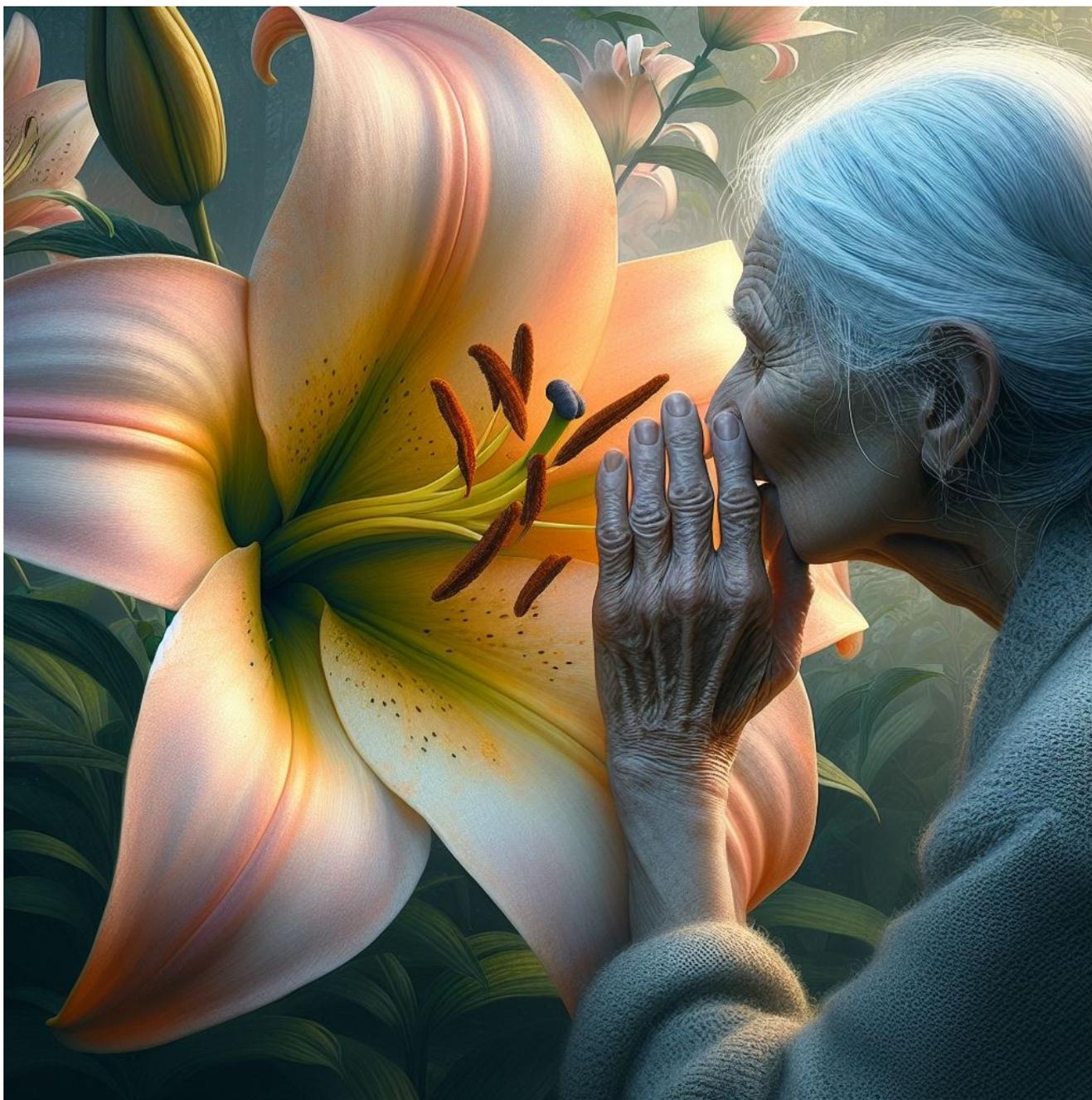
Ben held on to one of the handles and reached behind to release the latch. To reach it he had to lean over the top, and when the latch released, the lid sprang open. Ben had enough time to see the trunk was empty except for a sign in the bottom. He was blown across the room and out the door where he landed and rolled across the hall, ending up half crumpled against the opposite wall. Joe came over and peered at him. “What did you see?”

“A sign that said ‘Surprise,’ that’s all, it was empty.”

“Too bad.” Joe went back and shut the door while Emily helped Ben up.

“No more exploring today boys.”

## Flora's News Report



Emily left the boys and went outside to her garden. There was snow on the ground but the greenhouse was an explosion of green, warm and moist. There was a little gas heater in the corner that must run on the same hidden gas lines that the boiler ran on in the house, at least that's what Ben had decided. Emily and Joe thought differently. They figured the gas came directly from the land. Emily would bet that if they dug down under either stove they'd find a large flat pan that fed up to a line, and the soil bacteria would be chugging away on the nutrients that leached down from the plants. But Ben wasn't going to believe that. He thought he was going to get a bill from the utility company at some point. He could wait.

The carbon dioxide from the stove fed the plants, the plants produced sugars that leached back down to the bacteria. A lovely cycle that depended on the growing things, or so the plants said. The bacteria producing the methane would claim it all started with them. Flora thought they were all a bit slow, she said it all ran on magic.

Emily kept her opinions on the matter to herself. She sat down with a coffee beside Flora who was inside for the winter. "How are you today, dear? Are you warm enough?"

"I'm just fine Emma, thank you for asking. I see your boys were treasure hunting this morning."

"They found a new room, had some fun with mirrors and gravity."

"That house is a real joker. I hope they're both all right."

"Bruised egos and a bruised rib, but they're fine."

"That's good, do you want the report now?"

"Sure, what's happening in Everwood and Sky Lake?"

"Well, they say old Mr. Jenkins swears he saw the ghost of the town's founding mayor, wearing a feathered hat and dancing the Charleston in the town square at midnight!

"Jenkins is the old guy that spends most of his time in Callaghan's Bar, right?"

"Yes, he's the fellow that told me about the woman who came in to drink and pass out."

"Lily."

"Yes, sorry, I didn't realize that's who it was. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"I knew about her drinking problem before we moved here, don't worry, and no, she's got to figure it out herself. That boy you told me about seems to be keeping an eye on her."

"He's got his own problems, was heavily addicted, but he's been sober for a while now. He protects her and he's keeping her drinking private these days."

"So he's her 'all-nighters at work' is he?"

“Yes. From what I hear, he really does care for her. He’s one of her clients at the centre.”

“Not very professional of her, but I’m glad she’s got someone. That girl had to grow up too fast.”

“Tell me about it, one day I was a seedling and the next I was aware and stuck in a garden.”

“Good that you found Ollie.”

“Oh lordie, don’t tell him that!”

Emily laughed, “So what else is going on?”

"Emma, you remember I told you about young Benny Jacobs, don't you? Well, he tried to impress his girlfriend by serenading her under her window with an accordion solo. But the racket was so loud that the entire town joined in, and it turned into an impromptu polka party!"

“I bet she was impressed by that.”

“Well, they’re getting married next June. It turned out she was a closet polka fan and she was very impressed with Benny’s playing. You can never account for taste, can you.”

“I guess not, I’m still with Joe.”

Flora shook with laughter, “And then there’s Ollie and me. Oh my, don’t tell him that either, but his gossip makes my days go by.”

“Flora how does he get in here?”

“Oh he sits on the roof and taps it out on the glass.”

“Hence the streaks.”

“Hence the streaks, and the little mouse bones.”

“Um, I haven’t found the bones yet.”

“Just be careful where you step when you’re cleaning the windows next spring. You’ll find them.”

“Thanks for the warning.”

“So what about you? How goes it in the cottage?”

“Ben is still drawing up plans, he met a man named Carl who worked on the place when Abigail was here. He’d going to come help with the construction.”

"I remember Carl, funny little man with a shaggy dog named Whiskers. He's a whiz with a hammer all right."

"Well he's half convinced Ben that renovations aren't the evil, nasty, filthy things he used to think they were. He's actually enjoying the challenge of rebuilding some of the cottage."

"You don't suppose you could convince him to repair the greenhouse a bit, there's drafts."

"Oh, call it a repair and he's all over it. Just don't say 'renovate.' He's got some peculiar ways."

"From what you've told me, he had a peculiar upbringing."

Emma shook her head, "Yes, how he turned out shouldn't have been such a surprise to his father and I. But he's half believing in what he sees these days."

"The mirror room?"

"It really shook him, he had to lie down for a couple of hours to 'think about it,' he said."

"How is Joe?"

"He's good, really good, I was a bit worried about him, he seemed to be slipping a bit, his mind going walkabout sometimes, but being here seems to have sharpened him up. I think being on Turner land is helping him recover his wits. And you have to have your wits about you around here don't you?"

"There's been a lot of folks who couldn't handle the place, that's for sure. Legend has it, that the original builder of the cottage, Tobias Turner, had a pet parrot who could sing opera arias better than the local choir. They say its high notes shattered a few windows and the nerves of Tobias' wife, who gave him the ultimatum. The bird or her. Tobias helped pack her bags. She left the boys and took off like a shot."

"You're kidding."

"That's the story, don't ask me if it's true or not, it was before my time, but Tobias ended up with himself and two boys to run the place for a long, long time."

"The bird?"

"Died a month after the wife left, apparently he just pined away, turns out he was singing to her."

"You're kidding!"

"Not a word of a lie. At least that's what Elias told me. Speaking of that old fart, Ollie tells me he's going into town to check up on Lily."

"I didn't think ghosts could wander like that."

“Oh the town is very much his territory, he built half of it.”

“Ollie can see him?”

“No, just Lily, and that boy, Lou. Seems Lou is more than he looks to be. His grandmother thought she was a witch and his mother beat the boy black and blue when he ‘saw things.’ It was a pretty nasty situation, but the kid turned out OK, he goes to AA meetings and is being counselled by Lily at the youth centre. He helps with the kids, too.”

“Can Joe see Elias?”

“Not that I know, but you’d expect all the Turners to be able to see him. Maybe Elias doesn’t show himself to them, Joe and Ben. You know, he was always one for the young girls.”

“As long as he doesn’t turn out to be some sort of incubus, otherwise he’ll be a gone ghost.”

Over in the corner of the greenhouse, a rake fell over.

“He may have heard that.”

## **Through the Looking Glass**

“Can I see this mirror, please, Lily.”

“I’d have to take you to my place.”

Lou looked at her, not quite believing what he was hearing.

“No! No I don’t mean it that way Lou, it’s just that I never take clients home, my family would assume we’re in some sort of relationship.”

“We are in some sort of relationship, you want to get blotto and I watch you do it.”

“God don’t, please, don’t go there.”

“Well?”

“Yes OK come home with me you can have dinner with the family and you’re my friend, OK.”

“Sure, what’s for dinner?”

“Whatever you cook, I’m beat.”

As Lou walked in with Lily, Joe's fingers began to twitch. Emily put her hand over his and shook her head. She had always been a better judge of character, so Joe nodded and sat quiet while Lily introduced Lou as a friend from work.

Emily nodded and was polite, as was Joe. Ben was a bit suspicious. Lily had brought very few men home to meet them. She had never been involved with anyone for long enough to do that.

When the dinner was over, Emily served coffee and sent the younger folk off to the living room to drink it. Joe turned to Emily and said, "That boy's a trickster, he's a Reynard. Why did you stop me from blasting him?"

"I know he's a Reynard, Flora told me about him, he's attached to Lily, attracted to her, and is protecting her. Don't screw it up."

"You can't trust a trickster."

"Damn you Joe Turner, are you telling me not to trust you?"

Joe's head snapped back, "I'm not much of one, never could switch forms."

"No, but you sure smell like one."

"Says the pot when she calls the kettle black."

"All right, enough. The boy is looking after Lily, and that's the end of it. And she's fond of him too, although she doesn't know it."

"Are you scrying on them?"

"Good lord no, can't you see the way she looks at him. She's possessive of him."

"Oh just what we need, another strain of magic in the family."

"He's her friend, Joe, she's protective of her friend, she has never had many."

"True enough, she's been supporting the family for a long time, never had much time for a childhood. Poor sprout."

"So keep your blasting to yourself man."

In the living room, Ben was trying to get information out of Lou, "So you have a job?"

"Dad..."

Lou laughed, "I do. I work in the town archives."

“Really? So is there anything in there about this place? Some sort of ideas of a treasure maybe?”

“You mean the riddle. Sure, it’s old, been mentioned for decades.”

“I thought it was Abigail’s legacy?”

“It was, and now it’s yours. Of course that hasn’t stopped folks from digging around the place for it. Every few years a new treasure map shows up. We’ve got quite a collection of them in the town hall.”

“Treasure maps?”

“Sure, I’m half convinced the cottage produces them so that folks come and turn over the dirt on the place, makes it better soil for the trees.”

Lily frowned at Lou and shook her head slightly. “I hope it’s true about the treasure, we could use it. The place needs some work.”

Ben shut up and dropped his eyes to his coffee. That was as close as Lily had ever come to complaining that she was the breadwinner in the family. He needed to change that. Maybe Carl and he could do some good work on the renovations and he would start accepting commissions.

They finished the coffee and Lou took the cups back to the kitchen. He offered to wash the dishes but Emily shooed him back to Lily, “Go get a tour of the house, you two don’t need to be fussing with dishes, Joe will do them.”

Joe looked up from his own coffee, saw the look in Emma’s eye and nodded.

Lily took Lou around the first floor, and Lou wondered where her art supplies were, “You said you were dabbling.”

“Gran took them all into one of the sheds out near the lake, she said it was important I could have a place to myself where I would feel free to splash paint everywhere.”

“I’d love to see it.”

“It’s dark now, you can see it next time.”

Lou took note of that, maybe there would be a next time. He looked at Lily and she nodded, “Come on, I’ll show you the second floor.”

Emily walked into the living room in time to shake her head at Ben, who was getting up to follow the two upstairs. “Leave them be, Lily’s a big girl.”

Ben looked a bit doubtful but sat down again.

Lily made a tour up and down the hall, showing Lou where the closet door was, and then showing him the door onto the meadow. Lou was impressed, "I thought that place was just a legend, apparently half the town was conceived there, according to the old folks."

"Dad said that's what Carl hinted."

"Little man, rides a dog? I thought he was a legend too."

"Apparently not, he said he'd help Dad with the renovations."

With that they entered Lily's room. She pointed to the bed and Lou sat down, she walked across the room and took the sheet off of the mirror. It didn't show anything more than the reflection of the room, Lou saw nothing unusual, just himself on the bed. He reached up and moved some stray hair from his forehead.

Lily watched him do that and thought, not for the first time, that he was damned good looking.

Lou noticed her looking and said, "Looks like a mirror all right."

Lily grimaced and looked at the thing, "Mirror mirror, show us something."

The image in the mirror wavered, and it showed a vast plain of black sand, in the distance was a trunk. "I can take you to the treasure, Lily, and then you will have enough money to quit your job and become the artist you are destined to become."

Before Lou could say anything, Lily answered, "How can you do that? I can't go there where you're showing me, there's no place like that anywhere around here. No place with black sand that I've ever heard about."

"It's iron in the sand, and the place is here, inside me. Just touch me and you can come through."

Lily was still standing beside the mirror and she reached for the surface. Lou launched himself off the bed and shouted, "Lily, no!" But it was too late, she was merging into the mirror. Lou managed to grab hold of her other hand and he was pulled through as well. The sand crunched under his feet.

"Lily, we have to go back, this is all illusion, the mirror wants you here."

Lily looked away from the distant trunk and back at Lou. "Back how? The mirror is gone."

Lou looked around, "Yeah of course it is, we're inside of it. Damn it, why can't these magic portals just let you step back through."

Lily didn't bother to answer that, she looked back at the trunk and started walking toward it.

"Lily no, look around, we'll never find our way back to here."

"Sure we can, we can follow our footsteps."

“Lily look down, they’re disappearing as we make them. And look, there’s other footsteps, and the trunk is right here, now it’s over there again. You can’t trust this!”

“I have to go get the treasure, Lou. You stay here and I’ll come back to you.”

Lou shook his head, “You don’t watch movies? We split up and it gets much worse.”

“Well come with me then, I’m going to get the trunk, it’s just over there.”

## The Battle



Leo tried one last time, “No Lily, it’s an illusion, the mirror wants you here.” But it was too late, Lily started walking toward the trunk. After an hour or so, the trunk was exactly where it always was, a long way away.

“Lily either that trunk is huge, or it’s moving away from us.”

Lily stopped, “Mirror mirror, what’s happening? Why aren’t we getting to the trunk?”

There was nothing, no sound except the constant rustle of sand particles being moved around by a breeze that almost wasn’t there.

“Mirror mirror! What the hell are you playing at!”

Lou put his hand on her arm, “Don’t make it mad.”

Too late, overhead a tremendous noise suddenly erupted and then ahead of them a massive space ship crashed, on the other side of a massive sand dune.

“That wasn’t there before.”

“And the space ship was, Lily? This isn’t our world.”

They ran to the dune and climbed it, Lou kept Lily from going right over the top, “Don’t. Look carefully, we don’t know what’s going on.”

As they looked, a being came out of the craft, wearing some sort of silver armour and carrying a sword that hummed. “Damn, Lily, that’s you!”

Lily’s eyes closed to slits, “This isn’t funny.”

The woman in the armour stalked around to behind the spacecraft and the two could hear a terrible fight going on. Lou thought he recognized some of the sounds, he racked his brain... “Lily, have you ever watched ‘Forbidden Planet’. That one with the Disney special effects?”

“Sure I watched it a lot when I was a kid, it was a way to disappear for a couple of... Oh my God, the sounds.”

“It’s the Id monster.”

Lily was filled with dread, “I’m fighting myself over there, no this is too weird, Mirror mirror, get us out of here, stop this.”

The sounds of the fight went on and on while Lily shook with fear. Lou reached out and squeezed her hand. As if that somehow changed things, that it gave her courage, Lily took a deep breath. “No, I’m not having this at all.” She stood up and went over the top of the dune, about three steps down the other side she saw a sword.

Lou groaned and muttered, “Of course there is.” Expecting to see it, he looked to his right and picked up another sword. He had to run to catch up with Lily, who seemed a lot more angry now than scared.

She was muttering herself, when he caught up with her, sending all sorts of curses toward the mirror. “This is not cricket you crack-brained piece of glass, I’ll burn your frame and break you into a million pieces...”

Lou clamped his teeth together and made sure he was the first around the side of the ship. Sure enough, there was armoured Lily fighting against some sort of invisible monster. Each time her blade hit it, there was a flare that lit the monster enough that Lou could see it was huge. Lou thought to himself, ‘see’ which was the opposite of what he usually said in this situation, and he could see the monster. He also saw that it was about to sneak some sort of pseudopod around behind armour-girl. Swinging his sword like an axe, he chopped deep into that limb and it whipped back quickly to the monster.

By that time, Lily had arrived, “What did you do, Lou? How can you tell what’s there?”

“Try saying ‘see,’ that’s what worked for me.”

Lily shouted the word and could suddenly see her Id monster. Her eyes grew wide, “So much pride, so much of me involved in being perfect. I can see that! Damn it, I can see that!”

Lily stepped up beside armour-girl and added her sword to the fight. With two of them, the girls had stopped the monster. Lou stood behind them and chopped at anything that tried to get behind them while they hacked away.

Slowly, reluctantly, the monster started to back away, and when it did, it started to become smaller and smaller. They fought on for what felt like an hour, and the monster was finally reduced to something the size of a brick. Armour-girl stepped back and waved at Lily. Nodding to herself, Lily turned her sword over in her hands and stabbed down on the monster with as much strength as she had left. The thing sounded horrible as it disappeared completely.

Without a second glance at Lily, the armour-girl marched to the trunk, which was somehow only a few dozen metres away, now.

“Wait, wait for me,” Lily gasped, she was covered in sweat and panting. Tomorrow her arms would be frozen with pain, she was sure. Not to mention her back and legs.

The girl stopped and turned slowly. She had not even broken a sweat it seemed, although what was happening under the armour was anyone’s guess.

“Who are you?”

“You have to ask me that, girl? The mirror sent you in here, do you not look at yourself in its reflection?” The woman never opened her mouth, but Lily could hear her speak.

“Yes I know you’re me, but how, why?”

“The mirror watches you, listens to your dreams and so here I am. As to why? Can you not guess?”

“You’re my pride.”

The woman laughed, “The very opposite of that I would have thought, did we not fight your pride to the ground and then kill it?”

“But I don’t understand, what is the opposite of pride?”

The armour rang as the woman stamped over to face Lily. “Your pride, we talk about your pride, nobody else’s. Look closely at me.”

Lily did, and realized the woman was horribly scared across her face, her nose broken and crudely set. Lily blinked and the woman turned to walk away, “Watch my gait, my prideful girl.”

Lily saw that the woman had a terrible limp, as if her leg had been shattered and never set properly. “You are correct, I have a limp. You have also guessed how I got that limp. I fight, girl! I fight and sometimes I don’t win, but I fight! Damn you, my self who won’t try until you know it will be perfect. Damn you. Is it perfect? Your life? If so who is he?”

The woman threw her hand toward Lou, and Lily saw she could not straighten her arm fully. “Who is he!”

“He is my friend.”

“He protects you, he hides your ugly secret, the one you barely admit to yourself, the one that proves you are not perfect, proves that you can be out of control. He protects you because he is not proud, he knows what he is. You must listen to him, if you have not learned anything here today.”

With that the armoured girl stamped over to the box and as she did, Lily could feel every pain that shot through her body. She could see just how injured, how imperfect she was. Lily whispered, “You are what I must become.”

The woman whipped her head around to glare at Lily. “Become who you are, do not seek to be me, I do not ask you to relieve me, I carry my own destiny and it is mine, not yours!”

With that she wrenched the top of the trunk open. A blinding light rose up from the bottom and she stepped into the box, the light from her armour was too much, Lily and Lou covered their eyes and turned away. Then the light was gone, the trunk lid was closed and the woman was no longer there.

Lily was stunned, she looked around and the spaceship was still on the sand, wrecked and pinging from the heat. She looked back toward the mirror and it was not there. She looked at Lou, who looked back, giving away nothing in his face.

Lily walked to the trunk and lifted the lid. Light so blinding she could not look at it blasted from deep within. Lily looked back at Lou and shrugged, “It has to be the way out.”

“Wait,” Lou stepped up to Lily and took her hand, they both stepped in together and as the lid dropped, they found themselves in front of the mirror, Lou just reaching for Lily’s hand, and Lily reaching for the surface of the mirror. She dropped her hand.

“Was it a delusion, a hallucination?”

Lou raised his other hand, he held a sword. He nodded toward Lily’s hand and she saw that she still had hers. “Shit.”

Lou nodded, “Shit.” He took Lily’s sword and laid both of them carefully by the wall behind the mirror. Lily stepped to Lou and put her arms around him as he sat once more on the bed. Lily lay her head on his shoulder and cried for a long time. So long that Lou’s back started to spasm and he lay back onto the mattress. Lily shifted her head to his chest and cried some more.

Eventually, she simply lay on his chest and listened to his heartbeat.

Downstairs, Ben looked at his watch and toward the door. Emily said, “She’s a grown woman, Son. Leave them.”

“Is he the all-nighters she’s been pulling?”

“I suspect so. Finally. Just leave them be, who wants a whisky?”

Lily felt good. She had fought a battle, had an adventure and was here with her friend. “You are my friend aren’t you, Lou?”

Lou stroked her hair and lightly squeezed her shoulder.

“Did I learn the right lesson?”

“I suspect you did.”

“I’m still going to listen to you.”

“I might not know as much as she thought I do.”

“I don’t care.”

Lou smiled and closed his eyes. Lily drifted, half awake for quite a long time, then she sniffed, “Is that you?”

“I’m afraid it’s you, Lils, you fought harder than I did.”

“God, I need a shower.” Reluctantly, Lily got up and held out her hand for Lou to get off the bed.

Lou stood up. As he did so, Lily stepped up to kiss him. Lou bent his head so Lily could kiss him on the forehead. He turned, but she said “Give me that,” and turned his head back with her hand, lifting it to kiss him briefly on the mouth. Lou gave her a fast, fierce hug and then quickly turned once more to step out of Lily’s room.

## Fishcake O'Malley



“Dad, the Captain is coming to visit.”

Joe looked, but could see nothing. Just as he began to turn away, the prow of a rowboat appeared around the corner of the lake. He looked at Ben, who didn't seem to notice that he could see around corners.

Sure enough, rowing across the water was Captain O'Malley. He had visited a few days after they had moved in, introduced himself as “Fishcake” and delivered a cake from his wife. Unfortunately, he had also stopped on the way to do some fishing and the cake was in a boat full of fish.

It tasted of fish.

And here he was with another cake. “Ahoy neighbours, the wife sent along her spring cake for you, and I happened on a school of nice ones.”

Ben groaned, the fish were still flipping around in the boat and bouncing, once in a while, off the cake.

Fishcake grounded the rowboat on the stones and hopped out. He tied up on a small tree and then bent back to pick up the cake and a few fish, which he tossed to Ben. The fish that is, the cake he gave to Joe. Picking up the rest of the fish, he turned, and led the two boys to the cottage, where he walked right into the kitchen and threw the fish into the sink. “Hello Missus Turner, good to see you again.”

Emily turned a big smile on the Captain and said, “Hello yourself, my what handsome fish, thank you, oh and here's Joe with a cake. Your wife has been cooking again?”

“Well to be honest, I baked the cake, Louisa is feeling a bit poorly today.”

Emma eyed the lopsided cake and the ruined icing with multiple fish scales on the side, and nodded. “Well, we're done breakfast so I think we'll just have a slice of that lovely cake right now.”

Ben's eyes grew wide with fear, Emily grinned, “But poor Ben has a sugar count that's getting way too high, no frosting for you, Son.”

Ben threw his fish into the sink and collapsed into a chair, obviously relieved. Joe, on the other hand, put the cake down and sliced it quickly. “Nothing wrong with my sugar,” he said, and to Ben's horror, dug into a slice with a fork.

“Well, I'll make some coffee, you boys get comfortable and have a chin-wag. Ben, ask Fishcake about the treasure, he's been around for a while, he may have some ideas.”

“Oh, you've heard about the treasure then. Sure, I know just where it is, it's in the middle of the lake.”

Ben leaned forward over his cake and as it was hidden, he swept it onto a napkin in his lap. “It is?”

“Sure, everyone knows that.”

“So why hasn't someone hauled it out?”

“Well, as you know, this lake isn’t round or square or any other regular shape, so how do you measure just where the middle is?”

Ben sat back, slipping the napkin into his jacket pocket, “Oh.”

The Captain laughed, “Yeah, you should have seen the kids out there a couple of years ago with hundred foot tape measures and ropes trying to figure it out. You ever need a hundred foot tape, there must be a dozen of them in the lake, I hooked one out last month.”

“But why is it in the lake?”

“Oh, that would be because the Kraken snatched it off the dock one day.”

“Kraken?”

“It’s just a little one, a big one wouldn’t fit into the lake.”

“Now hang on, Krakens are mythical creatures.”

“You think so? I was driving one of those supertankers across the Indian Ocean about twenty years ago and one tried to take us down. Problem was, it couldn’t get its tentacles far enough up the sides to get a good grip. It just slipped off four or five times and then gave up, sank before I could get my camera. The crew was real disappointed, they were from some island in the south and were looking forward to a good feed.”

“And we have one in our freshwater lake here.”

“Well sure, I figure some giant bird snatched it from the ocean as a baby and dropped it here when it got tired of fighting with it. The poor little thing just adapted as best it could.”

Ben looked at Joe, who was swallowing his last bite of cake. “Sounds legit to me, Son.”

Ben didn’t see a smile on the Captain’s face, so he shrugged, “How’s the fishing?”

Having served the coffee, Emily had gone off to find Lily. At her room, she knocked silently, as mothers do, and eased open the door. The girl was still in bed, she had an afternoon and evening shift. Emily noticed that she was alone in the bed and sighed to herself. She walked over and sat on the edge and brushed a strand of Lily’s hair from her face.

Lily opened her eyes, “Good morning Gran, what time is it?”

“It’s early, you should stay in bed a bit and rest, I just came up to see how you were. Your friend Lou seems very nice. He didn’t stay?”

“Gran!”

“OK Lily, that Captain O’Malley is downstairs with the boys, so you and I are going to have a bit of a talk, yes?”

Lily dropped her eyes, “About what?”

“Lily, I have been patient, I have waited for you to come to me, but it’s time, alright? Now over there behind that mirror you keep covered up, I see a couple of swords. We can start there.”

Lily fell back on her pillow and put her arm over her eyes. Emily was having none of that, she moved Lily’s arm and poked her in the stomach with a finger, hard. Lily oofed and sat up instantly. She looked at her Gran and realized there was no getting out of this talk.

“That boy Lou, is he your sponsor?”

“To what?”

“Damn it Lily, you think I’m blind? You go on benders every once in a while, you have AA meetings that you figure we know nothing about. Your grandfather and I know all about that, and we know you’ve been drinking in town. We also know that Lou lets you drink in his place, do you know how risky that is for him?”

“Oh God, you know about that?”

“Flora has told me all about it.”

“The flower you talk to...”

“Yes, the flower I talk to. Lily you have no secrets from Joe and I. Now, your dad is another story, he can’t think anything bad about you, which is as it should be. What. Is. Going. On. Start with those swords, I don’t recognize the design.”

“You know about swords?”

Emily stared at Lily, who tried to hold her gaze but failed. Her grandmother could be like a stony cliff if she needed. Lily looked away.

“That mirror, Lou wanted to see it, and it talked me into going inside of it.”

Emily looked hard at the mirror, swore under her breath and said, “All of it, now.”

Lily told her the story, and it felt good to tell it. When she was done, Emily nodded, asked a few questions and then sat back. “Now Lou, tell me about him.”

Lily found it easy to tell the story now, she told it without any sort of excuses for herself, something that Emily didn't fail to notice. 'The girl must have learned something in the mirror,' Emily thought to herself.

"You in love with him?"

"What? I don't know. No, I can't be, he's a client."

"And it looks like you're one of his. Now look, take some advice from someone who knows, that boy is handsome on the outside and handsome on the inside. You think hard about that, girl. He fought a monster with you, he's protected you from getting fired, and most of all, he's been there."

Lily was still for a moment, then nodded.

"One more thing, and you may or may not be able to believe this after your little adventure, Lou is a trickster. Now normally I'd tell you to get away from him fast, but I think he is in love with you, and a trickster that loves you is a rare and precious thing. Trust me on that, I know."

Lily stared at Emily, "Grandpa?"

"Yes, and I'm a witch. Now, believe that or not, as you wish, but you think about what I've said. Go on back to sleep, I have to get back to the boys before they decide to start cleaning the fish."

## The Past in Pictures



Lily was in the attic again, she spent quite a lot of time there, sometimes just checking for the fireman's pole, but mostly poking around in the trunks. She had spent some time kicking them, on the reasoning that a trunk of gold would not move. There were other heavy things, however, and after she'd bruised her foot the third time she just opened them and looked.

In one, buried behind some kid's costumes and toys, underneath a box with old flannel nighties from at least six generations, she found a trunk of memorabilia, old letters and most exciting, old photos.

She dragged the trunk downstairs to the kitchen where Emily insisted on cleaning it before they hoisted it up onto the table. Eventually she opened it to show her grandparents what she'd found.

Joe was excited, he was always a bit of a family historian and here were the records of a brand new branch of the Turners.

He insisted on taking it to his shed where, "Ollie can probably help me figure out who is who."

Emily was more than happy to get the trunk out of her kitchen and Lily, after poking through the documents in hopes of finding a treasure map, was also happy enough to let him go.

Ollie was interested in the documents and photos, "I see those about once a generation. Honestly, I don't know why nobody has labelled the photos, or put them into albums that are better organized than that higgledy piggledy mess there."

"Well maybe I'll do just that, I need to buy some albums to do it though."

"Fine, in the meantime, you see that fellow there, the boat captain? He was Israel Turner, a big captain on Lake Winnipeg, back when they had steamers going up and down the lake."

"What generation is he?" said Joe, pulling out a fountain pen and flipping the photo.

"Let's see, he'd be Isabelle's great grandfather I think. Are we going to go through every photo like that? There's hundreds of them."

"You said we should do it, we'll just do the ones you know."

Ollie groaned, and if you've ever heard an owl groan, you'd never forget it. Joe scowled, "Come on, we don't have to do it all at once. We'll sort them into generations."

"All right, fine, show me the next one."

Joe soon realized that the process was going to take some time, Ollie started to tell stories. Joe pulled out his phone and tried to record them but all that showed up were a series of hoots and squawks. Apparently, Joe was hearing something different than what others heard. Well he could always write them down in the evening.

## ***The First Turners***

As it happened, the very first Turners to the place had built a small log cabin, one room, a fireplace, and an outhouse. Tobias Turner came up the lake on a barge with some household furniture and his new bride. They lived in a tent on the shore for the summer while Tobias cut trees and made them into logs to build the cabin. By all accounts, his wife did as much work as Tobias and then made the meals and cleaned up. Ollie seemed impressed with just how hard she worked, while Joe was happy that Emily wasn't hearing this story.

Their first winter was hard, the wood wasn't dry, having just been cut over the summer, and so their fires were cool and smokey. More than once, they stumbled out into the snow as the smoke filled the cabin. The chimney, a mud and stone affair, didn't draw very well with the green wood. Once the lake froze over, Tobias went out on the ice and began cutting the dead trees, which burned much better.

In the spring, things improved, they found the land much more fertile than they had any reason to expect. Their garden exploded, and the berry bushes they'd found the previous year were even more productive. It was like the land approved of them.

Ollie explained, "I think they started to pick up some magic from the land, or the land gave it to them, I'm not sure, but they began to have the most fantastic luck. There was a stream coming down to the lake and they found gold there. They never mentioned it to anyone, and would pan a little to pay for their goods down at the town on the other side of the lake."

"Was Everwood there at the time?"

"No, this was a hundred years before Everwood was founded. The Turners have been here more or less from the very first white men in the region."

"There were natives?"

Ollie looked at Joe as if he was a bit slow, "Of course there were, there was a lot of fighting throughout this area, between the Confederacy and the Algonquins, especially after the fur trade started. That's why the place was so deserted when the Turners showed up, wars had depopulated the place, it was given over to trappers, hunters and war parties."

"Is that part of the cabin still there?"

"Just the foundation, it's under the back kitchen. The cabin burned in the next generation, they had gone out for a hike and left some frozen wood in top of the stove to thaw. It thawed all right, and the place burned to the foundation."

"That's something I'd expect city folk to do."

"Joe, country folk can be just as stupid as anyone else. They rebuilt fast enough with some help."

"There were other folk around by then?"

“Sure, the Ojibwe were here, seriously, are you one of those who figure the land was empty until the white man got here?”

“No.” Ollie ducked at the look Joe gave him.

### ***Isabelle the Artist***

“Anyway, they rebuilt with planks and that’s your back kitchen. A bit drafty, but they built a proper fireplace that is long gone. That generation didn’t amount to much, but the grandchild, the first Isabelle, was pretty talented.”

“Ollie are you that old?”

“No, of course not, but Elias told me the stories. He moves back and forth along the timeline, says he’s got some sort of a watch that lets him do it.”

“Elias?”

“The ghost Lily sees, she told you about him. I told Flora who told Emily. You need to keep up, Joe.”

“Don’t be a dick, Ollie. Not everyone tells me everything.”

Ollie seemed to think seriously about that, “Dude, it’s gossip. How can they not repeat it and how can you not listen.”

“The first Isabelle?”

“Oh yes, she was quite the artist, her paintings were all over the cabin for years, probably up in the attic somewhere, everything ends up there.”

“Lily hasn’t found them yet.”

“Probably for the best, apparently Isabelle was good enough to discourage others from even trying.”

“You really are a dick, aren’t you?”

“You want to hear the stories or not?”

“How about you tell me who these guys are before the light fades, and we save the gossip for another time.”

“Joe, without the stories those are just photos and names. What’s that worth?”

## ***July and the Elf***

“Fine, fine. Who’s this and what’s his story?”

“Damned if I know. Some random boyfriend I suspect.”

Joe groaned, it was going to be a long process. “Boyfriend of whom?”

“Flip through a few more... there, that one, that’s July Turner. She was a couple generations after Isabelle. You’ve seen the meadow right?”

“Upstairs, sure. It’s freaking Ben out.”

“Well apparently it leads to other places. July was there wandering around when she met that other guy, they, well, let’s say it was love at first sight... the physical kind. That meadow has some sort of influence. Anyway, the guy was from some far distant land, he came back with July and they got married, but one day he wandered off into the woods and was lost. The story says it was a tragic love affair but I figure he just fell into a crevasse and broke his leg.”

“Why would you say that?”

“Because a couple miles from here there’s old bones down deep in a crevasse, from about that time period.”

“That’s still a pretty sad story.”

“Not as sad as the kid getting kidnapped by elves and dragged back to his old lands. That’s the one July told everyone.”

“Did she... have anything to do with the boy falling into the crack in the rocks?”

“Well there were some stories about him being a bit physical in his demands. The Turner women have never taken too much crap from their men.”

Joe thought about Emma, “The ones marrying in seem to be the same.”

Ollie gave an owl’s laugh.

## Magic and Family



Joe and Ollie met every night in the shed. They slowly made their way through the photos and Joe suddenly had a thought. “Why did I never know about this side of the family?”

“You didn’t need to, I guess. You had your life a hundred miles away, and listen, as far as I can figure out, no new owner of the cottage knows about it until they inherit it.”

“You’re kidding.”

“No, I’m not. Now the kids, they know about the place, naturally, and when there’s kids, they inherit, but every so often you get a spinster like Isabelle and it tends to be that they find out about some unknown relatives when they get close to passing the place over.”

“I don’t understand how that works?”

“I figure the cottage finds an owner if one isn’t here to inherit.”

“The cottage...”

“Joe, you know how magic works, I know you do, you’re talking to me. Yes the cottage, the land around here. They need an owner, someone to take care of them and they find one if they have to.”

“So this place will go to Lily?”

“Sure, if she wants it. No problem, provided Ben wills it to her of course.”

“He’ll do that, for sure, he dotes on Lily.”

“And he’s still denying he sees magical things.”

“He’s got his reasons, but yes, he’s stubborn. It’s been years.”

“Well that’s his business I guess. You others know about it and that’s enough for the cottage.”

“What is it the cottage wants with magic?”

“Ah, well that’s tricky. You know there really is a kraken in the lake, like old Fishcake says. It’s there because the land protects it. There are trees around here that don’t exist anywhere else. Birds and animals too. The town wouldn’t exist without magic, that’s what Elias used to get people to the town. He got tired of going all the way down the lake for his supplies, and so he took some of his land and built a few cabins, then lured the first residents in.”

“Sounds like a powerful fellow. Why didn’t he just use magic to create what he wanted?”

“Cripes, Joe, you know why, there’s a price. Elias is a ghost, too much magic tied him to the place. If he’d used more he may never have died. It’s too high a cost. How come you don’t use more of it?”

“Well exactly that, you use as little as you can and try to use your brains instead.”

“How’s that working out for you?”

“Dick.”

“Well the land wanted, it made the cottage magical and the cottage made the family powerful.”

“Wait, how does that explain my side?”

“I don’t know, you figure it out, you’re the historian, maybe there was a younger son who wandered off generations ago. Maybe your family found this place and the magic comes from them. Who knows, it’s here and you’re here and I’m tired and hungry and Flora wants me to go check out the town, so I’m going. See you later.”

Joe was looking down at the photographs, “Yeah, see you later.”

Emily and Lily were at the kitchen table, deep in conversation. “So let’s say I get the magic thing, I mean I more or less have to admit it’s here, how come I never knew about it?”

“You did, once, before your mother left.”

“Mom?”

“Oh my little Lily. I guess it’s time to tell you the story, you’re a grown woman. Your father told you that your mother left you because she had family business. That wasn’t true.”

“I know that, she left because I wasn’t good enough for her.”

Emily turned fierce eyes on Lily, “Is that what you’ve believed all these years? Damn it, Ben, you idiot, idiot, idiot. Your mother left because of magic, not because of you being imperfect, do you hear me girl!”

Lily ducked her head, Emily was angry. “But...”

“No! You listen to me my dearest love, you did nothing, what happened was between your father and your mother. Shen left because she couldn’t handle the magic. She didn’t want to see it in you, but especially in your father. A couple of things happened and that freaked her out, upset her down to the core of her rationally stupid being. She ran, and she left you to think it was because of you.”

“Gran?”

Emily took a big breath and forced herself to be calm. “All right, the full story. Ben married Shen and they were happy. They had you, and it was good for a couple of years, but Ben had so much magical power that he attracted those who wanted his power. There were several instances where he had to fight, and your mother saw a couple of them. They scared her right down to her soul, she’d been raised

in a modern religion. I say modern in the most sarcastic of tones because their beliefs were medieval. Shen came to see your father as a devil. Then you started floating your things around the room. She couldn't take that, so she disappeared."

"So I did..."

"Damn you girl! You were a baby with powers you were trying out, you were no more responsible for that than learning how to talk. Don't you ever think it was anything else. No, your mother was the one with a problem, not you and not your father."

"But he doesn't even believe in magic."

"He loved your mother, I think that deep down he hopes she will come back. I know that from the day she left, he shut down, he stopped believing in his power, and somehow, his magic went black. Nobody chases him any more to steal his power because he's buried it."

"But you and Grampa..."

"We're just a couple of burned out hippies who did way too many drugs. If we think we can do magic, or fly, or talk to the dead, or see things nobody else can see, well that's just chemically induced psychosis."

"You can fly?"

"Will you concentrate, please. Your grandfather and I moved in with you and your father as soon as your mother left you. Our pension cheques helped the family stay afloat. I didn't mention it, but your mother's family is incredibly wealthy, so your father never developed the habit of working for his food. He became an Architect because he loved the work, and he's talented, but, well you know."

"He lives as if he's still rich." As Lily said that, her hand flew to her mouth, as if she could stop the words from coming out.

Emily took her hand and squeezed, "He still lives as if he's rich, and between the three of us, our pensions and your work, we let him keep thinking that way. It may be time to explain it to him, but perhaps he's starting to figure it out himself."

"The cottage, the renovations."

"And some other things that are happening, yes."

"So we say nothing?"

"And you don't go doing magic in front of him. I suspect the cottage is working on that, it seems to have a plan."

"The cottage?"

“You don’t feel it? The thing is half alive.”

“OK that’s just arrived at my freak out limit, there’s only so much I can take in at once.”

“Fine, let’s start dinner. Cooking and cleaning are the perfect antidote to being freaked out. And afterwards, digging the garden.”

Lily sighed, “Yes Gran, I’ll help you dig the garden.”

Emily grinned and patted Lily’s hand, “You’re a good granddaughter.”

## Ben Meets With the Mayor



Ben walked into town, it was a great day, warm and fresh. Spring had to be the very best season of all. He was in a good mood, he was whistling. He was going to meet with the Mayor, and he had the drawings for the cottage renovations under his arm.

It had turned out the Mayor was not only the town's real estate lawyer, she was also the chair of the planning commission and a fine architect herself, although she hadn't finished her degree. She had mentioned something about having a bit of trouble with her advisor and so she switched to Law.

Picking up two coffees, he wandered into the town hall and was waved right into Abigail's office. "Hope I'm not interrupting anything. I brought coffee."

"You dear man, you're a lifesaver. I was fading fast. Sit, sit. What have you got there?"

"Some of the plans for the cottage, I was hoping to get your ideas before I go much further, since you will have to approve them eventually."

As Ben unrolled the drawings across her desk, Abigail had a glance, "You took away the extension out toward the lake."

"Carl told me it looked a bit out of place, and I had to agree. Lipstick on a pig I think he said."

"Carl. Do you know I've never met him? My father told me about him working on your cottage, but it can't be the same man, that was too long ago. I wonder if this Carl is the son."

"He told me he worked on the place just before Aunt Isabelle took it over."

"That would make him a very old man, Ben. Are you sure he wasn't just pulling your leg?"

"Oh... You know it never occurred to me how old that would make him. I wonder why? He certainly didn't look that old."

"Well, whoever he is, I'm sort of glad he talked you out of it. It was a beautiful shape, but it didn't really fit the building."

"I've been thinking the exact same thing. I'm new to the renovation thing, I have always worked on new buildings."

"I have to admit I looked up some of your work, and I was very impressed, if a bit confused about some of it. Maybe we can talk about some of your designs, I'd love to know your thoughts. My teachers were definitely not at the cutting edge of design."

"I'm starting to think I was a bit too forward in my own work, but I'd love to talk to you about it. I think I could use some feedback."

"I don't know that you need anything from anyone else, these drawings look great. You've retained the original spirit of the building while updating it. You know, I think even Isabelle might have liked this. You won't have any trouble getting approval from the committee."

“You’re serious? That’s good to hear, I was afraid the laundry room was a bit much, bringing it upstairs and combining it with a shower room.”

“Have you done much trotting up and down from a basement to do laundry, Ben?”

“Can’t say I have.”

“Keep it upstairs, and putting all the moisture producing items in one room that’s easy to vent, you’re doing a fine job here. Are you going to do the work yourself?”

“I thought Carl would help.”

“Well I hear you’ve met Lou, he’s pretty good with a hammer, and there are a few others around town who would be glad to help. Especially if they got to work with a talented architect. You’d be doing them a favour to let them help.”

“Yes? That would be great.”

“OK, I’ve got another thing or two to talk to you about, especially after seeing these drawings. What are you doing for supper?”

“Just heading home I guess.”

“Let me take you out, but first, let’s take a short walk.”

Ben gathered up his materials and put them back into the carrier he put over his shoulder. The Mayor told her secretary she was calling it a day and went out the door with Ben. When they got onto the sidewalk, she slipped her arm through Ben’s and fell into step with him. Ben wondered that he felt so comfortable with her on his arm. He hadn’t been involved with a woman since his wife had left.

Abigail laughed and pointed, “Right. Here we are, I told you it was a short walk, everything in this town is a short walk away. I’d like you to take a look at our community centre, I think it’s just about time it was updated.”

“Sure, I can have a look, but as I said, I’m more experienced with new buildings. Now that looks like an old hotel or a boarding house.”

“You nailed it, the place has been both in its history, we converted it to a community centre about thirty years ago, and now it’s too small. Come on, I’ll give you the tour.”

Ben and Abigail went through the doors, nodded at the young man on the front desk and had a look at the main floor. “Here’s the gym, you can see it’s tiny, hardly enough room for a basketball court. Off there are the weight rooms and then there’s the showers.”

Abigail banged on the door and pushed it open. “Just look at that, the place is dripping. Don’t mind us Perry, just taking a tour.”

The fellow in the shower didn't even bother to cover up, just waved at Abigail, who turned to Ben and said with a grin, "We've seen it all before, haven't we?"

Ben thought he'd better start reassessing his attitudes toward small town life.

Upstairs, they found several meeting rooms, some craft rooms and a sewing room. "These are club spaces?"

"Right, we leave them set up so that the folks that use them can come in any time, not just at meeting times. It keeps the seniors active."

"You care about your townsmen quite a lot, don't you?"

"Well that's always been a big part of Everwood, our community spirit. So what do you think about the centre, can you do something with it?"

"I'm assuming you want a gym addition, right? How much land do you have out back?"

"Plenty, it's a triple lot, there is a soccer pitch out back that could easily be moved to the school grounds."

"You've been thinking about this."

"More like waiting for someone to come along and make sense of it. How about it, are you up for the job?"

"Let me think about it, I have some ideas. I think you'd want to keep as much of the original building as you could, and put the addition on in a way that it's a bit of a surprise as you move to it."

"I knew you were the man for us. Come on, let's go get some supper and we can talk about it."

Abigail took Ben's arm again and walked him down the street. Ben was deep in thought, and Abigail watched him with a fond look on her face.

## Intervention



“Gran I don’t get it, why am I fighting when I should be learning about magic?”

“You’re going to learn how to control reality without learning how to control yourself are you? That’s a bad idea, Lily, a formula for disaster as they say. You’ve got to learn how to run before you can walk right?”

“It’s the other way around Gran.”

“Yes girl, it is, now let’s see what you remember from when you were a kid.”

Emily began her attack, she was using the shield she had found in the house, and a large butcher knife she’d taken from the kitchen. She’d covered the edge with some masking tape, but that wouldn’t help much if Lily wasn’t on the ball. Emily blocked Lily’s arm to one side with the shield and stabbed. Lily faded to the side and grabbed Emily’s wrist, folded her blocked arm in and stuck her elbow into Emily’s armpit on the shield side. Lily turned and Emily was unbalanced. Before she fell, Lily stopped, just at the point of balance.

“Good, dear, you’ve remembered some of your training.”

“I use it in my job, some of the kids I’ve worked with were violent. Most of them aren’t trained so it’s not hard to control them without seeming like I’m fighting them.”

“Lovely, but let’s see what you can do against someone who is trained.”

With that, Emily began to push Lily hard. Lily was soon winded but holding her own. Still, she could see that her grandmother was holding back, she was taking Lily just a tiny bit beyond her abilities as she attacked. Fine, Lily had a few tricks up her own sleeve, and she snaked her arm around Emily’s shield, around her arm, and stripped the shield. Or at least she thought she had. Emily pulled Lily in tight and the tip of the knife was pressed into Lily’s throat, a tiny drop of blood appeared, despite the tape on the blade. “That was a nice try, girl, but you have to remember that when you come inside to attack, you’re opening yourself up. That’s enough for today, let’s wash up and start supper.”

Emily touched a finger to Lily’s neck and the blood was gone, as was the small cut.

After supper, Joe took Lily out onto the front lawn and handed her one of the blades she had brought back from the mirror world. Joe took his expandable stick from his pocket and opened it to cane length. Stepping back to distance, Joe signed for Lily to take a guard position. “Emily says you’ve remembered some things, you never really trained sword when you were a kid, show me what you learned in that mirror of yours.”

“Gramps, you’ve got a stick without even a hand guard, and we haven’t dulled this blade, I’m not sure I have the control not to hurt you.”

“That’s a nice thought, Lily, but I’ve trained a bit with my stick against a sword. I’m sure you’ll be careful enough. Now let’s see.”

Lily lifted and chopped with the blade. As she lifted it up, Joe tapped her on the wrist, at the top of her swing, he hit her in the ribs, hard. When she cut down, Joe wasn't there, he'd stepped to the side and tapped her lightly on the head.

Lily stood very still, the blade held at the bottom of her swing, while she assessed herself. The wrist and head were fine, but she was going to have a hell of a bruise on her ribs. Good thing it wouldn't show at work tomorrow.

Lily turned her head carefully to look at her grandfather. He was standing at his ease, the cane lightly resting on the ground, watching her. Lily turned her body and lifted the blade to a middle guard position. Joe grinned and nodded.

After an hour of practice, Joe declared that Lily had learned some things and she should go have a nice cool bath to keep the bruising down. Lily found herself thanking him for the lesson. She felt great, but she suspected that might not be the case about half way through the night when the adrenaline wore off.

As it turned out, she felt the bruises, but they weren't too bad. Joe had given her a pouch of bath salt to use and it must have worked.

The training went on each evening for weeks, Emily saying that there would be magical challenges now that Lily was using magic.

"But I'm not using magic."

"You think not? Well if you're not, you're not, but you might want to consider how you avoided my last three thrusts. Come on, time for supper and then you can play some more with your grandfather. He looks forward to your bouts."

Lily muttered, "I'm glad he does."

Emily smiled as she climbed the porch stairs at a pace appropriate to her age. Watching her go up, Lily shook her head.

One day she found herself facing the man she had first seen in the garden. Elias stood in front of her with a brutal looking cudgel that he was idly swinging back and forth in his hand. Emily stood beside Lily and explained, "The rules are simple, you can hurt each other, as in cause pain, but neither of you can injure the other. Do you understand? It will hurt like hell, but you won't be damaged. This is so you can experience Elias' style of fighting."

"Which is?"

"We'd call it catch as catch can, or sometimes kick and gouge, but Elias would have called it All In. There were no rules, just submission. Elias was an expert, as you can see, he's got both ears and eyes."

"Both ears and eyes... what the hell Gran?"

"Like I said, pain but no damage. Now what do you want to use for a weapon?"

“A sawed off shotgun.”

“No, what would you learn? Here’s a good cudgel for you too. Have fun.”

Lily was getting good at muttering, “Have fun, yeah you come have fun fighting a ghost you can’t stop because you can’t damage him.”

Emily laughed, “Who says you can’t stop him, break his arm and he’ll stop, trust me.”

Emily got her cheek ripped open, one eye gouged out, her ear half bitten off, but she managed to break Elias’ arm and then shortly afterwards his neck. She just took a bit of convincing that it was all permitted. She wasn’t used to fighting without rules.

After the fight, Emily took Lily’s head in her hands and her injuries were no longer painful, not only that, but she could see out of both eyes again. Lily looked over at Elias and he was fine, he touched his hand to his forehead and vanished. Lily got the impression he’d said, “Next time child.”

“Not if I can help it,” thought Lily back at him.

On another night, Mayor Greenwood showed up with a couple of ash wands. It turned out she was one of the instructors in the local Singlestick club. Lily was astonished, “That art isn’t around any more.”

Abigail laughed, “That will be news to some folks in Everwood, we’ve been training and competing for years. There’s a lot of scars on foreheads that wouldn’t be there if we didn’t have tournaments.”

“Well fine then, where are the facemasks?”

“I did say scars on foreheads didn’t I? I’m sure I did.”

“No protective gear?”

“We play to pinks, Lily, first one to open an inch of cut on the other, wins. Here’s your singlestick, let’s get at it.”

A very sweaty hour later, Lily was happy to drop her left elbow and then drop herself onto a bench. She had learned something about reaction times, that was for sure, and when she’d finally learned to use her wrist and her hips to spin her stick around, she’d scored a few hits.

She looked up to see her father out there with a stick, facing Abigail. He didn’t follow the rules, but was dancing around instead. Abigail laughed and stalked him, changing her style to match his. Grampa Joe sat next to Lily on the bench. “I didn’t know Ben could fight, but he told me that in school he joined a Bartitsu club, that was a surprise I can tell you. He and I are going to have a bit of a match if this woman doesn’t beat him black and blue.”

## Lily Rescues Lou



After weeks of training, Lily was declared to be doing 'OK' by Emily. Joe whispered loudly to Lily, "High praise coming from her."

Lily laughed, "It is, Grampa, it really is."

Emily gave them both a dirty look and declared the practice over for the day. Lily showered and got ready for work. It wasn't quite the chore to go to work as it once had been. She was beginning to see that she could not save everyone, she could not do all the work that had to be done, that she could not be in control all the time. Just getting beaten up regularly was relieving a lot of her stress, which was weird, she had to admit.

It had been a while since she had gone to Lou's place and got drunk. Not that she didn't go visit, but she was losing the urge for oblivion and was starting to enjoy just being in his company. He still insisted they not 'date' in the evenings but they often had coffee to talk about Lily's concerns, and of course they both attended meetings together.

All of which might explain why Lily noticed instantly that Lou wasn't at the youth centre that day. She asked around but nobody had seen him since the previous day. He wasn't answering his phone. Lily told Karen that she was worried and was going to check Lou's apartment. Karen nodded "Call if you need me."

Lily knew there was trouble the moment Lou's roommate opened the door. Sally looked like she was at her wit's end. "Lily, I think he's using again. He's been catatonic since last night. I can't rouse him."

"Did you call an ambulance?"

"No, he seems fine but he won't react, he won't answer me."

"Let me see."

Lily checked Lou's room, she saw no drug paraphernalia and smelled no booze. "Has he been like this before?"

"No, I mean he passes out if he's using, but never for this long."

Lily bent over Lou, lying on the bed as if he'd just gone to sleep. She knew he always started his night on his right side and that's how he was lying. He may not have moved all night. She checked his breathing and pulse and they were fine. She wondered what her Gran would do, and for some reason the thought rose that when Lily was sick, Emily would put her hands on her temples and concentrate. Lily rolled Lou onto his back and put her hands on the sides of his head. She closed her eyes and instantly got a deep feeling that Lou was fighting for his life.

She had to get Sally out of the room. "Sal can you please go make some tea and wait in the kitchen for a few. I'm going to sit here with Lou and I need to concentrate."

Sally seemed to understand, she nodded and went out, closing the door behind her.

Lily didn't think much more about Sally, but instead turned back to Lou. Her hands were still on his head so she closed her eyes again and leaned over him. Touching her forehead to his and with all her will, she tried to help him. The instant their foreheads touched, Lily was with him.

Where, she didn't know. In his head? In another mirror? There was sand again. Brown this time, and there was no space ship. This time there was some sort of monstrous being, Lily got the impression it was female and Lou was getting the worst of a fight. He was down on one knee but still trying to fight back while the thing swung talons at him. It barely scratched him when it swung, and Lily got the feeling it was enjoying the pain it was causing.

"Lily, get out of here, you can't be here!"

Lily shook her head, Lou had saved her, there's no way she was going to leave him. She wished for their swords and they were in her hands. This she knew how to do. She launched herself at the beast but it laughed. As she swung, Lily's sword went right through the beast's arm. The beast kept swinging and Lily was slammed back onto her butt. She looked down and saw that blood was welling from her side. Shaking her head, Lily said "no" and the blood stopped, the slashes closed.

This seemed to surprise the beast, "You've been taking lessons, good, so much sweeter."

Lou gasped out, "Lily you can't fight it like that, it's been waiting for you to come."

The beast backhanded Lou and he went rolling across the sand. Lily took a step toward him, which brought her into range of the beast's claws again. Another slash across Lily's chest opened up a wicked wound, but Lily barely looked at it. She willed it healed and it was.

This was not her Id monster, this was something else, and Lily wasn't one to keep fighting a losing strategy. Iron had no effect on this thing, a sword was useless. She opened her hands and the swords were gone. She tried to think of some other weapon, a stick maybe, a gun? Could she make a gun appear in her hand?

Then she remembered what her grandmother had said about iron. "It's not the iron in the sword, girl, it's the iron in your soul."

The moment she remembered that, there was pain. Blinding, screaming pain all through her body. She felt herself becoming weak, small. She dropped to her knees. She was nothing, less than nothing, gum on the heel of a shoe, not even worth notice. She was worthless, helpless, nothing but a child.

A child? She looked at Lou and got up. She had never been a child, not since her mother had abandoned her. She became an adult on that day, and she was still one, thanks to Lou, who needed her now. Needed her to be an adult, to fight.

Lou, the pressure off of himself, managed to stand up. He shouted, "Lils, I tried magic, but it didn't work, I tried to fight it physically, tried to change, but it was too strong, it caught me. Be careful."

From the corner of her eye, she saw Lou change to a fox. She didn't think about it much, but it gave her new strength to see the fox was healthy, unharmed, and radiating a controlled rage. Good, she could focus on the monster.

She had blocked the pain, and the beast seemed confused. But it tried again, focused completely on Lily. Lily opened up, "Come on then, you want to hurt me? Come, come."

Lily opened her arms and her mind. The beast screamed and attacked with everything it had, but Lily wasn't there. 'This is what they were trying to teach me, magic and budo are the same.' Lily grinned as the beast turned to attack again. The same attack over and over. Lily slid aside again and again as the monster grew furious.

And careless. As it stumbled past one more time, Lily struck from the side. The thing lost its balance, physically and mentally, it stumbled sideways and fell. It was confused. How had it fallen, for all its power, how had it fallen? This slip of a girl could not have done that.

Seeing the confusion, Lily struck again, just as Lou dove in and caught it's shoulder with his teeth. Lily barely noticed how big that fox was, but she struck again, while the monster was distracted. Lou took a chunk out of the beast, spit it out and lunged for its head. As he did, Lily drove deep into its mind, a spear of pain that she'd learned from the beast.

With a scream that seemed to shake the world, wherever they were, the beast disappeared.

As it did that, Lou and Lily stopped, looked at each other, and were back in Lou's bedroom. Lily collapsed on top of Lou, her head sliding down onto his chest. Lou's eyes opened to see Sally in the doorway, looking frightened, "I heard screams."

"It's OK now Sal, it's all OK."

"You're a fox you know."

"Oh, right." Lou changed and Lily stirred when he did.

"Sleepy now, nap nap."

Sally grinned and Lou winked at her. She closed the door quietly and went back to the kitchen to drink her tea.

## Seasons Unhinged



Lily woke up a couple of hours later, feeling much better for the nap. Lou had been fighting all night, and he was still asleep. “Sally, I’m going to take Lou to my place to get him checked over by my grandmother. He seems to be resting fine, but I want to make sure.”

“Absolutely, I’ll help you get him out to your car.”

“How long have you known he’s a Trickster?”

“Since not long after I met him. At first when he changed, I thought it was part of my withdrawal symptoms, a hallucination, but then he showed me I wasn’t going crazy. How long have you known?”

“About ten minutes it seems, I’m just discovering that my family has certain talents, and so do others.”

“Well I’m glad Lou has someone who can relate to him. You know, I looked in on you two and you weren’t moving at all. Both of you were frozen. Can you tell me what happened?”

Lily sat down at the kitchen table while Sally made more tea. By the time she had told Sally the story, Lou was shifting around in bed. The girls went and woke him and he went with Lily to her car. As she left the apartment, Lily hugged Sally, “I’m glad he’s got you too. Someone who knows what he is and who looks out for him.” Sally returned the hug.

When Lily got home, the family were gathered at the kitchen table, eating a pie that Emily had baked. “Were you going to save me a piece?”

“No, you can have it now, and you look like you could use some sugar, Lou.”

Lou grinned and dug in while Lily repeated the story of the fight with the beast. “Gran can you check Lou over please, he was just about done when I got there.”

Emily shook her head, “He’s a trickster, Lily and I can see he’s changed, and changed back, he’s fine. By the look of how fast he’s eating, I’d say his only need right now is another piece of pie.”

Lou grinned as he put the last piece into his mouth, and pushed the plate politely across the table.

“But you, girl. Come over here I need to pull something from you.”

“What? No I feel fine.”

“Look, you blocked off the attack, you walled it up inside yourself. It’s like a thorn in your thumb, I have to cleanse you or you’ll have the psychic version of blood poisoning. Come here.”

Lily looked doubtful but sat next to Emily, who performed some strange movements with her fingers. After a time, Emily winced, as if something had stabbed her in the chest. She took a deep breath and relaxed again. “There, done. I need to teach you how to get rid of that sort of thing Lily. Still, it was a lot less nasty than I expected.”

“I sort of threw it back at the monster.”

“You what? Damn child, you’ve got an instinct for this sort of thing. We’re going to move along to more advanced training I think.”

Lily thanked her grandmother and then turned to her father, who had been listening to all of it. “Dad, Gran said you had fought with something before Mom left and before you stopped believing in Magic. Does this sound like what you faced?”

Ben thought for a moment, then said slowly, “It does, Lily, something very similar, if not the same thing.”

“Did you kill it?”

“No, I beat it away, like you did. Then I stopped doing magic and it never came back.”

“Why has it come back now?”

“You. I think it’s come for you, your grandmother and grandfather are too well shielded, there was nothing for anything to feel, no magic to detect, so there was nothing worth stealing here. Or at least that’s what I figure, but now this house, this land, is broadcasting like crazy. Look, I don’t like that you are learning about magic, and I don’t like that I’m remembering, either, so I’m going to try to forget again. I hope you do too.”

Joe shook his head, “Isn’t going to work this time, son. This place is too powerful, there’s too much here and it’s shoving it into all four of us. We can’t ignore it, but if we figure out how to manage it we might be able to hide it.”

Ben didn’t look convinced, “I’m glad you’re OK Lily, please try to be careful.”

“I’d be happy to ignore it all, but it came after Lou. I didn’t really have a choice.”

“I know that sweetheart, keep working with mom and dad, they have always had more skill than I ever had. My best bet is to just forget this I think, like I did before. Lou, I’m glad you’re OK. Please you two, take care of each other.”

With that, Ben went back upstairs to work and Lily checked in with Karen at the centre. Lou stayed for dinner and then ran back to his place. This time Lily understood what he meant by that.

Nothing happened for a couple of weeks, but then the cabin seemed to get ideas. Lily was on the couch in the living room, relaxing and drinking a coffee when she felt a bit hot. She reached over with her foot and swung the door open. To her surprise, a blast of cold air and snow blew into the room.

Curious, she walked out to the hall, where the side door was open for the breeze, and she looked out on winter. This wouldn’t have been unusual except that it was early summer. Since she was in her bare

feet, she closed the door and then the living room door. After all that had happened, Lily didn't think too deeply about it until she had finished her coffee.

"Gran, that's not the door to the meadow, it's just the side door. Has it ever gone anywhere but where it should?"

"Not that I've noticed, dear. The cottage seems to be having fun again. I think we just have to roll with it."

"What if it's another attack?"

"Does it feel like that?"

"No, it was just winter. I closed the door."

"Shall we go see what's out there now?"

The cottage door creaked open, and a rush of crisp autumn air filled the room. It was the season of changing leaves, cozy sweaters, and pumpkin-spiced everything.

"The door opened to fall."

Emily grinned. "Fall it is then, I love the Fall, let's make the most of the coolness."

Opening the windows, they could feel the built up summer heat moving out of the house. Emma prepared a picnic and the family stepped out, finding themselves in a vibrant forest painted in shades of gold and crimson. The sun cast long shadows as it dipped below the horizon, and the air was filled with the earthy scent of fallen leaves.

Emma spread out a plaid blanket, and the Turners gathered around a campfire. Joe took out his harmonica and began to play.

As the stars began to twinkle above, Lily pointed to some shooting stars, "Make a wish."

Joe wished that his harmonica playing was just a little bit better. Emily said it was as good as it had ever been, causing Ben and Lily to laugh. He really wasn't very good.

Emma wished for great-grandkids, which caused Lily to gasp and then turn red. Ben said he wished Lily had exactly the life she wanted, kids or not, and looked daggers at his mother.

Which left Lily, who simply wished for good health for everyone. This met with approval all around.

In that relaxed mood, the family was barely surprised when some twinkling lights floated toward them.

Out of the shadows, a group of tiny, glowing forest sprites emerged. They had wings like lace, and giggled like the tinkling of wind chimes.

"Hello Hello!" one of the sprites chirped. "We couldn't resist joining your party."

With a bit of a groan, Ben thought 'yet more magic to forget' but he extended his hand, "We're the Turners, I'm Ben, and this is Emma, Lily, and my father, Joe."

The sprites introduced themselves and danced around the campfire, leaving trails of shimmering light in their wake.

"We're celebrating the Fall Equinox," one of the sprites explained. "It's a special time in this forest, and we thought we'd share it with you, since you're here."

The sprites led the Turners on a moonlit walk through the woods. In one spot, the fireflies were gathered, giving them a wonderful display. In others, frogs sang so loudly that Lily had to cover her ears. On and on they wandered, seeing the beauties of that place.

"It's like a fairytale," Lily whispered.

Emily nodded, "but then again, so is our wood, you just have to be open to the wonder."

When they got back to the picnic blanket and the campfire, the sprites told them the legend of the Harvest Moon, which was said to bring good fortune and make dreams come true.

"Would you like to make a harvest moon wish?" They asked, holding out a small, glowing acorn.

Lily took the acorn and closed her eyes. She made a silent wish for her family to always be happy and together.

As she opened her hand, the acorn rose into the sky and transformed into a radiant star.

The sprites then sang a soft lullaby that seemed to carry the Turners into a peaceful slumber. They dreamed of the golden leaves, the laughter of forest sprites, and the warmth of family.

The next morning, the family awoke to find themselves back in their cottage. It was as if the fall adventure had been a beautiful dream.

At breakfast, Lily wondered aloud, "Did that really happen?"

Emma smiled. "It was a magical night, wasn't it?"

Ben reluctantly agreed, "Sure, but now I've got to put that out of my mind too."

## Mayor Abigail Visits



Mayor Greenwood came down the path, heading for the cottage with a basket of goodies. Joe glanced out the window and teased, “Uh oh, you’d better go out the side door Ben if you’re going to avoid the Mayor, no doubt she’s got more work for you.”

“What? Who?”

Joe nodded his head toward the window and Ben looked out. Abigail was walking with a light step along the path, swinging a basket. Ben smiled gently and Joe grinned, “Guess I’ll just move along to my shed, I’ll be there if you need me.”

“What? Oh sure Dad.”

“You know, if you want some advice or anything.”

Ben didn’t hear.

Abigail had seen Ben in the window, she waved brightly and pointed to the back door. Ben rushed down the stairs past his father, to open the door just as she was approaching.

“Good morning Ben, it was such a nice day I thought I’d bring some treats. I’ve been canning and baking.”

“Well that was very kind of you, Mayor. Would you like some coffee?”

“Love it, and I’ve got scones here to go with. But really, call me Abby, Mayor is just so formal.”

Ben grinned and took the basket from Abigail into the kitchen. Emily was there, took one look at Abigail and grinned. “Good to see you Madam Mayor, welcome. I’ve got coffee on and now I’m heading out to do some gardening. I hope you’ll excuse me.”

“Oh, would you like some help?”

“No, no, just scratching around, you sit and have some coffee.”

A certain look passed between the women. One that Ben missed completely, as Emily walked out the kitchen door with two cups of coffee, and wandered over to Joe’s shed to collect a hoe.

Ben looked up from his photo album, “You met the Mayor?”

“Oh yes, there’s some hope there.”

“It’s been a long time, you think he remembers how?”

Emily laughed, handed Joe a coffee and grabbed a hoe. She walked into the garden and sat down beside Flora, amused to bring the flower some gossip for a change. “The Mayor has come to visit Ben.”

Flora seemed to think this over, “She’s a bit older than he is.”

“By a few years, right? That’s OK, he’s no spring chicken.”

“By more than that, Emma. She’s been Mayor of Everwood for seventy years.”

“What? How is that possible? I’m 95 myself, but I look it.”

“It’s the place, there’s so much residual magic in the soil that someone who knows how to use it can stay young for a very long time.”

“She’s a witch? Is that what you’re telling me?”

“No more than you are, and she’s nowhere near as powerful from what I have heard. No, she’s just someone with a lot of experience and I suspect she’s looking at Ben for husband number six.”

“Black widow?”

“No, no, not at all. Just outlives them.”

“Bottom line, Flora, should I be worried about this?”

“Not that I know of, she is a good person, if a bit older than Ben.”

“Fine, that will do, the boy needs to get over his former wife. We’re hoping Abigail will be the one to help him do it.”

Ben poured coffee for Abigail and sat down opposite her at the table. Abigail took scones and butter from the basket and handed one to Ben. “Try that and let me know if you like it.”

Ben’s face told her all she needed to know, “Oh my lord, this is wonderful, you’re a cook too? Is there anything you can’t do?”

“Never been any good at flying.”

“Fly... oh, yes.”

“How are the plans for the cottage going? Got any further along?”

“Absolutely, I’m pretty much done and should have them submitted by the end of next week.”

“Wonderful, I look forward to seeing them. Now, have you had any time to think about the Community Centre?”

“I have some ideas, would you like to see?”

They took their coffees upstairs to Ben's office where he unrolled a few sketches. Abigail was impressed, they were a delicious mix of traditional and new. "I think the committee will like these, can I show them?"

"Well they're really just sketches, but yes, I'd appreciate some feedback. I'd like to do something the town wants."

Abigail looked closely at Ben. This was not the prickly modernist she had researched. Maybe country life was softening him. Well it happened, it had softened her. They spent some time looking over the plans and drawings, sipping their coffees and occasionally bumping elbows. Neither of them seemed worried and neither drew away from the other.

When they'd finished their coffee, Abigail seemed to notice the room across the hall. "Oh, that's the room with the meadow isn't it? I haven't thought about that for decades."

"You know about the meadow?"

"Sure, it used to be a very popular place to visit once. Then a couple of tragedies happened."

"Pregnancy?"

Abigail smiled at Ben, "Since when was that a tragedy?"

"Well, Carl told me about how it was a favourite kissing spot."

Abigail got a dreamy look on her face, "Amongst other things. But no, nothing to do with that. A couple of kids went missing and when we couldn't find them we closed the door and nailed it shut."

"I wondered about why it was hidden. Carl warned that you could wander too far from the meadow."

"And yet, you've uncovered it."

"Well I've got a table and chairs there, I have coffee in the mornings when I'm thinking. I don't go too far, it's nice enough right beside the door."

"Well I'm glad the meadow is getting used again. I imagine it was lonely."

"The meadow?"

"Sure, haven't you noticed that things around here seem to have a mind of their own?"

"I'm trying not to notice."

"Ah, yes, your wife."

"You know about that?"

“Did my research on you and yours, Ben, sorry.”

“No, it’s sort of a relief that you know about Shen. She left us because of this sort of magical thing happening.”

Abigail looked at Ben’s face for a while, “I see. Yes.”

A bit of awkwardness crept into the room. Ben said, “Would you like a refill on the coffee? I wouldn’t mind another of those wonderful scones.”

The tension broken, Abigail smiled, “Yes please, and you may have as many scones as you wish. I can always make another batch and bring them along.”

“I’d like that very much.”

Abigail took Ben’s arm as they crossed the room to go back downstairs. In the hallway, she glanced into Ben’s bedroom and seemed pleased to see that it was neat and tidy, the bed made.

Downstairs, Emma called in from the garden. “Would you like to stay for supper, Madam Mayor?”

“Thank you no Mrs. Turner. I must get back to work.”

Ben looked up from his scone, “Shall I walk you back? I can carry the drawings to show the committee.”

“Why Ben, that would be delightful. What a kind offer to make.”

## The Renovation Starts



Ben spent the next weeks working on the cottage plans. Carl dropped by often to see how they were going, and he would point out this or that architectural quirk and explain who had come up with it, who had later changed it, and who had restored it. Ben was fascinated at the history. He was learning to

appreciate the time capsule an old building is. His thoughts had always been toward that blazing statement, that amazing new construction, but he was learning that subtle could be amazing too.

As he worked, Lily borrowed some of his blueprints and came back with some paintings of what the changes would look like. Ben was amazed, “Those are really good sweetheart, you have captured what was in my head, and from blueprints. Not many can do that. I’m very impressed.”

“You like them? I’m so glad. I’m afraid I need a lot more training to be good at this, but it’s fun to try.”

“You’ve done more than try. I don’t think I’ve seen many who can capture the essence of what I’m trying to do.”

“Oh Dad, thank you, but you have to say that don’t you?”

Ben gathered his daughter into a hug, “Absolutely not, sweetheart, these are really amazing.”

Lily beamed, “Then I’ll do you some more.”

The next day, Lily came in to see her impressions pinned to the office wall. She felt pretty good about that.

Each time Ben went into town to visit Abigail at her office, to show her the drawings and Lily’s impressions, there seemed to be more people dropping in. The town was getting excited about the projects, the cottage and the community centre. The centre committee had asked Ben to work up a couple of his ideas, one that was quite traditional and one that was very avant garde.

It was curious, even to himself, that Ben spent as much or more effort on the traditional design as he did on the more modern concept. A few years ago he would not have even bothered with the traditional. The less his building fit in, the more it stuck out, the better, he had thought. As he worked, the committee seemed to be splitting into two camps, each championing one of the designs. Ben worried that there would be trouble, but Abigail assured him that a small town always worked that way, that if people weren’t on one or another side, they weren’t happy.

One side wanted to make a splash, and the other wanted something that was functional, they weren’t too worried about gaining wider recognition. As he worked, Ben swung from one opinion to the other, himself.

As for the cottage, Joe wandered into Ben’s office fairly often. The cottage reminded him of the place where he grew up. He asked Ben to include a firewood lift from the first to the second floor, and to put a fireplace into one of the spare rooms so he could make it a den. When Ben pointed out they had central heat, Joe explained carefully that nothing beat a fireplace in a den. Big wing back chairs to block the drafts, a fire, a glass of whisky and a good book.

That became the underlying theme for the second floor. Ben found himself enjoying the chats with his father. They were bringing the two of them back together as they had not been since Ben was a child. Because of this, Ben found himself becoming even more attached to the cottage.

Knowing he was going to do a lot of the work himself, Ben found the designs an interesting challenge. Joe's fireplace had to tie in with the main chimney of the house. Instead of simply putting it into the plans, Ben found himself thinking just how he could do it himself. This is where long conversations with Carl were helpful. Carl seemed to know each twist and turn of the building. Ben began to believe that the little man had built the original place. Something Carl denied with a laugh.

Eventually, the physical work could begin on the cottage. It was then that Ben realized what Abigail had predicted was true. There were plenty of young men who wanted the experience of carpentry for a first class architect. Ben and Carl became more foremen than carpenters, surprising Ben who had thought they would be doing the work themselves.

Carl began training the men in demolition and construction techniques, safety practices, and the hundreds of other skills a general contractor needs. Ben, for his part, seemed to be holding classes in how to read blueprints, including now to modify them at need. He suspected that out of the cottage project there would be more than a few qualified draftsmen trained.

He was more pleased at that, than he had thought he would be. Perhaps teaching was something he might like, although he'd never considered it before. He was changing his opinion of the old saying "Those who can't do, teach." He knew he could do, and yet he could also teach.

Partway through the construction, the townspeople were working on the outside walls, taking off the planking to get at the insulation, or rather lack of it.

Ben walked underneath one fellow who somehow dropped a plank straight down onto Ben's head. He didn't see it so much as feel it coming. Ben stepped forward, raised the hammer in his hand and tapped the plank behind himself where it hit the ground harmlessly. Joe, who had been watching, remarked, "Looks like the martial arts training has come in handy, son."

Ben looked at the board, up at the man who dropped it, who was looking rather scared, and then nodded at his father. "I guess so."

Looking again at the man above him, Ben said "hardhat, you should be wearing a hardhat."

"Yes boss." The man said as he shook his head, he was hanging from the studs two floors up, if he fell, the hard hat would land somewhere other than where his head landed, he was sure, but he yelled at his buddy to throw him one.

Seeing what was happening, room by room, Emily was delighted. Ben asked, "How would you like to modernize the kitchen, mother, we could put a nice range where the wood stove is now."

"Son, you take away my wood stove and there will be trouble. You can leave the kitchen just like it is, it's perfect right now."

Ben shrugged. "How about a greenhouse to start seeds for the garden."

“Now you’re talking.”

Room by room refinished, wall by wall insulated, the place began to be a cozy and inviting space. The workers began to bring dishes for pot luck dinners and stay around enjoying the den, the living room, and the other nooks and crannies, sometimes heading home late in the evening. Where in years past, that would have bothered Ben a bit, he found himself playing the host. It didn’t hurt that the designs were praised lavishly. The after-work gatherings became a place where the philosophy of architecture was debated, as well as new methods of construction, proving his helpers were also studying on their own time.

Ben found himself seriously considering just how welcoming he’d made the cottage, from a drafty, rather cold and uninviting place, to one where folks found reasons to hang around. Some of the suggestions the workers had made, helped with that, as well as those from Carl and Joe. This renovation thing was starting to be more and more attractive, and Ben was starting to enjoy the feedback to his designs. He was much less proud and much more satisfied with the work. Satisfaction trumped pride, he decided.

Every step of the way, Ben found reasons to ask Lily to draw and paint. Impressions of the design work for the carpenters, and paintings of the finished room, often featuring the men who had worked on it. The feedback from those paintings was tremendous. Lily was still unsure about her skills, but she became more willing to give it a go. Each painting became an art lesson as she saw where she needed to do some more study to improve the work.

All in all, the project was pulling the family closer, and everyone was making new friends in the community. The workers were already talking about the community centre, they had been checking in on Ben’s work on the two proposals and there were, as expected, arguments between the designs. One thing all the men and women who were working on the cottage agreed on, was that they were all going to work on the centre, no matter which design was chosen.

Standing outside the cottage, admiring the work, with her arm through Ben’s, Abigail sighed. “You’ve created a whole new industry here in town, you and Carl. Do you know some of these folks are being recruited by construction firms in other towns?”

“I didn’t, it will slow us down a bit, but I’m happy they’re finding paying work.”

“Oh no, none of them are leaving just yet, they’ll finish the cottage, and maybe go earn some money, but they’re coming back to do the centre. That’s what they’re telling me. They’re getting great on the job training.”

Ben looked embarrassed, and because of that, Abigail pulled him down for a big kiss, which made Ben’s ears go red. The banging of hammers went up in pitch as the carpenters suddenly paid more attention to their work.

## Lily's Dream



Lou woke and instantly knew there was a problem. Lily was beside him in his bed, but she was not resting comfortably. Far from it, Lou could see that she was tossing and turning, talking in her sleep. That wasn't something she usually did. Snore, yes. Grunt, groan, throw up, but that was all part of being dead drunk. She was sober, naked and sweating.

Something was wrong and Lou wasn't sure what to do. Sal had told him that she had held his head in her hands, and touched foreheads. That got her into his head. He knew he needed to get into Lily's head. He threw his leg over her and said a hopeful prayer to anything that would listen. He grabbed her head with his hands and instantly he could see what was happening.

She was talking to ghosts, not only talking to them, but losing her self. They were draining her. Lou had no idea who the ghosts were, but Lily knew them. She was apologizing. Apologizing and letting them consume her life. They were going to kill her and she was going to let them.

"No, no, no, not going to happen." Lou more or less head butted Lily in his rush to get to her. "Lily, stop, they're killing you!"

He was with her, in some sort of barn, no, a cottage, a beach, a wood, a snow covered mountain. It kept changing, the location, it shifted like a dream does, but these didn't feel like dreams. They felt like real places. With each change, one of the spectres became a little more solid, it pulled at Lily a bit stronger. Fine, each ghost owned one of the locations.

"Lily, you mustn't let them do this, come away with me!"

She didn't hear Lou, or if she did, she ignored him. Lou tried to grab one of the ghosts, to tear her away from Lily, but his hand closed on nothing. There was a sort of spark, but nothing else. Lily kept talking and getting a bit less real. Lou stopped trying to do something and listened to Lily.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I let you down, I was a shit to you, I hurt you so badly, and I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Lou had never asked Lily about her past. Well not true, he had asked, but never got an answer, except for a feeling that she had never had a long term relationship.

Lou focused on the ghost that had just become more solid, they were in the barn again. "Who are you! Who are you to Lily!" He stood between the ghost and Lily and would not let it touch her. The ghost was solid, it had to go around and Lou wouldn't let it. "Tell me why you're hurting her!"

The ghost seemed to see Lou for the first time, and stared at him. It shook its head and tried to go around. Lou blocked it, then the scene changed and he looked for the next spectre, found it and blocked it. This one saw him, "Hungry, so hungry."

Lily tried to step around Lou, "Here, here I am, I'm sorry, eat, I'm sorry."

Lily bumped Lou and he spun around. He grabbed the thing he could, he grabbed Lily and hugged her tight. The ghosts howled.

Lou walked Lily away from them. They didn't follow, he walked her further, pushed her down to sit on the ground, then spun around. Lou changed to a fox, a dream fox, insubstantial, he was in a dream, he could do this. In that moment he charged, snapping and tearing at the ghosts. Only the one whose location was real was safe, Lou's teeth went right through, but the rest. The rest suffered and when the scene changed, Lou went after the one he hadn't been able to hurt.

He had no idea how long he fought, but he could hear Lily apologizing and offering herself. Thankfully she didn't get up and walk back. Lou fought. He would go on fighting, tearing, ripping, for as long as it took.

The spectres felt like one. They didn't feel like separate beings, which was strange. Each one he tore felt like the others.

On and on he fought, until finally, finally, they dissolved. All of them simply faded away. Lou spun around, worried they would reappear beside Lily but there was nothing. He ran to Lily, changed to human once more and gathered her in his arms. Lifting her to a standing position he let her see that there were no more ghosts. Then he grabbed her head and touched his forehead to her.

He was back in his bed, Lily was waking up. She was confused and panting as if she had run a long way. Lou dropped onto her and pulled the covers up, she was freezing, as if all the warmth had gone from her body. He put his arms around her neck and tangled his legs in hers.

Slowly, agonizingly slowly, she warmed. Lou willed his body heat into her and said nothing. Eventually, Lily stopped shivering, or shaking, Lou wasn't sure which. She stilled and then said "Lou?"

"I'm here Lils, I'm here and so are you."

"What happened, Lou, what... why am I so cold."

"You were in a dream, and there were ghosts that were draining you, they took your warmth, they were taking your life. You kept apologizing and saying they should drain you."

"Lou..."

"Listen, Lily, you've had relationships before right? And they ended badly?"

She nodded.

"Did any of them die?"

"What? No, I hurt them because I chased them away, betrayed their trust, some I punched, kicked, bit. But nobody died, except me maybe, a little bit inside each time."

"So how could they be there in your dream as ghosts? Lils, something else was pretending to be the ghosts, something that knows about your past. All those ghosts felt like the same thing, I think something was attacking through your guilt. Do you understand?"

Lily nodded, “But what? What wants me dead?”

“Not dead, powerless, something is trying to steal your power.”

“Like something wanted my father’s power?”

“Was he attacked like this? Maybe that’s it, maybe that’s what it is.”

Lou rolled off of her, kissed her cheek and said, “Lily, go back to sleep, it’s still hours to dawn. Soon I want you to tell me about your past, you need to put those ghosts to sleep so nothing can use them against you. Do you understand?”

Lily nodded again, “Can you make love to me first? I think it would help.”

Lou smiled and kissed her softly, “Of course my love, of course.”

An owl took off from outside the window. This was Ollie’s cue to report back to Flora.

The next morning, Lily woke and stretched, she felt delicious, she didn’t remember the dream, and the rest of the night had been dreamless and deeply restful. Lou, on the other hand, began to stretch but winced, there was a bite mark on his right shoulder. He kissed Lily, not letting her see his shoulder and slipped out from under the covers to go to the bathroom. Once there he changed and changed back to heal the bite. As he checked it in the mirror, he remembered how he’d got it and grinned, Lily certainly wasn’t trying to chase him away with that bite. He went back to the bedroom and kissed Lily once more, “I’m going to make us breakfast, you hang out here until I call you. We’ll talk later.”

At the same time, Flora was giving Emily a report on the dream. “From what Lou said, the ghosts of her old boyfriends, and girlfriends maybe, were consuming her magic in the dream. Lily felt so guilty about those relationships that she was letting them kill her.”

“The poor girl. Lou went into the dream and fought for her?”

“Sometimes the tricksters surprise you. He seems to really love her.”

“I think it’s mutual, I damn well hope so, he’s the best chance she’s had for years.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean something has been after her father and her for years. Joe and I have been too well guarded I think, or it would have been after our power too.”

“There’s Ollie again, Lily or both of them are coming here to get ready for work. You’d better go put coffee on.”

“Thanks Flora, I’ll visit later.”

## The Memory Key



“Lily, I’m not asking you because I want to know, I’m asking because you need to tell me. Do you understand?”

The argument had travelled into the kitchen from the side yard, Lily trying to walk away from Lou, Lou not letting her go.

“No, I don’t want to live through all my old relationships, why would anyone want to do that? Let the past die.”

“Because it’s a loaded gun aimed right at your head! You need to tell someone, and why not me? I know how they can be used against you.”

“No! Lou, not you, not anyone. Damn it’s my life, I don’t want to share it. Do you understand me?”

“Oh I understand you. All too well.”

Lily threw up her hands and stomped out of the kitchen. Lou glanced over at Emily who was being busy by the sink. Emily shook her head, “Let her be for a while, she’s got a stubborn streak in her and I’m afraid it’s from me. I’ve got a pie in the cupboard, any chance you’d like a slice and a coffee?”

Lou sat down at the table and put his head in his hands, elbows on the table. Emily had to smile, he looked so whipped. “Lou, you have to understand she’s carried that stuff inside her for a very long time, and if it’s ever going to come out, it will be a bit at a time. She thinks she’s a monster but I’d bet dollars to this pie, it’s not a third as bad as she’s made it in her head.”

“I wish she’d tell me, so I could tell her that.”

“You think it’s all therapy and sharing? Like down at the youth centre? You’re both pretty good with the kids, but there’s tar that doesn’t wipe off your shoe. There’s tar that gets deep down in your soul, that hardens there, and no amount of tissues and spray cleaner will get it off. It’s got to melt.”

Lou accepted a slice of pie thanking Emily with a nod, “What melts it?”

“Love. Love that goes beyond what put the tar there in the first place. Love puts it there, or the idea of love, the shallow kind of love that gets broken easily, the kind that hints but doesn’t deliver. What melts that sort of tar is love that doesn’t demand anything, that doesn’t ask anything. Love that sticks around like a dog sticks around even if he’s kicked.”

“Emma we’d call that abuse, and advise leaving.”

“I know you would, Lily just kicked you, are you going?”

Lou swallowed a forkfull of pie and washed it down with a sip of coffee, “I don’t believe I am.”

Emily cut another piece of pie.

In the meantime, Lily had gone on climbing stairs, she wasn't even sure why, but she went all the way up to the attic. For some reason, this was becoming her safe space, well not quite that, but perhaps her comfort space. As she did every time she got there, she started looking around at all the old boxes and chests. There seemed to be an endless supply of them, and they seemed to shift around. She had asked, but nobody admitted to moving them.

She opened random boxes, there had to be something here to explain the place, something more than the old photos and letters they'd found.

She shifted a box, and the glow caught her eye. It was a massive key. There was no way it was going to fit anything in the attic. Not a chance, "Oh come on, what's that, the key to the mystery?"

As she said that, the key shimmered and then slid into the form of a grinning Elias. He winked, and then pointed to an old wardrobe. Lily smiled at his little joke, and then wrenched open the door, which seemed to be stuck. It was empty except for the required two moths who flew out and up into the rafters. Lily looked back at Elias, who was still there, "What? There's supposed to be something here?"

Elias shook his head and pointed at the wardrobe again, making a little humping movement with his hand.

"Behind it? Let's see." Lily took hold of one edge near the wall and heaved, it scraped across the floor, leaving a track in the grime, and as Lily looked behind, she saw a door. With some more pushing and pulling, she got the wardrobe far enough out that she could open the door. She tried it, but it was locked.

She was starting to get angry, and as she turned to look at Elias, he pointed to the wardrobe again. Sure enough, inside, hanging on a nail, was a key.

Lily tried it, and with hardly any ominous creaking, the door swung open. There was light from a grimy window, high up near a peak in the roof. The place smelled dead, dusty, and musty. There was a small table in the middle of the room and an album on the table. With nothing else to look at, Lily picked up the album. When she turned to the first page, she screamed and dropped it.

Having heard that, Lou was up the stairs and in the room before Lily could leave. She tried, but Lou was blocking the door. She stepped to the side but he took her shoulders, "What's wrong, are you OK?"

Lily seemed to collapse, she pointed at the album, "That."

Lou walked to where it had landed on the floor and opened it. "Another album, you should give it to Joe to add to his collection..." Lou had turned to the next page, "Lily is this yours, that's you there beside that guy. Why did this scare you?"

"Because I've never seen it before."

"Oh. You found it here?"

Lily nodded.

Lou turned around and there were a couple of chairs up against the wall, Lily hadn't seen them when she had entered the room, but she wasn't surprised to see them now.

Lou opened the book to the first page and lay it on the table, arranging the two chairs on either side of the book. "So tell me."

Lily started to shake her head, but she couldn't say no. She couldn't leave the room. "Oh shit."

Lou sat quiet while Lily fought for a moment, and then gave up. She sat down and looked at the first page. "That was my first year of University, I was in residence. That fellow was a lovely boy, he was a virgin when I met him, but I bedded him. I'd had a couple of experiences, nothing particularly romantic, just your drunken hook up. Him I liked a lot, and he was kind, and gentle, and patient.

"I used him. I would go out prowling and if I didn't pick some guy up, I'd go visit him. I did that with a couple of boys and eventually they all went away, hurt. I didn't care."

Lily turned the page, knowing what would be there, "And that was the fellow who lived next door, we used each other I guess, I'd call him up at all hours when I was horny and there was nobody else there. It was a kind of an agreement but we never talked about it. He had a girlfriend so there was never any sort of feeling that we'd get together in the end, and we didn't."

Lily flipped a few pages, "These are all guys I bedded and moved on to the next one. Oh and a couple of women as well, I wasn't picky. I never bothered explaining anything to any of them, just stopped calling.

"There he is. This was the first guy I tried to have a serious relationship with. It was awful, I made him angry, we fought all the time. We'd be driving in his car and he would let go the steering wheel, as if he wanted us to crash. Yet he stuck around, like he was obliged to do it. He had asked me to stop whoring around and I tried, I really tried. We tortured each other for a couple of years and then he couldn't take it any more, he left me to go to another school.

Lily was getting more calm. Lou dared to speak, "It sounds like you took as much shit as you gave."

Lily gave him a dirty look. "It could have worked, I tried but I just kept pushing him, making him angry. Look, I was an asshole, plain and simple. I cheated on everyone, every single one. Mostly because I could, and I couldn't see why not."

Lou looked at the book again. Lily turned the page, "Sure, of course, this is the first guy I tried to live with. He was just too good for me. And yet I loved him with all my heart, and I think he loved me too. He was in grad school doing a masters, and I was working for the fine art department as a model, doing extra courses in psychology as well as finishing my science degree. Thinking back on it, I wonder if that was it? He was just so much smarter than I was, he was doing a fine art post grad degree and I was just a model."

Lou looked up at her, Lily shook her head, “No, he never threw that in my face, he was good to me, always put me first, let me go running, let me play volleyball. That’s where I met him, playing volleyball. Look, he never once, ever, said anything about my just drifting along, not deciding to do something with my life. We talked about having kids for fuck’s sake! But something caused me to shut down. He would try to reach me and I would just walk away, it got bad. One day he pushed my buttons and I lost it, I threw a knife at him and thankfully I missed, but that was it. I walked out.”

“You would have hit him next time?”

“I know I would have, and he would have stayed until I did it. I loved him but there is something wrong inside me.”

“You were young, Lily, you were learning how to do that stuff, living together.”

“Well I tried a couple more times and it never worked out. So I gave up on the idea. Ironic that I got a job fixing up other people, when I’m such a mess.”

“Why, Lily?”

“Why what? Why am I incapable of staying with anyone? I don’t know, you figure it out. My mother couldn’t stay with me. She left because of me! There, is that cliché enough for you? Poor little kid missing her mom.”

“That’s a little simple.”

“Why not. I like simple. So how about I’m broken. I can’t let go of perfect, and when something isn’t perfect, I smash it to pieces. A relationship has to be perfect, and I had one that was almost, but I smashed it anyway.”

“If you were, are, such an asshole, why did you let those ghosts almost drain the life from you. Why would you care about them if they were your old relationships?”

“I don’t know! Guilt maybe? You’re so smart, why don’t you tell me.”

Lou sat quietly, but Lily seemed to have said all she was going to say. She got up to go back downstairs and Lou picked up the book to take it with them.

“No, leave it here, I’m going to close and lock this door. The damned thing can go back where it came from.”

## The Kidnapping



Emily tapped lightly on Ben's door. She had a couple cups of coffee and some tea biscuits. It was late morning and time for Ben and Abigail to be up and about.

"Yes, come in," came a groggy voice. Emily opened the door and looked at her son in bed. He looked sleepy and he was alone.

"Abby not here?"

"She's just gone out to the bathroom, she'll be back in a moment. Thanks for the coffee mom, I'll take it." Ben did, and put it on the night table.

"OK son, it's mid morning, I'll make you both some breakfast when you get up."

Ben was still just a bit embarrassed that his mother knew he was having sex with a woman. It was stupid, he was a grown man with a grown daughter but even so, you never outgrow a mother.

For her part, Emily closed the door and grinned. She flapped her hands at Joe who had snuck up the stairs to listen in. "Get away with you old man, there's nothing to see here," she hissed, but then she looked at the bathroom door. It was open and Abigail was not there.

Emily looked at Ben, and the both of them looked at the open door just down the hall, the one that led to the meadow. They walked quietly to it, and saw that the meadow door was open too. Not only that, but the belt from Ben's bathrobe was half torn away and lying just outside the door.

"Get your stick, Ben, and my shield, I don't like this, I'm going to go call but I'd feel better if we were armed."

"I'll get your butcher's knife too."

Emily stepped through the door after making sure it was wedged open. She knew that once in, no sound would penetrate back to the house, so she opened her mouth and yelled. She had a yodel that could be heard a kilometre or two away. She listened carefully, but there was no sound in return. She turned in another direction and yelled again. Nothing, no matter which direction she faced. Just silence, as if there was nobody here. Yet she could feel Abigail, she was somewhere.

Joe went downstairs, got their weapons and Lily was just outside the kitchen, sketching. She saw Joe gather up Emily's shield and a knife. She didn't think much of it, the grandparents often practised together, so she went back to her sketch.

Ten minutes later, Lily became aware that there was no noise coming from inside or outside the house. She became curious, put her canvas aside and picked up the triangle she had been using as an easel. Why she did that she couldn't have said, but she carried it into the house. There was nobody downstairs and when she got to the second floor she saw the open doors and the half-broken bathrobe tie. It didn't take much to figure out what was happening.

Lily couldn't see her grandparents from the door, and she had heard Carl's warning about going too far in, as well as Abigail's story of the missing kids. She called up her sword and stepped through. As she

did, she heard the fight. Running fast, Lily took off in the direction of the noise, but it didn't seem to be getting any closer. She caught a hint of sound from another direction and took off toward that. Again, she couldn't have told anyone why, but after running full out for what seemed like almost an hour, it might have been a few minutes, she heard the fight for real.

Breaking through some brush, she came across a frightening scene. Abigail was unconscious and half naked on the ground. A massive beast, half visible was standing above her, and her grandparents were fighting. They were fighting and losing.

Their weapons had turned into some sort of magical force projectors, which was a good thing, because they had obviously tried hand to hand and been badly hurt. The beast was hurling balls of something, some sort of energy, at them and Emily was deflecting them with the shield, Joe was returning blasts from his cane. The two of them were barely holding their own, but they showed no signs of giving up or running.

Somehow Lily knew that this thing would kill them, and she took a step forward to join the fight. Looking down, she noticed her metal tent in her hand, and threw it to the ground, willing it to grow, which it did. When it had assembled itself, a matter of seconds, Lily did something she had no idea she could do, she waved her hand and flicked her grandparents into the tent. As the door slammed shut, Lily tried to do the same thing to Abigail, but the beast had noticed her.

“Oh, delicious, I wanted the one and I've got the other. So nice, fortune is smiling on me today, my debts will be paid.”

Lily was confused, the beast, if it was the same one that had been attacking her, had never spoken before. No matter, she had to get Abigail to safety. Lily screamed and the brush waved, smaller trees bent and snapped, and the beast was blown back a few metres. Abigail was uncovered and Lily waved her into the tent.

The beast roared in anger and sent a blast toward that pyramidal metal structure, but it simply bounced off. Seeing that, Lily grinned, they were safe and now it was just the beast and her. Lily opened her other hand and she had a sword in each, hers and Lou's, that was comforting, to have Lou's sword with her. The beast roared again and sent a blast toward Lily, who simply swatted it away with her sword.

Back in Everwood, Lou staggered. Something, Lily! She had borrowed some of his power. He looked at Sally, said “Blankets” and changed. Sally ran for the bedroom and collected several blankets which she threw over the fox that was Lou now. He was panting, and his temperature was dropping fast. Something was pulling power from him. Sally turned up the thermostat and threw more blankets over him, then stripped, grabbed the sugar bowl, and climbed in with him. Giving him what help she could. She shivered as she tried to warm him, and she fed small bits of sugar to him, which seemed to help. Whatever it was, she hoped it would be over before her friend was drained.

The beast paused, “Stupid girl, you can't beat me, I'm your mother, don't you recognize me?”

Lily looked, but said nothing.

“I’m sorry sweetheart, but I have debts to pay, you were supposed to help me when you were born, but then I wanted your father, but I got neither of you. Now the debts have come due so you will have to give me what I should have had so long ago.”

Having learned her lesson not very long ago, Lily just laughed, “You’ve made a serious mistake this time. I don’t remember what my mother looked like, you idiot. Even so, even if you are my mother, you’ve just lost any connection with me. I didn’t drive my mother away, I didn’t drive you away but now I’ll do just that. I’ve beaten you before and I’ll do it again.”

Inside the tent, Emily had tended to Abigail and the Mayor was resting, Joe had been watching through a window and warned his wife that Lily was up against it. “She’s just pissed the thing off big time, I don’t know if she can win this.”

Emily glanced over, “She’s so much stronger than she thinks, but she’s afraid of losing.”

Joe nodded, “She doesn’t have enough skin in the game. She doesn’t care what happens to her and we’re safe in here with the Mayor. Em, she doesn’t care if she survives or not.”

Emily nodded and bit her lip as the beast hammered Lily with a massive burst of energy. Lily bent into it, deflecting it with her swords.

“No, she’s holding her own, someone is helping, Joe. That’s Lou’s sword in her left hand, she’s using him! Does she know she can drain him?”

“Does she know he’ll let her?”

“Joe, we can’t let her do this, we have to get out there. We’ve had enough life and she hasn’t had any yet. Let’s go.”

Joe shook his head, “She took away the door, Em, we can’t get out.”

“Damnit, how do we kick Lou out of that sword and put ourselves into it.”

“We can’t, we can’t, I’ve been trying.”

Emily wailed, she was going to lose her granddaughter. The beast was a match for her, and Lily had lost too much of her stubborn pride to dig deep enough. Of all the poor timing, she had only learned half the lesson.

The beast could feel Lily’s weakness. It laughed, “I really am your mother, child and now I’m going to take you back inside myself. Thank you for becoming powerful enough to be worthwhile. After you I’m going to...”

The thing never finished the sentence, a loud whirring sound grew and grew. Just as the beast looked up, a metal insect slammed into its head, rocking it back. The beast roared and grabbed at the bug, but it avoided the claws and hit the beast again. This time the creature backhanded the bug aside long

enough to throw a loop of energy around Lily and start draining her life. “Your toys are nothing, and I know the ways in, girl. I have you and I’m going to finish the job. Oh delicious, if I’d known you had this much magic I would have taken you with me.”

Lily went down onto one knee, she felt despair, she had failed, she had always failed. But something kept her from giving up, Lou, she thought of Lou and she hung on tight. There was a core that the beast could not get to, and Lily thought she knew what that was. It was a chance for happiness, it was Lou.

Lily hung on, and the beast screamed in rage. The impasse lasted long enough for the bug to come flying back and hit it once more. The beast looked up and saw Ben. He had followed the rest of the family into the meadow and sent the bug ahead to find them. As he arrived, he didn’t see a beast. “Shen? No! You can’t be Shen, she would never use magic. It’s a poor trick, monster.”

Lily, distracted by the arrival of her father, worried that he couldn’t defend himself, lost focus and the beast started to drain the rest of her life. “You wait there, husband of mine, I’ll just finish our whelp and be back for whatever poor dregs you have in you.

Ben’s heart sank, this was Shen. “You would kill your daughter?”

Shen ignored him, she was pulling the life from Lily as hard as she could. Ben called the bug back to himself, and whispered in it’s ear. The bug flew up high into the air and became a massive light. Ben looked from the bug to his wife and stretched out a hand, fingers spread.

The light struck. It was blinding and the beast howled in pain, trapped and immobile. Ben started to close his hand.

As the beast was caught, Lily fainted and the door to the cabin snapped open. Emily, Joe and Abigail, who had recovered consciousness, tumbled out. Shen was screaming, and Ben, a terrible look on his face was still closing his hand. Abigail walked to him and put her hand on his arm. Ben never looked away from Shen but he stopped squeezing.

Abigail nodded, turned to Shen and with something like a look of kindness on her face, spread her arms and then closed them with a loud clap. The monster was gone, simply gone.

## Into the Past



As Shen disappeared, Elias appeared to everyone. He turned to Abigail and smiled. Abigail nodded and Elias too, disappeared.

Emily knelt by Lily and put her hands on her, Joe put his hand on Emily's shoulder and Lily began to recover. Bit by bit, she woke and regained her strength.

In Everwood, Sally was relieved to feel Lou get a bit warmer. "Lou! Lou, change! Change damn you, I'm freezing to death here!"

The wolf snorted and shifted into a human shape. A warm, human shape.

"Eww, that's something I'm not going to forget for a while," Sally untangled herself from Lou's arms and legs and shivered. Lou in turn, wrapped himself around Sally to warm her up enough to get her into a bathtub.

Lily came fully awake and looked with confusion at her family. "What is going on? Dad are you all right?"

Emily filled her granddaughter in on the end of the fight, and on Abigail banishing Shen.

"That was really my mother?"

"I'm afraid so, I had no idea she had any magic. She hid it well."

Lily reached for her father's hand. Then she looked at Abigail, "You banished her?"

"Put her into the past, with Elias."

"Dad, what's going on?"

"Let's get back into the cottage and I'll tell you some things I should have told you years ago."

Once they were sitting around the kitchen table with coffee and breakfast, Ben looked at his family. Abigail looked back with a certain interest, she was as confused as Lily, that Ben had power.

"Your grandparents and I had a business back in the day, Lily, this was before you were born. We were what you might call trouble-shooters."

"Just trouble is more like," said Joe, but Emily gave him a look and he stopped talking.

"We were mercenaries, we hired out to do certain jobs that ordinary people couldn't do. Some of it included your grandparents performing a bit of magic. I usually did the planning, got the jobs and all that, but I'd do some magic too."

“But mom...”

“Shen was someone I met in school, Lily, and years later we got back in touch. I thought she knew nothing about the magic. We got married and then you came along. We shut down the business and I tried to make a living with architecture. Mom and Dad retired and had a small house with a garden.

The thing is, as you started to grow up, you displayed some magic. Shen was upset, and I thought she was afraid of you, of the magic. Eventually she left us and that’s when Mom and Dad sold the house and moved in with us, to help raise you.”

“But that thing?”

“Shen loved you, I’m sure of it, she told us she should have absorbed your magic when you were a baby, but she didn’t, she left. She didn’t know I had any power, or if she did, it wasn’t worth it to kill me. Maybe she left me around to look after you. Whatever the reason, she left because she loved you.”

“That’s hard to believe.”

“Lily, I lived with you both and I’m sure she did. Somehow though, she’s gone further into debt in the magical world and when we both moved here the magic came roaring back, and she knew she could take it from us.”

Emily touched Lily’s arm, “She must have left, and left your father to raise you, who else would have attacked him earlier, when he fought her off, not knowing who she was.”

Ben turned and reached for Abigail’s hand, “I didn’t know she had you, and I didn’t know you could do that.”

Abigail looked fondly at Ben, “Did you mind? She’s your wife, I’m sorry I’ve sent her back.”

“She’s not my wife any more... what do you mean, back?”

“I sent her to Elias’ time, and gave her power to him. She no longer has any magic, or any knowledge she ever had any. Whatever had a grip on her can’t find her now.”

Ben hugged Abigail tightly, “Thank you Abby. Whatever she became, she was my wife and I loved her.”

Joe took out his stick, “So these things?”

Abigail nodded, “Elias was a damned good blacksmith, and he had all Shen’s power plus his own, I suspect he made those and hid them in the house, so you could find them and use them.”

“OK that’s starting to hurt my head.”

Ben looked from Joe to Abigail, “How did you get the power to do that, to send her back?”

Emily raised her eyebrows as Abigail looked at her. “I don’t know how this is going to sound to you, Ben, but I’ve been around here for a long time. You know this land is magical, well I’ve soaked up a lot of it. It let me live a long life, but I also learned to manipulate time. I’m afraid I’m a bit older than you. Do you mind?”

Ben just kissed her.

The family turned to their breakfast, and spoke about ordinary things. About half an hour later, Lou knocked on the door. Lily started, “Lou! Are you all right? I felt you.”

“You did more than feel me, you damned near drained me, but I’m fine Lils, and so is Sally.”

“Sally?”

“She kept me warm, and then I had to warm her up, but she’d good now, although I’d avoid her for a day or two if I were you.”

“Why, I want to thank her.”

“Well the last thing she said to me was that she wants to remove your head from your shoulders for trying to kill me. She’s a bit angry with you.”

“But I didn’t know...”

“I explained, just let her cool down a bit, or warm up again, or whatever.”

Emily dropped a plate of eggs and bacon and a coffee in front of Lou, and he smiled thanks before shovelling it in. “Hungry,” was all he said.

Lily was quiet, but laid her head on Lou’s shoulder, not minding the up and down motion as he ate.

Joe looked around the table and counted. “Emma, have you noticed that this table now has six places?”

“And?”

“It only had four when we moved here.”

“Senile old man, it’s always had six.”

“Don’t try to gaslight me woman, I can count.”

“Next thing you’re going to tell me the kitchen has got bigger.”

Joe looked like he was going to go get a tape measure.

Lily spent the rest of the day outside on the porch with Lou. Ben walked Abigail in to town so she could go to work, and Joe retired to his shed while Emily caught Flora up on the morning's events.

The next day, Lily was in the attic, facing the wardrobe. She took the key from the hook and pulled the cabinet out from the door to the memory room, as she called it to herself.

She unlocked the door and went in to find a chair at the table and a book lying open. Lily looked and saw a photo of Shen and Elias. They looked happy, the cabin was smaller, but she could tell it was the same place, in front of the lake.

As she flipped through the book, there were photos of children, more children, proud additions to the cabin, and yet more children. Sometimes there were others in the photos, probably the townsfolk from Everwood, come for picnics and contests. Lily smiled to see that her mother seemed to be happy, there was no sign of troubles.

The kids grew up, and then some of them were gone from the photos, off to found their own families, no doubt. Lily wondered if one of those branches were the ancestors of her own side of the Turners. She rather hoped they were.

## The Great Gathering



Ben had declared a picnic for the town. The renovations were done and he wanted to show them off to those who had worked on the cottage and to their families. Lily had told her father about the old gatherings and Ben had been delighted. The day started out with a mid-morning pot luck lunch. The kids ran about, and the adults drowsed, having over-eaten as is required at such an event. A few of the older teens kept an eye on the kids so that none of them got too far into the lake, and Fishcake O'Malley was there in his boat. He could get to a kid in trouble with a surprising turn of speed.

Later in the afternoon, after the naps, after the gossip, there were games. Three legged races, potato sacks, spoon and egg, toss the pumpkins, and a dozen more that Ben had barely heard of. It seemed the locals never let go of any sort of entertainment. There wasn't a smartphone in sight for the whole day.

After an exciting set of contests, with numerous silly prizes being awarded, it was time to get down to the serious event, the talent show. Again, the locals surprised Ben and the family, with skits, recitations, and music. The best were the dances, everything from clogging to ballet.

Lou shocked Lily by putting on a brilliant display of yodelling, although she did think that it sounded a bit like the howling of a fox or three. Joe showed off his harmonica skills, Emily her flower arrangements, and Ben, he showed off his renovations.

There was even an art show, with the local painters guild lining up the easels for everyone to inspect. The guild president wandered over to Lily with a sort of grin on his face, "Lily, there's an easel that doesn't have anything to display. It's ruining the whole show, would you do us a great favour and put one of your paintings up please."

"But I don't have anything to display."

"Well, I happen to have noticed an illustration in your father's office that would do splendidly."

"It's just an artist's impression of some of his drawings."

"And it's brilliant, do you mind? I took the liberty of bringing it downstairs, it's over there by the wall."

Lily was flustered, but also just a bit flattered. "Well, if you think it's good enough."

The fellow smiled and bowed to Lily, "Of course it is."

Once it was displayed, Lily had to admit to herself it looked pretty good beside the other artwork, a lot of which was very good indeed. As it turned out, Lily took the "best newcomer" ribbon, which pleased her to no end.

As the events began to wind down, Ben noticed many people looking as if they expected something else. With some thought, and the hint of a few people looking behind bushes near the house, he figured it out.

"Folks, thank you all for coming, we appreciate it, and I hope you all had a good time today. I certainly did. Now, before we call an end to the festivities, I'd like to announce one last contest. You all know about the riddle of the treasure I imagine, if not, my father Joe will tell you. At this time I would like to

announce a three hour hunt for the treasure. You may look in the house, but only in groups of at least three if you enter the meadow. You can search around the grounds, in the lake, but with supervision from Captain O'Malley and the lifeguards. You can look in the sheds, and in the woods, but only out to 100 metres. If you dig a hole, make sure you don't mess up my mother Emily's gardens or you will answer to her. I'm sure she has turned over every inch of the gardens and I assure you she has found no treasure chests. Are the rules clear? If you find the treasure there will be a reward!"

There was a roar of approval. "Very well, let the hunt begin!"

There were excited voices and laughter, the townsfolk scattered all over the property and many of them ran into the house.

One group of teens made their way up to the attic. In a dusty corner, covered in cobwebs and behind a trunk, they found a map. Shrieking like banshees, they unfolded it and saw that it was indeed a map to the treasure, complete with a big red X.

Racing downstairs, they began reading it off, keeping their voices down so as not to give away their secret, they took off into the woods where they weren't heard from for two hours.

Since the cottage was surrounded by a vast forest, Lily asked Lou to patrol about a hundred metres out so that nobody got lost. As he was loping along, he spotted the teens sprinting from place to place, always close to the cottage, but out of sight. They didn't know it, but the map was leading them on a huge circle around the lake. On and on they ran, until, two hours later, they came upon another group of teens, from a different school, who had dug a massive hole beside the lake.

As they approached the side of the hole, they realized that it was too deep for that group to get out. Not only that, but the ground water was coming in and the kids were shivering in the wet. Forgetting the map, the teens quickly grabbed branches and wild grape vines and threw them into the hole. After a bit of flailing around, the group was rescued. The entire bunch lay down on the beach to warm up, and several couples formed during the rambling discussions that happen on a beach. At some point, the map followers realized that the hole was right where the X was, and they had gone in a circle. Years later, some of the teens who had paired up realized they had indeed found their treasure.



The lifeguards ended up being asked by several teens to lead an expedition to the centre of the lake. Fishcake advised against it, “That kraken has surely woken up by this time of the year. You really don’t want to meet up with him.”

Curiously, the teens believed Fishcake that the treasure was at the centre of the lake, but they didn’t believe him that there was a kraken. The Captain just shrugged, and rowed the group out into the lake. He had several sets of snorkels and masks, and he made sure that they all knew how to dive. The kid who didn’t stay in the boat.

The lifeguards led the way down into the murky waters of the lake, they swam here and there, barely seeing the rocks and mud of the bottom. After several dives up and down for air, the Captain counted one less than there should be. He told the divers and they instantly went down to look. As they got there, the four would-be rescuers were grabbed by tentacles. They squirmed, but were soon stuffed into a cave that was, somehow, filled with air. There they found the missing diver. Looking back to the entrance, they found a tentacle waving at them, as if to reassure them that they were fine, and to warn them that they weren’t coming back out that way.

Back on the surface, another tentacle waved at Fishcake and he sighed in relief. He was old friends with the kraken.

The group looked around the cave, which was dimly lit by some sort of phosphorescence, and they noticed a tunnel. With much excitement, and a conviction that they would find the treasure, they started down that tunnel. In it, they found strange fish that were walking on their flippers. The fish nodded to the kids and continued on to the lake.

Further down the tunnel, strange floating lights appeared and seemed to lead the kids on. It was a good half an hour after that, the tunnel sloped upward, and then exited in the woods near the lake. Disappointed, the kids sat down on some fallen logs to rest and try to recover their mood. As they did, one of them happened to scratch with his heel in the dirt, and discovered a fungus. Julie, who was training to be a chef, pounced on the truffle. “Oh my goodness, you guys just wait until I make you some pudding with this little beauty.”

As Fishcake grounded his rowboat near the patch of oak, he heard that treasure being discovered, and smiled.

All over the property and in the house, similar groups of hunters were discovering their own treasures, but nobody found a box of gold. As they reported in and showed Ben and Emily their finds, Emily smiled. “I told you and Joe that a treasure like this is never a trunk filled with gold. We’ve found several of the real treasures around here. You’ve found Abigail and Lily has found Lou. All of us have found ourselves being a family once more.”

Ben hugged his mother and turned to the next group, “Yes kids, you can keep that trunk full of toys, be nice and share them with each other.”

“Oh we’re going to take it to our clubhouse Mr. Turner, thank you very much.”

## Many Endings



Lily was thinking that maybe she would take some art lessons. She had developed a new enthusiasm for her work at the youth centre, but she felt another urge. To paint for real, not just for therapy with the kids. Her work for her father and the art contest had inspired her.

She was poking around in the attic once more, this time to see if she could find any of the first Isabelle's paintings. The ones that were supposed to be so good.

She dragged a trunk across the floor and, yes indeed, that glint was a gilded frame. Leaning it out away from the wall, Lily realized it was a painting. She gasped as she got it into the middle of the room where she could see it. It was breathtaking, a landscape she felt she could walk right into. Looking at the bottom she saw Isabelle's signature. No wonder this woman caused other artists to quit. How could anyone match this?

And yet, after all that had happened, after the fights with her mother, Lily was inspired. Here was something to work toward, something worthwhile.

Looking around the attic, Lily found several other paintings, just as she had expected to find them. She was getting used to this space, it was like the 'infinite room of stuff you want'. Well maybe she would make up a better title for the place, but it would do for now.

Carrying six of the paintings downstairs, she lined them up against the wall in the library. Joe came into the room and said "Hey, that one there, I saw it in one of the photographs, it used to go on that wall."

Sure enough, Lily saw a nail in the wall and the space was perfect, so she hung the painting. Lily stood for a long time in the centre of the room, looking at the one she'd hung and the others, leaning against the bookshelves. Joe watched her devouring the works, "It's too bad you can't talk to Isabelle about these. I bet she'd have a lot of advice."

Lily nodded in a distracted way, she was beginning to see something, a hint of how Isabelle constructed the paintings. The undercoat there, a buildup of background, the brush strokes. "Sorry Grampa, what?"

"I said it's too bad you can't talk to Isabelle about how she did these."

"Grampa, you're a genius!" and Lily was running for the stairs.

Once back in the attic, she grabbed the keys from the wardrobe and unlocked the door to the memories. As she went in, there was Isabelle, standing before an easel, brush in her hand. She looked up as Lily entered and said, "I've been waiting for you, child. It's about time someone came to learn from me. Shall we get started? There's a smock over there on the hook."

Joe stood at the top of the stair, looking across the room, at the lesson. He went back down to the kitchen, "Emma, you'll need to make some sandwiches and coffee for Lily, she's taking lessons from Isabelle and I suspect she'll be there for a couple of days."

"Good. The girl needs to get working on her painting. She needs something concrete to root her into the world."

"Not like us eh? Off to any place we could get to."

"And what did it ever get us?"

“An amazing family and a lot of love?”

“Besides that you old fool.”

Joe smiled to himself and wandered out to his shed to talk to Ollie.

Several days later, Lily came down from the attic with a dreamy look on her face. A shower, a nap, and she was in her painting shed, inviting Lou to come for a visit. “I know I’ve been out of touch for a couple of days, I’ve been studying painting. Do you want to come and model for me?”

“What? No I like you for more than your body, but I could really use your body right about now.”

“To paint, you goofball, to paint. Yes we’ll go to a meeting later this afternoon, but for now, will you come?”

“Both, I have an idea for a painting of a man with his fox.”

Back in the house, Abigail was in Ben’s office with a proposal. “The committee chose the traditional design. I have to admit I liked the modern better, I wonder if we can incorporate some of both?”

“I’m glad they chose the traditional Abi, I think I can stretch myself on that one. But I suspect we can put some of the more modern in there for you, without it looking like a big goiter.”

“Good, now this other thing. Ben I’d like to become partners with you.”

“As in marriage?”

“Well, sure, but I meant business partners... You really want to get married?”

“Do you?”

“OK forget that for now, I’d like to become partners in a design firm, you’d be in charge of course, but I might be able to help out, I still remember how to draft.”

“You’re serious?”

“Sure, I know where we can find a cheap office, I happen to own a building with the top floor vacant. Lots of big windows for great light.”

“Abi I don’t have much money.”

“Ben, sweetheart, I do. I own half the rental spaces in town and after the number of years I’ve been alive, not to be rich would be the surprising thing. Like I said, there’s a space that is rent free, and I’ll be funding any other expenses.”

“Uh, what would I contribute?”

“Your skills, idiot, your skills. You’ve developed quite a reputation in this area, I suspect we’ll be very busy, or rather you will. I plan to remain Mayor even after we get married. Is that OK with you, husband?”

Ben grinned and dropped down on one knee, “I do.”

Abigail nodded, unrolled some blueprints and spread them out. “Do you think you could talk Lily into doing an artist’s impression of the new community centre?”

“We’d have to pay her.”

“Of course, whatever they’re paying in the big city these days, we have to give her a fair wage to keep her here.”

“Of course.”

Time passes, as it always does. Lily had Lou, Ben had Abigail, and Joe and Emily had each other as well as Ollie and Flora. Ben held yearly gatherings at the cottage, contests and the treasure hunt at the end of the day. The town looked forward to the event each year, and nobody was disappointed they never found the gold. The Turners had found their treasure, certainly.

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