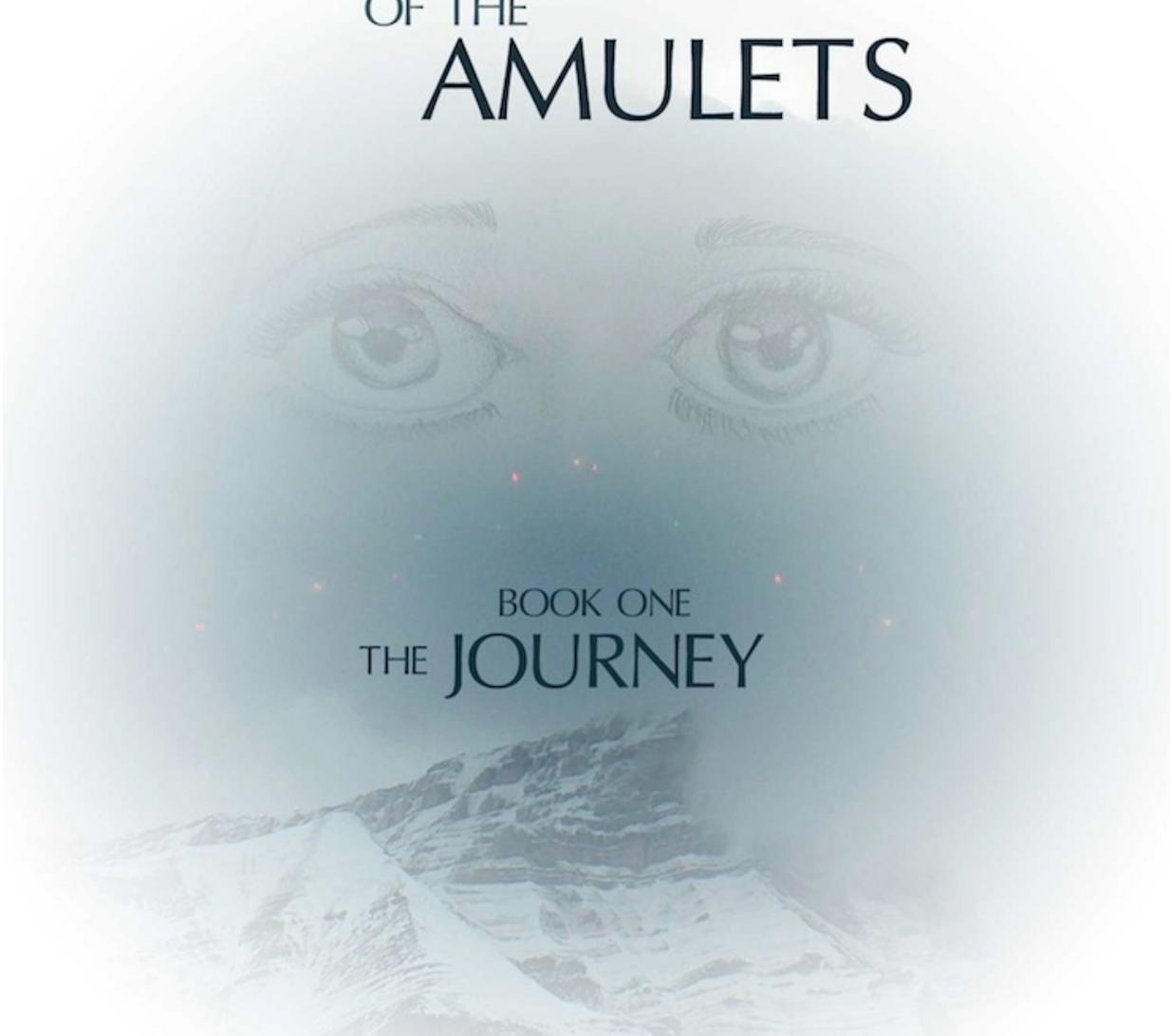


THE
CHILDREN
OF THE
AMULETS

BOOK ONE
THE JOURNEY

NICK PEMBERTON



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The Binding

*Let time remain still,
And this complete you,
May the wind remember,
When she is ready.*

*Let the silence guide you,
And this complete you,
May time return her,
When you are ready*

- Deciphered from the engravings on the original amulets by the first of the docents

Chapter 1

The Invitation

When the girl was born, in the place of her parent's first meeting, Canace smiled in her long sleep. The wind will remember, she thought, and for the first time since her sister had left, the spirit of Canace felt whole. I will go to the girl, she whispered. It is time - It is time.

Jenny stumbled and froze as people raced past her, running ahead of the advancing wall of fire. The ash and soot whirled around her and she coughed roughly. Above the wind and roar of the flames sirens blared and a helicopter rattled across the haze.

It can't land, she thought, it can't see what it's doing

A gust of wind blew the flames toward her and she felt her face tingle and tighten under the heat.

Crack! She spun around toward the sound to see burning needles raining down from an exploded tree on the scattering people. They clawed at their hair and beat their clothes, stumbling away.

The smoke billowed up, darkening the sky, and the town was lit by the eerie red glow of the fire. Jenny squinted across the Bow River toward her street.

I've got to get home - Dad will know what to do.

She turned toward the bridge and bolted, jumping over people and passing cars - her red hair flying out behind her. Ahead of the bridge a line of flame launched itself across the road and Jenny held up her arms to break through.

Faster!

She ran so swiftly the flames couldn't touch her and she screamed, bursting through the dense smoke.

What the-?

She stopped and stared, her eyes darting about.

Where am I? Where's my house?

There were no houses, no roads, no river - everything had vanished. She was surrounded by a ring of flames like a noose tightening in on her. She backed away from the nearest flame and tripped, falling to the grass. She smelt something new - pungent and bitter.

My hair!

She gasped, her lungs burning with the smoke and heat. She curled up in a ball and closed her eyes.

I'm going to die.

Suddenly the heat stopped, the crackling and crashing around her ceased and the air cleared.

Jenny opened her eyes and sat up. The flames still roared and the smoke poured toward the sky, but something spared her patch of grass. She squinted, looking at the edge of the flames. Something was there, something moving, a white blur capped in red swirling around her.

A patch of the wall of flame was parting, a dark rectangular field forming in it. The white blur kept zooming around the edge and in the dark rectangle a girl appeared. She was dressed in a long white robe and as she walked, her hair spilled around her side - the same red hair as Jenny's.

She reached out her hand and helped Jenny to her feet. Jenny wiped her eyes to clear them. The girl was exactly like her. It was like looking in a mirror reflected on a wall of flame. The girl still held her hand and Jenny trembled in her grip.

'Who are you?' Jenny cried. 'And what has stopped the fire?'

The girl smiled and looked at the edge of the flames, where the white blur still flashed around them.

'It is the wind, my sister. It is you.'

As soon as she said it, the white blur froze and Jenny saw another girl, identical to the first, standing and looking at her. The girl didn't flinch as the flames roared past her and the searing heat returned.

'You, my sister. Save yourself.'

The girl released Jenny's hand and vanished. Jenny stared frantically around and screamed as the flames drew close. Just as they reached her toes and the burning started, the world went dark; the heat and the noise vanished.

It was pitch black in her bedroom, still the middle of the night. She was soaked in sweat and panting hard.

That same nightmare, she thought desperately. Why, why, why?

She sat staring out the window making sure all the houses were still there. The street lamps glowed dimly and for once Jenny heard no sounds - no birds, no cars, and most importantly no

people. With everyone asleep the voices that she heard in her head, the voices of everyone around her, were silent.

She lay back slowly, breathing gently and letting the lingering fright of the nightmare leave her. Willing herself to be calm, she let the sound of her heart and the steady rise and fall of her breath wash over her.

What if everything stopped? she thought.

She held her breath and listened to her body - she couldn't stop her heart's beat, but she could will it to slow down.

I can control my breathing, though.

With slow, deliberate thoughts, she breathed in, held it, and breathed out. Silence. Breathe in. Pause. Breathe out.

If I fall asleep, will I keep breathing?

She stared at the ceiling, trying to ignore the rhythm of her lungs. She tried to think about something other than her breath, shifting frantically over the events of the last few days. Her best friend Sarah's twelfth birthday, the horrible trip her family had taken back to Calgary, the noise of everyone around her.

It was no good. She kept returning to her breathing, to the controlled pace. She frowned and slid out of bed. She padded over to the window, staring up at the peak of Sulphur Mountain, brightly lit by the moon.

Why are there always two girls?

The dream was so vivid, so frightening and always the same.

What does it mean?

Jenny sat on the bench in her window, staring up at the peaks. She couldn't remember when the dreams first started, but she could remember when they got worse: just after they had moved to Banff, five years before.



'We're moving,' Jenny's mother had announced.

The Greysons were sitting quietly around the dinner table, thinking about the horrendous day they'd just been through.

'What?' her father exclaimed. 'What are you talking about?'

'You know exactly what I'm talking about, Donald. We are moving. Away from here. Away from Calgary.'

Jenny looked at her mother and then her father. After a few moments of concentrating on each, she knew that once again she was the reason for their fighting.

'Don't you think that's a little rash? That maybe you're over-reacting?' her father asked, his voice low and even. 'After all, it's not the first time it's happened, and I'm sure as she grows older, she'll...'

'Oh come off it! She was catatonic! She couldn't walk, or speak - it's not getting better, it's getting worse!'

Jenny put down her fork and got up.

'Where are you going?' her mother said. 'We're talking about you, you know.'

Jenny looked at her but said nothing, and then started to walk away.

'You come back here at once, young lady!'

Jenny whirled around, a look of anger blazing across her blue eyes.

'I need to be alone, *mother*,' she hissed. 'I thought you knew that!'

Her two brothers looked at each other, smirking behind their hands.

'It's not funny - how would you feel if it had happened to you?' their father said. 'We've got to help her, all of us.'

'By ruining our lives?' her elder brother Tom said. 'By leaving home?'

Their mother sighed and stared out the window toward the distant mountains.

'She's not getting better, boys. She's already seven, and her doctor thought this would have stopped by now. We have to do something.'

'But why do we have to move?' Tom pleaded.

'It's the people,' their father said. 'She's having a lot of trouble being around people. They, um, frighten her somehow. That's what happened today.'

'But she's been to the mall before,' Tom continued. 'What's so different? Why did she freak out?'

'I wish I knew, Tom, really I do. But I think your mother's right. We have to get her away from here.'

'So our lives get wrecked, all because of her?'

'They won't get wrecked!' their mother shouted.

Tom stared at her, a frown framing his face, but said nothing.

'Where are we going, Mommy?' Mark, Jenny's five year old brother, asked.

'Banff,' she replied.



Two months later, on a warm July afternoon, the Greysons left Calgary, their van stuffed to the roof with precious possessions and headed west toward the mountains. Jenny smiled as they passed beyond the city bounds and looked straight ahead.

'This is great!' she said.

'Yeah, wonderful,' Tom grouched. 'I hope you're happy.'

'I am. No more crowded malls, no more horrible people.'

'I thought you liked the mountains, Tom,' their mother said from the front seat.

'Well sure, to visit. But what is there to do? It'll be boring!'

'You just wait, I'm sure you'll make new friends, and besides, Calgary isn't that far away. We'll still visit.'

Tom sat in silence, staring out the window.

Jenny looked at him, concentrating on what she sensed from him. His mind was reeling with anger and frustration, most of it directed at her - he blamed her for everything that was happening, for ruining his life.

'It's not my fault, you know,' she said to him.

'Of course it is,' he snarled. 'You and your fits. Your temper, and your spells.'

'But I can't make it stop!'

Tom crossed his arms and turned away, staring out the window.

'Too bad you weren't better at running away. Maybe then I'd still be at home!'

'Thomas!' his mother yelled, shocking their father almost off the road. 'That's quite enough out of you!'

She turned to Jenny and tried to smile.

'It's not your fault, dear. You can't help being who you are.'



Their new house lay on the south side of the Bow River, up a small street that had to snake its way up the slope of a mountain. Jenny couldn't remember a time in her life when she felt more relaxed and happy. It was an easy place to be alone, so long as she stayed away from Banff Avenue, the main street in town and the place where most of the tourists flocked.

At the foot of their street, stretching along the south side of the river, there was a large park and Jenny had already found many secluded spots where she could read or play with no one interrupting. She went almost every day, winding her way along the edge, making sure she was alone before settling in.

When she got to the park it was empty so she walked past the children's area, slowly moving across the field toward the sandbox. She sat on its edge, staring into it, trying to imagine what it would have been like to live in a castle. Even though she was seven, she still loved playing in sand, still loved to build structures, towns, roads and fields.

The peace of her solitary building, being able to ignore all the sounds, all the intrusions around her, was the best part of building sand-worlds. Using a bucket that someone had left, she started making small towers, pretending they were buildings that lined the streets.

On the smaller lanes she used her hands to create houses for people to live in, scooping the sand up and mashing it into mounds. A small gust of wind blew the sand from her hands and the sun glinted off it. She picked some of it up and held it high above her. She tilted her head and looked up at her hand, letting the sand fall slowly through her fingers. A satisfied tremor shook her as the sand cascaded down. She tried to wrap herself around the column of sand and found that the glints weren't always where they were supposed to be - they moved as the wind gently shifted. Over and over again she scooped up the sand and poured it past her watching eyes, trapped by the sensation.

She was so absorbed in what she was doing that she didn't even notice the child approach. Emerging from the trees, he walked quickly and silently over to her. He looked slightly older than she was and had a pale, almost alabaster skin. As he sat down beside her, she looked away from her pouring sand and nearly jumped out of her skin.

He held his hands up in front of him, reaching timidly toward her. She looked at him and frowned through squinted eyes. He had on dark boots, close to black which rose above his shins almost to his knees, an old grey pair of pants and a white shirt. He had a black robe or cape thrown behind him and around his neck was a small but beautiful medallion, with a glowing gold core. It was the only thing about him that had any color - everything else was grey, or black, or pale.

He looked at her sand village and smiled, crouching down to look at the buildings she'd made with the bucket. She concentrated on him, not sure why she couldn't hear anything from him - if she wasn't looking at him, she'd never have known he was there. He didn't say anything, instead leaning back and resting on his arms, watching her and her village.

A sound from across the park startled her and she turned to see what it was, knocking over one of the bigger castles she'd built. Her face fell when she saw the damage she'd done and she reached for the bucket to rebuild it. She was stopped by the pale boy, who held up his hands and shook his head.

Gesturing at her to sit down, he turned to the ruined castle. He held out his hands, palms down and waved them gently over the sand. As if drawn to a magnet, the sand began to trickle together, piling itself up like it was trying to reach him. He tilted his head and moved his hands around the pile, poking the air around it with his fingers, shaping turrets in the air. The sand rushed to fill in his work and within moments a new castle stood gleaming in the sun, intricate in detail. The boy withdrew his hands and looked over at Jenny.

She had a wide smile on her face and giggled as he sat back. She looked at him and then bent down to look at what he'd made, admiring the window impressions, the turrets and the gate.

When she looked up, he was gone. She sat up straight, searching for him and found nothing.

She jumped to her feet and stared around. She couldn't see anything of him, no footprints in the sand, nothing. She closed her eyes and listened. She could hear children in the small playground, still hear the large swings creaking but her companion was gone. She turned slowly, listening and stopped. Opening her eyes, she stared at the woods across the field. He went that way, she was sure but no sign of him remained.

'Hi!' a voice behind her said.

Jenny flinched and spun around. Standing to one side of the sandbox was a girl with dark black hair, cut in a bob, smiling at her.

'I'm Sarah - you're the new neighbor, huh?'

Jenny concentrated on her and then smiled.

'Sarah Tomiyama, right?'

Sarah frowned.

'Um, yeah, I guess...'

'I did it again, didn't I?' Jenny said. 'I always do, you know, I say things I hear, never know when to stop, it's just, well, that's your name, right?'

'What do you always do?' Sarah asked, smiling.

'I always go too fast. At least, that's what my older brother says.'

Sarah rolled her eyes.

'Yours too, huh? Older brothers suck. I hate mine.'

Jenny nodded, looking at the ground.

'So what's your name?' Sarah asked.

'Oh, sorry. I'm Jenny. Jenny Greyson. We just came here - from Calgary.'

Sarah glanced toward the sandbox.

'Hey, did you build this?' she said, looking at the castle, 'It's amazing!'

'No, I, well I built a castle, but it broke, and then this boy came...'

She paused and looked around, then back at Sarah.

'Did you see him? He went into the woods, just before you came - you must have seen him.'

Sarah shook her head.

'Sorry, I didn't. Maybe I know him - what did he look like?'

'Well, he's a little older than us, I think. He wore gray pants, and a sort of cloak or cape - a black one, and his skin was totally white - no color at all - even his eyes were colorless.'

Sarah thought for a moment.

'Must be a tourist. Sounds like one of the weird ones my mum warns me about - not too many people wear cloaks in the middle of summer.'

'You mean they do in the winter?' Jenny laughed.

'You won't believe it,' Sarah replied. 'We get all sorts of people here. So c'mon, do you want to meet my friends?'



Five years later, on the first nice day after Sarah's twelfth birthday, the two girls were walking slowly down their street toward the park. The late June air was still crisp and dew hung on the leaves around them. As they stepped from the shadow of the mountain, they felt the warmth of the sun on their backs.

'So what happened to you in Calgary?' Sarah asked.

Jenny shuddered at the memory of her family's recent trip, a trip that was supposed to be fun - visiting old friends, shopping and dinner at her grandparent's house.

'I don't know,' she mumbled.

'Tom seemed pretty mad at you,' Sarah continued. 'He said you ruined the trip, as usual. What did he mean?'

Jenny paused, staring up at the peak that rose above the Banff Springs Hotel. How could she explain the voices? The shouting, frantic din of everyone's minds? The painful, driving urge for silence?

'I ran away,' Jenny whispered. 'I hate that place. I hate the people.'

'Me too. But why run away? Just ignore them, like they ignore you.'

'I can't. The noise was too much.'

'Then plug your ears next time,' Sarah laughed.

'Yeah right, that wouldn't look weird at all,' Jenny replied.

'So was it the same as before?'

'Before when?'

'Like before you moved here.'

Jenny shrugged and started walking again.

'I don't know. I don't remember that.'

'Your mum said it was. She told me to keep an eye out.'

Jenny crossed her arms across her chest and walked faster.

'She doesn't know what she's talking about,' she said fiercely.

'So what did she mean?'

Jenny spun around and glared at Sarah.

'Drop it.'

'Drop what?'

'All of this. Just forget it.'

'Whoa - Ok - whatever. I'm just trying to help.'

Jenny's shoulders sagged and she shoved her hands in her pockets.

'I know. But you can't. No one can.'

They walked the rest of the way to the park in silence. The sun had risen higher in the sky and the sidewalks were starting to dry. Wisps of steam rose from the field and drifted away toward the river. Across the field, people were running in and out of the woods.

'Park Tag!' Sarah exclaimed. 'C'mon!'

They ran across the field toward where their friends were playing. A dark-haired boy came over, grinning, and tagged Sarah on the shoulder.

'Sarah's it!' he screeched, bolting into the woods.

'Hey, no fair David - why didn't you pick her...'

She turned to where Jenny had been. She was alone.

'Jenny! That's just as bad!' she yelled before sprinting off, looking for someone to catch.

When Jenny took off, she ran deep into the woods and found a massive tree surrounded by some low-lying brush. She crouched down and leant against the tree, sure she wouldn't be seen.

She listened to the others, trying her best to stay quiet. Sarah was moving loudly through the woods, trying to flush someone out. Jenny peeked around the tree and saw Sarah in the distance, looking in the wrong place. Marty was somewhere dark, somewhere near the river - she glanced that way and smiled. He was behind the fallen tree, sure that he couldn't be found.

Too easy, she thought.

David was harder - he wasn't staying still. At first glance, he'd gone the opposite way and it took Jenny a moment to sense where he was - he was creeping along the opposite side of the woods, close to the path, crouching low to stay hidden from view. She could tell he was doing his best not to laugh.

She sat back down and hid since Sarah was drawing near. There was no way that she could make a run for it if Sarah got too close, so she sat as still as possible, keeping her mind and body quiet.

As Sarah walked past her, Jenny heard a distant crack like the snap of a small tree. It was followed by angry voices, using words she couldn't make out. She stood up and turned to look. David was standing about one hundred yards away, in the middle of the path, holding up a toy car. He was surrounded by several older boys and Jenny could feel his fear as the boys yelled at him.

She and Sarah started walking toward them and as they got closer, they could hear David's desperate apologies. Jenny felt a sudden, deep anger at the older kid, and took off toward them, running as fast as she could. Sarah stopped and stared, stunned at how fast Jenny was going - faster than any athlete she'd ever seen.

The older boys had their backs to her but David could see her coming and his eyes widened. The largest of the boys noticed his reaction and turned around just as she arrived.

'Jenny!' Mike Sinclair exclaimed. 'Where did you come from?'

'Back there,' she said, indicating with her head without taking her eyes off him. She knew he was furious and she could see why. David was holding a broken model car, one that had a large antenna mounted on its rear spoiler. Mike had the controls in his hand.

'Then go back. This doesn't concern you,' he said, turning back to David.

Jenny walked over, reached up and put her hand on Mike's shoulder.

'You leave him alone,' she hissed.

Mike whirled around on her.

'What do you mean?' he yelled. 'Get out of here!'

'It was an accident, Mike, and you know it,' she continued. 'He didn't mean to step on it.'

'So what? He did and he's gonna pay. Now get lost!'

Jenny walked over and stood beside David. The older boys towered over the two of them.

'No,' she said.

He stood still, staring at her through furrowed brows for a long moment and then lunged at her. Everyone gasped as Jenny vanished. Mike clutched at his side and turned around. Jenny stood behind him, her arms crossed, watching.

'I said leave him alone!'

Mike let out a low grunt and then charged at her again. This time she crouched down and leapt into the air, kicking him on the head before landing behind him. He fell to the ground, face first and got a mouthful of needles and mud. He stood up, beside his friends and wiped the needles away.

'C'mon, guys, get her,' he snarled.

They all advanced. She stood still for a moment, staring from one to another and then ran right at them. As if hit by an invisible force, all of them went hurtling back and smashed to the ground or into trees. They got up slowly, their eyes widening as they backed away before turning and running.

As soon as they were gone, Jenny started trembling, her shoulders sagging and she looked at David.

'Are you all right?' she asked, her voice quaking, 'Did they hurt you?'

He merely nodded, looking from her to the retreating boys and back.

Sarah and Marty came over but said nothing. As she looked from one to the next and concentrated on them, she knew she'd done something that scared them and as she thought back on the fight, she began to understand.

'Jenny,' Sarah said, 'what just happened?'

'What do you mean? I told them to leave. They wouldn't.'

'Yeah, but how did you do all that?'

Jenny's eyes squinted up.

'I - I don't know. I mean, they were going to hurt David, so I just -'

She paused and stared at her feet before looking back up at her friend.

'I just made them leave.'

Sarah shook her head and turned to the others.

'OK, guys - Jenny's 'It' for trying to get herself killed!' she yelled.

Jenny started counting and they all took off.

As the game continued, an old man stepped out from behind a tree and moved off into the woods. He walked swiftly, with the speed of one much younger and as he got further away, he faded from view and then disappeared. Jenny felt a twinge in the back of her mind and whirled around on the spot where he had just been.

No one ever saw him which was just as he intended.



He reappeared in an eerie, outdoor space, a small stage in front of him with no obvious backdrop and a bonfire burning to its left. His clothes had changed to magnificent dark blue robes, laced with gold inlay and he walked past the fire towards the front row of seats that faced the stage. The seats were hewn from the rock and went up and away from the stage for some distance - there were perhaps one hundred seats in all.

As he looked up at the seats, shapes began to emerge on them, forming first into swirling, vaporous clouds and then into a mist that focused into human outlines. The shadows became whole and the seats filled with people. They were each dressed in grey or light brown clothes that

hung softly on them, a black shawl or cape draped over their shoulders and they were all wearing bright medallions that hung from a gold chain around their necks.

The people were from all over the world, all shapes, sizes and color. They sat in silence, watching the old man at the front, waiting to hear what he had to say. The medallions around their necks glowed brightly in many different colors.

In the front row of seats three impossibly old figures sat, two men and one woman, wearing robes that matched those of the old man. They were surrounded by others of varying age yet obvious importance and their robes had many inlays of gold and silver and were far brighter than the masses that rose in the seats behind them. The three elders rose slowly as the old man approached.

‘What news, Exeter?’ the woman said in a lilting voice that hinted at an Irish background.

‘I have seen her again. She is...’ he paused, looking for the right words, ‘... quite gifted.’

‘I would think that’s a good thing,’ she replied.

‘Well, yes, my lady, I agree, but I have not seen such power in one untrained before. She is already able to sense the thoughts of others, and she has some remarkable physical abilities. What is even more unusual is that she is using them well.’

He went on to describe the fight he had just witnessed and as he did, ghostly images of it appeared on the stage. He pointed out how easily Jenny rose in the air when she jumped over one of the boys, how she seemed coldly calm in the face of what should have been overwhelming odds against her.

When she rushed at the boys and they burst away from her as if hit by an invisible hammer, the three elders watching gasped. A murmur rose from the assembled crowd as well and a low swell of voices drifted down as they discussed what they had just seen: a chaotic, swirling mist around Jenny, one that seemed to lash out at the bullies as she ran past.

‘You see?’ the old man said.

‘Indeed,’ the older of the men said, ‘That is highly unusual - great caution is required.’

‘There is more, Exeter?’ the old woman asked.

The old man looked at her, his face a mask of confusion.

‘There is. She has had visitors. I cannot say who they are, but they resemble us.’

Several people in the front row of seats leaned forward. One of the standing elders looked hard at the old man.

‘In what way?’

‘They dress the same, that much is certain. I found it very hard to see them - they seemed to flit in and out of vision. They were very pale, almost no color at all, except...’

He was cut off by the woman.

‘Except what? Are they bound? Could you see them?’

He nodded slowly.

‘Yes, my lady, I could. Very bright they were as well, and pulsing, just as here.’

The voices around rose, some almost shouting. The three elders turned and held their hands up and instantly a silence fell. They turned back to the old man and stood thoughtfully for a moment.

‘It is not possible to say what this means,’ one of the men said, ‘but it is very obviously a signal.’

He turned back toward the front row of seats where some sat watching him closely.

‘It is as some of you have predicted. However, we will not know for some time yet. Do not make undue judgments.’

‘Undue judgments?’ a man several rows back said. ‘Sir, this may not be what you think either - these pale beings are a warning, I’m sure of it.’

‘Sure of what, Vladimir?’

‘And the girl,’ Vladimir continued, ‘She is not like us - we all saw what she can do. She and the pale beings have made contact, yet we barely see them. What does that tell you?’

‘Nothing at all,’ the old woman in the front replied. ‘It is a mystery, but nothing more, as the Docent has just said. The girl is gifted, that we have seen. We should concentrate on what we know, and leave speculation to its own devices.’

The Exeter cleared his throat.

‘There is the question of matching!’

‘Indeed. This will be a challenge for you old friend, no doubt of that.’

The Docent paused and smiled. ‘But you have always been the best at what you do, we all have full confidence in your choice. Have you seen the boy lately?’

‘No, sir, I’ve been a bit preoccupied. I will soon.’

‘Good. Now then, the real question is the young lady you’ve presented today. Visitors like those you’ve alluded to are one thing, but there are far more sinister things in this world.’

‘And,’ added the old woman, ‘there are many who may have noticed.’

‘I agree.’

The elders turned to face the crowd, staring slowly from one to another. The people seated nodded or twitched and then slowly dissolved away into the same mist they were when they arrived, drifting away from the seats and over the plains that surrounded them.

When they were all gone the three elders and the Exeter remained.

‘Shall I proceed?’ he asked them.

‘I would advise great caution in this,’ one of the men said.

‘But we cannot ignore her!’ the woman exclaimed.

‘No, we cannot,’ he replied, nodding at the Exeter, ‘let’s just hope *they* do!’



Jenny’s home was a small, wooden house, painted blue and white and had a covered verandah on the front, where her parents often sat to read the paper or simply talk to friends.

She and Sarah were walking back up the street after the game in the park had died down and Sarah was still buzzing about the fight.

‘So come on, Jenny, tell me what happened!’ she urged.

‘I told you, I’m not really sure. I hate those boys, and I got mad, is all.’

‘Yeah, you just got mad. C’mon,’ said Sarah.

‘Well you’d have done the same!’

Jenny stopped walking and stared at Sarah. ‘Wouldn’t you?’

‘Sure!’ Sarah laughed, ‘If I could. Not everyone can just jump over people, you know - or vanish.’

‘I didn’t vanish! What are you talking about?’

‘At the start - we all saw it. One moment you were there, standing in front of him, and the next you’re behind him. How did you do that?’

Jenny paused for bit, thinking back to the fight.

‘Well, I just ran. Nothing else.’

Sarah snorted and set off again.

‘C’mon, Jen. I’ve never you seen you move that fast, even in races at school. You were going faster than a car!’

‘I was not!’

‘Yes you were. Everyone there saw what you did, and none of us have ever seen anything like it. What’s going on?’

Jenny sighed and looked up at her friend.

‘I don’t know. It’s like something inside me snapped.’

‘But you’ve been mad before. I’ve seen you yell at your brothers. What’s so different now?’

They’d reached Jenny’s house and stood at the foot of her walkway, talking on the sidewalk. Her parents were sitting on the porch and heard snippets of the conversation drifting up from the street. When Sarah left, Jenny came trudging up the walkway.

‘So what was that all about?’ her mother asked.

‘Nothing.’

‘Something happened, Jenny, for Sarah to be so upset. What was it?’

She told them all about her morning including what had happened to David. When she was done she slumped down in a chair opposite her parents.

‘You’re certain there’s no more?’ her father asked, leaning forward.

‘No Dad. Nothing.’

He raised an eyebrow and glared at her, his eyes never leaving hers.

‘Tell me again how you managed to get all those boys to leave, yet there isn’t a scratch on you?’

‘I don’t know,’ she blurted. ‘They kept trying to hit me and stuff, and I just moved. They fell down a lot.’

‘Jenny,’ he whispered, ‘I know that’s not what happened. Tell me what really went on.’

He crossed his arms and leant back, staring over his glasses at her. Her fists clenched together and a red glow spread across her cheeks.

‘No!’ she yelled, leaping up and running into the house.

A glass sitting on the table cracked and shattered, spilling its contents. Her mother stood up and peered down the street, sure that someone had thrown something at them. Her father didn’t bother and sat staring at the broken glass, a long-forgotten tremor running up his spine.



That evening there was a hockey game on television and the family gathered to watch it together. It was one of the few times that they were allowed to eat in front of the television and they usually ended up with hamburgers and french fries.

The game started off well but by midway through The Flames were taking a beating, and they started to lose interest. Jenny changed into her pajamas and went down stairs. She sat in front of the fire, staring into it.

When her mother came back in, Jenny crawled over and sat on the sofa beside her. She slowly leaned over and curled up in a ball and put her head on her mother's leg. Her mother stroked her hair and she slowly fell asleep, no longer bothered by the day.

About an hour later, her father came down and found them both asleep. He nudged his wife and bent down to pick Jenny up. He carried her up to bed and placed her in it. She was still in her house coat which he carefully removed, making sure she didn't wake.

He sat on the edge of her bed, watching her sleep, lost in memories of her birth and the difficult childhood she'd had. After a while, he put his hand on her head and closed his eyes. One minute later, he sighed, took his hand away and left, closing the door behind him.

His wife was watching from the hall.

'Well?' she said when he came out.

'Well what?'

'Tell me what you saw.'

He looked at her and just nodded. Her face wrinkled up and she walked away to their bedroom, her shoulders shaking.



On Monday morning, Jenny was the first up, trying to avoid running out of hot water midway through her shower.

When she was finished, she stood in her housecoat in front of the sink drying her hair. There was a small radio on the counter and Jenny smiled as one of her favorite songs blared out. She started dancing, forgetting about her hair and twirled around the little room.

She caught sight of her reflection in the mirror as she spun, the housecoat twirling with her and grinned. *One day I'll be a famous dancer!*

A knock on the door jolted her back to reality.

'Hey Jenny,' Tom yelled, 'that's not a dance hall, and there's a line up here!'

Jenny stopped and returned to the sink to finish her hair, a red glow spreading across her normally pale skin. She shut the radio off.

'I'll be out in a minute,' she stammered.

She looked at herself in the mirror and hurriedly brushed her hair out. Grabbing her toothbrush, she set to work, still watching her reflection. She bent over the sink to rinse and shrieked when she looked up.

Attached to the mirror was a letter, in a dusty old envelope, with her name written on it in a formal, hand-written style.