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Elsie's Secret

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Honors Thesis

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Chapter One

Elsie woke up to the sound of birds chirping. She got out of bed, went over to her bedroom window and opened it. The sun was shining bright today and there was not a cloud in sight. Feeling hungry, Elsie ran into the kitchen where her mom was making breakfast.

“I made your favorite breakfast Elsie,” said her mom as she handed her a plate with bread, butter and honey. She also placed a glass of milk on the table next to Elsie. “Are you excited for school today Elsie?”

“Yes. It’s going to be the best day ever! We finally have art class”. Art was one of Elsie’s favorite subjects, especially painting. They didn’t have many art classes in school, for reasons unknown to Elsie.

“Well make sure you pay attention in the other subjects as well. I know you don’t like arithmetic but we all had to learn it once. Now go and get dressed. I’ve laid some clothes out for you on your bed”.

“Ok Mama”. Elsie got dressed and hurried out the door. She made it about two steps, when her mom ran out behind her.

“Elsie you forgot your schoolbag”, said her mother, out of breath. She handed Elsie the bag, kissed her on the head, and headed back inside the house. The school was only a ten-minute walk away, so Elsie usually walked there by herself.

On her way, Elsie saw a field of flowers. They were vibrantly colored and covered with bees and butterflies. *I must stop and smell them. They look so pretty*, thought Elsie. As she walked into the field, she saw something fluttering in the distance on one of the flowers. At first

she thought it might be a butterfly but it seemed much too large. It had intricate, almost transparent wings that glimmered in the sunlight. It looked like a tiny person with wings. But when Elsie blinked, it was gone. *Could it be a fairy?* Elsie thought.

The last person she had heard talk about fairies or anything magical was her grandmother. Her grandmother had described fairies and tiny creatures that looked like people with wings. What she saw or thought she saw definitely matched her grandmother's description. She often wondered what her grandmother was up to. She had not seen her grandmother in four years. When Elsie was four years old, her grandmother left the town and they had not seen her since then. Her parents told her that she had left for a long adventure, but as Elsie got older she started to think that they were hiding something from her. Why would she leave? And with no letters or contact since then?

Lost in her thoughts, Elsie forgot for a moment that she was on her way to school. When she finally realized, she ran to the schoolhouse hoping she wouldn't be late. Her teacher was strict about coming to class right on time. Fortunately for Elsie, she arrived in the classroom just as the class was starting. Arithmetic was the first subject they would be studying today anyway and Elsie really would rather miss it. *Arithmetic is so boring*, thought Elsie. *I already know how to count.*

Elsie could not pay attention in class. She always had trouble focusing in arithmetic, but today was especially hard because of what had happened earlier in the field of flowers. All she could think about was the stories that her grandmother had told her. She daydreamed about fairies and nymphs and fields full of the most unbelievable flowers. She remembers her grandmother telling her about crystal blue waters where the nymphs of the sea swam with

dolphins. Magnificent forests with the tallest trees and sparkling rivers. How could she possibly focus on math when she had beautiful images running through her head?

Elsie's teacher, Mrs. Euphelia started to notice Elsie's lack of concentration. "Elsie! Are you paying attention?"

"What...oh...Yes Mrs. Euphelia", Elsie stumbled over her words. Thankfully for Elsie, her teacher ended the first lesson and they were to move on to art. Elsie's teacher, Mrs. Euphelia walked over to a cupboard by the window and pulled out large pieces of paper from the bottom shelf. She placed the paper on each student's desk and walked back to the cupboard.

"I want everyone to form a line by the cupboard so I can hand you a jar for water and a paint brush." Mrs. Euphelia handed a small clay jar and a brown wooden paint brush to every student. "Once you have your jar, head over to the sink and fill it with water. Then take everything back to your desks and I will bring you the paint". After every student had their jar and paint brush, Mrs. Euphelia opened a drawer below the cupboard where she kept pans of watercolor paint. Each pan had eight colors: red, blue, yellow, green, orange, purple, black and white. She placed a paint pan on every desk. "I want you to paint something that makes you happy", said Mrs. Euphelia. "At the end of class we will go around the room and share what we created".

Elsie did not have to think hard about what she was going to paint. With all that day dreaming about fairies and other creatures from her grandmother's stories, what else would she paint? She started with a field of flowers, using every color paint there was. Unsatisfied with the colors in the pan, Elsie began mixing colors together to create her own. She wanted to use as many colors possible to paint her flowers. She then painted fairies with delicate wings, flying around the flowers. She decided to paint the fairies in different colors, as she couldn't quite

decide what colors they were and if they were all different. Her final touch was to paint the nymphs that her grandmother told her about. Her grandmother had told her a lot more about nymphs than fairies. She had said they were the most beautiful people in existence. They were very similar to humans in size and not that different in appearance. The female nymphs had long flowing hair and wore colorful dresses, and had different types of flowers in their hair- roses, daisies, tulips, you name it. The male nymphs had bare chests and wore pants made of moss. They too wore flowers in their hair. Elsie also decided to paint birds on their arms, as she remembered her grandmother telling her that nymphs could speak to animals and understand them. Elsie was extremely pleased with her work and excited to share it with Mrs. Euphelia and the class. It was the best painting she had ever made.

Mrs. Euphelia was walking around the classroom when she stopped at Elsie's desk. "Can I see your painting Elsie?", asked Mrs. Euphelia.

"Sure", said Elsie.

"I am going to go show your painting to the principal" Mrs. Euphelia said.

Elsie thought there was something strange with Mrs. Euphelia's voice. She did not have a chance to see her facial expression as Mrs. Euphelia took Elsie's painting off the desk and headed out of the classroom. Elsie felt quite proud of her painting. She must had done a great job if Mrs. Euphelia was going to show it to the principal. Elsie waited patiently at her desk for Mrs. Euphelia to return. She couldn't help wondering about Mrs. Euphelia's strange sounding voice. Maybe she was just surprised at how good her painting was.

Mrs. Euphelia walked into the classroom five minutes later. "Elsie would you go down to the principal's office please."

Was my painting really that good, thought Elsie as she skipped down the hall with a huge smile on her face. When she arrived at the front office she was told to have a seat on the bench outside the principal's office and wait. After a few minutes, the door opened and a deep voice invited her to come in. The principal, Mr. Greeves was a tall, plump man with a big bushy red beard. Elsie felt tiny standing next to him and was relieved when he asked her to sit down. He had a warm look in his eyes and Elsie thought *it must be good news*.

"Sit down Elsie, I want to discuss this painting you made. Would you mind telling me why you decided to paint what you did?"

"Mrs. Euphelia asked us to paint something that makes us happy. I was thinking about my grandmother and all of the wonderful stories she used to tell me", said Elsie.

"And Elsie would you mind telling me what these creatures are that you painted?", asked Mr. Greeves.

"They are fairies and nymphs Mr. Greeves", answered Elsie.

"Elsie are you aware that all things magical are banned in this town?"

"Yes sir", Elsie responded quietly. "But I... it's just a pretty painting.

"Very well. I would like you take this letter straight to your parents and you can have the rest of the school day off". Mr. Greeves handed her an envelope.

Elsie notice he had a sad look in his eyes. She walked out the door feeling very confused. Why had he given her the rest of the day off and what was in the letter that she had to take to her parents? Was she in trouble for painting a picture? Anxious to know what was in the letter, she ran home to give the letter to her mother. When she got to her house, her mother was hanging laundry out to dry. She was very surprised to see Elsie home this early.

“Elsie what are you doing home so early? Your school doesn’t get out for another three hours”. Elsie said nothing and handed her mother the envelope. Her mother read the letter in silence with a concerned look upon her face. “Oh Elsie, it says in this letter that you are not to return to school and that I am to home-school you from now on. Your teacher will stop by tomorrow with the books and material we are to use and will check in every week to make sure you are learning the correct things”.

“Are you mad Mama?” asked Elsie timidly.

“Of course not Elsie. I will talk to your father and see if you can be let back into school. One painting and they kick you out of school? This town is silly with their banning of magic”.

“But I don’t know anything about magic. I just painted a pretty picture.

“I know Elsie. Don’t worry, we will figure this out.

Chapter Two

Elsie was in her room working on a puzzle, when she heard shouting coming from the other room. She knew that her stepfather must have been home. Elsie’s father had passed away when she was a baby, so her stepfather was the only father she had ever known. He worked in the mayor’s office, and was one of the main advocates against magic in their town. Elsie knew based on the shouting, that her stepfather had found out about Elsie’s drawing at school and her expulsion.

Elsie heard footsteps coming towards her bedroom, so she ran back to her puzzle and acted as though she had not been eavesdropping. Her stepfather opened the door:

“Elsie you should be ashamed of yourself. You brought disgrace upon this family and I could lose my position in the mayor’s office.”

“She’s just a child”, she heard her mother say.

“Child or not, she should know and honor the rules of this town. Magic and anything relating to it is strictly forbidden. I WILL NOT TOLERATE IT IN THIS HOUSE”

“I just painted a picture”, squeaked Elsie, “I don’t know anything about magic”.

“SILENCE! This is what’s going to happen: Elsie you are not to leave the house for any reason. I do not want you getting distracted outside. You are also not going to have any access to art supplies, so you cannot produce any more magical drawings. Your principal will bring your assignments every week and that is all you are going to do. You are going to wake up and eat your breakfast, help your mother with chores, do your assignments, eat your dinner and go to bed. Is that clear?”

“Now that is just ridiculous”, said Elsie’s mother. “I am not leaving Elsie at home when I do the outdoor chores and go to the market and she is certainly not forbidden from having art time.

“Do you want me to arrest my family? Because I will if there is no cooperation. The law in this town is the most sacred thing”. So saying, Elsie’s stepfather stormed out of the room, leaving Elsie’s mother to comfort her.

That night a thunderstorm was brewing in the town. Little Elsie layed in her bed listening to the rain fall, drop after drop after drop. Sometimes she could swear she heard the tiniest voices when each raindrop hit the ground outside her bedroom window. Most rainy nights she would fall asleep listening to the rain. She’d dream of fairies coming to visit her and leading her into the

most beautiful forests you could ever imagine. Other nights fairies would lead her to the seashore, where mermaids would swim while the villagers were slept.

There were stories on the island passed down from generation to generation about nymphs once living on the island. The nymphs lived in peace with the island villagers for centuries, until one of the nymphs went bad. She began to lure children into the forest or into caves, never to be seen again. Some say she turned them to stone, but most believed that she turned them into fairies that would do her bidding. She made the fairies so small that no human would ever be able to see them. They say that they were small enough to fit into raindrops, and that's how many of them escaped during one terrible winter storm.

With the children disappearing, the villagers became afraid of the nymphs and began hunting them down, which forced them into hiding, never to be seen again. Most of the villagers believed that the nymphs had fled the island, which was not the story Elsie's grandmother had told her. Her grandmother said that the nymphs had hidden themselves in the trees and in the waves of the sea, waiting to be awakened by the true heir of Queen Amerissa, the forest nymph queen. After defeating the evil sea nymph queen Kirkis, Amerissa had cast a spell putting all the nymphs into a deep long sleep, concealing them in the trees in the deepest forest of the island. Because of the power of the spell, Amerissa had to use all of the energy in her, killing her in the process.

Elsie fell asleep after some time, dreaming about the nymphs and fairies. It had been such a long time since she had heard anyone tell a story about nymphs. Elsie's grandmother used to tell her stories about fairies and nymphs back when she used to live with them. That was before the town became strict and afraid about anything relating to magic or even speaking the word magic. At least she didn't know what happened before her grandmother left the town.

While it was still dark, Elsie woke up to the sound of the door creaking and her mother's footsteps entering her room.

"Mama?"

"Go back to sleep Elsie. I'll only be a minute."

She watched as her mother lifted up a floorboard and began placing paper, paints, brushes, and other art supplies underneath it. When she was finished, Elsie noticed her mother catch her still watching.

"Is everything okay?" asked Elsie.

"Everything is going to be okay. Just make sure you take out the art supplies only when I tell you it's alright. We have to be very careful from now on. Now go back to sleep and in the morning we will talk".

Elsie layed her head back on her pillow and listened for the door to close. She kept thinking about home and what would happen next. She wondered what the real reason her grandmother left town was. Elsie guessed her stepfather had something to do with her grandmother's disappearance. Any time Elsie mentioned her grandmother he would get angry. Elsie had tried many times to get her mother to talk about it, but her mother always changed the subject. Elsie needed to find out what had happened between her parents and grandmother. Only her grandmother would be able to help Elsie figure out her dreams and teach her more about the nymphs.

Elsie decided that she would ask her mother about her grandmother in the morning, after her stepfather had left for work. Elsie believed things would change, and she would finally get some answers. Thinking of her grandmother, Elsie fell asleep. She woke up again when she heard her stepfather leaving for work and decided to get out of her bed and head to the kitchen for some breakfast. Elsie could hear porridge bubbling as she went down the hall towards the kitchen.

“Good morning Elsie. Are you ready for some breakfast?” Elsie nodded and sat down at the kitchen table which was next to a large window. Elsie loved to sit at the table watching her mom cook.

“What’s wrong Elsie?”, asked her mother

“Mama... could you tell me about grandmother and could you tell me what really happened to her?” Elsie’s mother ran and closed the window.

“Shhh Elsie. Remember we have to really be careful. What if someone heard you mention your grandmother? I will tell you after breakfast, I promise. But not here in the kitchen.”

As she finished her breakfast, Elsie watched as her mother left the kitchen, and she could hear her closing windows in the rest of the house. When Elsie finished her breakfast she found her mom in Elsie’s own bedroom, which was the farthest room from the front door. She had shut the window and was closing the shutters so no one could look in if they happened to walk by.

“Ok Elsie, before I tell you about your grandmother, I want to make sure you know more about the history of this island and its villages. As you know there are five villages- Arnidia, Kaikona, Derina, Lydine and Olmeka...”

Elsie's mother proceeded to tell her about all the villages on the island. Elsie's family lived in Olmeka, the least tolerant of anything magical. Although most of the other villages were also intolerant to magic, not all of them shared the same dislike toward it. The island sort of resembled an hourglass, although the northern half was a lot narrower than the southern one. Four out of the five villages were on the southern part of the island. Olmeka was located on the southern end of the island, with Lydine to the east, Derina to the northeast and Kaikona to the northwest. Arnidia was the single village on the northern part of the island. There was a large forest, a mountain range and a river separating the Northern and Southern parts of the island. Lydine and Derina shared Olmeka's dislike of magic but Kaikona was more neutral and sympathetic. Arnidia was the only village rumored to be a supporter of magic, although not much as known based on its location compared to the other villages. There were few people in Kaikona that would go to Arnidia buy boat for trade. The journey was long and hard, so many were not brave enough to make it.

“Your grandmother is rumored to be somewhere in Arnidia, although we can't know for sure.”

“Can we go to Arnidia and find her?”

“Maybe Elsie. Right now all we can do is wait.”

“Wait for what, Mama?”

“For our friends in this village to help us. Right now we can't be sure who to trust”.

