

I: Journey Wind

The moon was full, yet the forest stayed Halloween black. The fox stopped, her ears erect. Ending her hunting early, she tiptoed silently through the forest. At the edge of a small clearing, she paused to sniff the air before hurrying across, to reach her den under the ruins of the old cottage.

A circular spot in the carpet of dry pine needles rustled then stilled. They twitched again. The gray fox caught the movement and quickly took shelter under the firewood stacked against the stone chimney at the back of the building. The needles lifted and spun, picking up loose blades of grass and dry bits of earth to accompany them. The dust devil grew as unsettled night air brushed across the meadow circled by age old pines. The whirlwind called to the ferns. The feathery plants straightened from their bent slumber to dance and jerk as the glowing wind-spiral rose, broadened and began to howl. High branches on the trees joined in the frolic, swaying and bending as the swirling gray funnel brushed against them.

Swaying gracefully at first, the funnel lurched and began to gyrate wildly from the three growing forms that plumped and distorted its center. Tired of its load and finished with the task it was summoned for, the journey-wind belched and was gone.

“Get off me.”

“That’s my foot.”

“Ouch! I burnt my thumb. What’s on fire?”



“You lit my beard with your pipe, you quarter-wit,” Hagerwolf yelled, flailing his hands at the tip of his whiskers.

Larkstone pulled his hickory wand from inside his vest. “Hold him, Fernbark!”

Fernbark locked his stubby arms around Hagerwolf from behind. Larkstone swung. The wand clipped off the tip of the scrawny wizard’s beard as cleanly as a troll’s razor. The gray hair floated to the ground and sizzled as the last of it burned to curlicue ash.

The fox peeked out after catching the scent of the three odd men; butter and cinnamon. She wiped her tongue across her snout. The smell was familiar.

“That’s my vest!” Larkstone yelled at Fernbark. “What are you doing with it?”

“How should I know? Hey! Those are my pants. Get ‘em off, you overstuffed bag of lizard lard. You’ll split the leather.”

“Me! I’m not the one that eats four pounds of boar bacon for lunch.”

“Quiet. Both of you!” Haggerwolf said, still plucking the end of his beard. “We’re supposed to be doing this in secret. And you’re wearing my boots, Larkstone. The journey-wind mixed us all up. It always does that in a trip this far. Let’s change, but fast.”

The three wizards stripped, tossing everything but their red long underwear into a pile on the ground near the ramshackle door to the cottage. Then they grabbed for what was theirs.

Haggerwolf, the taller one, pulled out pants, shirt, and a long robe. They were all dark blue, almost black and had the outlines of forest animals embroidered in the fabric. Fernbark and Larkstone, both shorter and stout, sorted through the pile. Fernbark’s clothes were different shades of green with outlines of plants and Larkstone’s clothes light blue with fish and seashell patterns.

“Your buttons made my fingers green,” Fernbark said. “Never buy a vest with copper buttons.”

“You sold it to me,” Haggerwolf said and rubbed his sleeve against one of the buttons. “I’ll take that little matter up with you when we’re back home. Now give me the book. Let’s get on with this.”

“You had it when Larkstone conjured up the journey-wind,” Fernbark answered as he slipped his arms through his suspenders, letting the blue bands snap against his shoulders.

“One of you grabbed it from me when that blasted wind took off with us.”

“There it is.” Larkstone pointed back to the edge of the pines near where the whirlwind had expelled them. “Must have blown out of my hands.”

The book smelled of skin, but not from an animal the fox recognized. She sneezed to push the scent from her nostrils. Bordering the cover of the thick book, heavy studs glowed faintly in competition with the moonlight. Both the light and smell chafed her instincts. Keeping low, she crept from her den, dashed around the corner of the woodpile, and disappeared into the woods.

“What was that?” Larkstone asked, his voice sharp and fast. He hugged the book close to his chest and spun around.

“Just some critter,” Fernbark answered. “Probably one of those cats these hills are named after.”

“It’s not the cat-hills,” Haggerwolf said, rolling his eyes and shaking his head. “It’s Catskills and we’re in the mountains. That critter was just a porkypie, I think. My aunt used to feed ‘em bits of sugar rolls.”

“Who else knows about this place?” Fernbark asked and looked in the direction the fox had run. “Maybe we should--”

“It’s safe,” Haggerwolf said, cutting him off. “My aunt knew what we were trying to do. Just before Fistlock killed her, she told me about her little secret hideaway world. This will be a safe place to stash that leather-bound scourge.”

“But we’re not the only ones who know this world exists,” Larkstone said, still clutching the book tight as he walked back toward the cottage.

Haggerwolf gave the teetering door to the old building a kick. “Ah, but we *are* the only ones that know how to get to it.”

Rusted hinges lost their grip and rough hewn boards gave way. When each board slapped to the floor, a new puff of dust joined with the rest. Haggerwolf braced his hands on the doorframe and leaned inside.

The interior was dark except for a strip of floor in front of him and a spot in the far corner of the room where part of the roof had fallen in. In those two spots the moon eased its dim light inside the small stone and log cottage.

“I’ll make some light,” Fernbark said and ducked under Haggerwolf’s arm. He took a good-sized pinch of dried moss from his vest pocket and rolled it into a ball between his palms. “Give me some water.” He reached back without turning around, expecting someone to hand him a water skin.

“I didn’t bring any,” Haggerwolf said. “How about you, Larkstone?” he asked, looking over his shoulder.

“We’re not on a blasted picnic, and my spells don’t use water. Why would I bring any? You’re the leader. You’re supposed to think of those things,” Larkstone said and slid past the taller wizard. “Allow me.” Larkstone grabbed Fernbark’s hand and spit.

Fernbark jerked his hand away. His eyes widened, his face reddened and his mouth opened.

“Don’t say it,” Larkstone snapped, before Fernbark could utter a complaint. “It worked, didn’t it?”

Fernbark grumbled something about garden slugs under his breath as he picked up the glowing pea-sized ball of moss from the floor. He scowled at Larkstone before taking a pinch of orange powder from another pocket. When he sprinkled it on the moss, the room lit up in the bright yellow-green glow of the magic light.

Haggerwolf pushed between them and moved to the stone hearth. “All right, you two. Let’s just take care of the book and then get out of here. Help me clear this spot. Fernbark, find something to sweep with so we can see the mortar lines. Larkstone, we’ll need a makeshift pedestal.”

There wasn’t much inside the cottage, except for a few shelves that retained a precarious grip on the log walls and a pile of rubble from the fallen section of roof. Larkstone sifted through the jumble of broken boards and shingles, while Fernbark went back outside.

Haggerwolf knelt in front of the fireplace and began clearing pine needles and debris off of the hearthstone. Fernbark returned with a bundle of dried grass and began sweeping the last of the fine dust and dirt away from the spot Haggerwolf had cleared. When they had a three-foot oval area swept clean, the two wizards moved back and waited. Larkstone used several chunks of broken timber and a few moss covered wooden shingles to fashion a short pedestal to hold the book.

“Now are you going to tell us your plan?” Fernbark asked as he set the book in place. “You said it was better if we didn’t know until the last moment. I figure we’re pretty close to that time now.”

“We’re going to seal the book and hide it with a layer of spells. Any spell that can be done, can be undone, so we’ll each cast our own spells.

“Good plan,” Larkstone said and began rolling up his sleeves. “If we’re creative enough, even if one person knew all the spells, it would take three ogre-lives to figure out how to work them.”

“I do admit, it’s one of my more brilliant plans,” Haggerwolf said. He reached to tuck the end of his beard behind his wide belt, but grabbed air where the missing end would have hung. He cleared his throat, scratched his side and then tucked the sheared end inside the opening of his shirt, between two buttons. “Let’s get started. We’ll bury it inside the hearthstone. But first…” He drew a slender dagger from behind his belt and knelt by the book. Holding the hilt in one hand, he placed three fingers of his other hand over runes etched into the blade. The dagger began to glow.

The thick book had a strap and ornate latch to hold it closed. Haggerwolf placed the tip of his blade at the base of a brass acorn that formed the lock for the clasp. He gave his wrist a quick twist. The acorn popped loose and Larkstone snatched it from the air.

“Hm… Magic. It figures. It turned back into a real acorn,” Larkstone said. He put the nut on the hearthstone and smashed it with his boot. “So much for the lock, but one of us will have to deal with the acorn in their spell. It’ll need replacing to unlock the strap. No one can cut that leather. It’s from a glorgwart.”

“Then I say it’s spell time,” Fernbark said. “Let’s circle around. Who wants to go first?”

“Book in a stone stays out of sight,” Haggerwolf said and waved his wand.

“Not bad,” Larkstone said and nodded as he pulled out his own wand. “Seek with a rainbow in the night.” He and Haggerwolf looked at Fernbark.

“Tears from a girl with an overbite.”

“What in the troll-ear was that?” Haggerwolf asked as he stared at Fernbark.

“Well,” Fernbark said and began to blush. “You two rhymed and that’s all I could come up with. We’re supposed to be spontaneous, aren’t we?” He tried to force a scowl on his face.

Haggerwolf rolled his eyes and cast another spell beginning the next round. “Nut with a cap where the pine cones fall.”

“Names of love in a mother’s shawl.”

“Laughs from a boy who ain’t too tall.”

Haggerwolf and Larkstone both looked up.

“It’ll make it harder to figure out. Won’t it!” Fernbark yelled at them, his face burning bright red. “Let’s place it.”

The three men pointed their wands and the hearthstone began to shimmer. A rectangle in the center of the quarried stone turned clear before it vanished. While Larkstone and Fernbark kept their wands steady, Haggerwolf used his to move the book. The bound pages floated from the makeshift pedestal and hovered over the void in the hearthstone. As he lowered his wand the book settled into place. When all three wizards withdrew their wands, the void filled with clear stone, sealing in the book.

“Now just a single spell by me,” Haggerwolf said. “It’s an alarm for the three of us if someone tries to tamper here.” He pointed his wand at the book. “Shambles re-scrambles.” A puff of wind fluffed the end of his beard and circled the other two wizards, flipping their shirttails as it passed.

“What’s the alarm?” Larkstone asked as he tucked his shirt back in.

“You’ll recognize it if it happens,” Haggerwolf said and put his wand away. “Let’s finish it. Same order as before. I’ll start. Lightning reveals.”

“A tear unseals.”

“Blood heals,” Fernbark said, his face beaming this time.

Fernbark’s look of pride and the surprise on the other two faces were lost in the sudden swirl of dust. The magic light dimmed and the clutter of boards and shingles in the corner rattled until the wind stopped. The three wizards coughed and waved their arms.

“I guess that means it all worked,” Haggerwolf said as the dust settled. “If Fistlock, himself, found this place, he’d never figure out all of that.”

“And my little creative touch rules out random chance,” Fernbark said, looking at his friends expecting to see them nod in agreement. They were looking at the hearthstone.

The stone, the fireplace, the beams and shingles from the pedestal, were all back in their original positions.

Haggerwolf nodded approvingly at their work. “There’s absolutely no chance that anyone from this world or any other could ever find and open that book.”

“Well, my friends,” Larkstone said as he used his hands to brush dust from his shoulders. “One of you call up another journey-wind and let’s get home to Gabendoor before Fistlock comes looking for us.”

2: Children of the Summer Wind

“Give me a push. My wheels are stuck,” Windslow yelled over his shoulder at his older sister.

“I thought you said your new chair could go anywhere? Maybe you need to recharge the battery. I want to go back to the campsite anyway,” Hillary said. She grabbed the handles at the back of her brother’s wheelchair. Before she gave it a shove, she used an edge on the back frame to scrape dirt off the side of her hiking boot.

Clear of the temporary obstruction, Windslow sped ahead. Hillary watched his brown hair bob up and down as the wheels of his all-terrain wheelchair bounced over the rough ground. She smiled to herself as she imagined his head as a giant pinecone and his freckles as seeds. Her friends thought she and Windslow looked alike. Their hair color and complexion gave them a similar look, so much that people often thought they were natural brother and sister instead of step. She wished he’d let her fix his hair. Cut short, it stuck out at odd angles. She tried to put gel in it once and he freaked.

“These stupid sticks are hard to roll over. My battery is fine,” Windslow yelled as his chair rolled over dry needles and small dead branches from the trees. He looked up into the tall pines and stopped. Digging into his side pack, he searched for his bag of acorns. “Watch this.”

He loaded an acorn into the leather pad of his slingshot. Holding the wood handle out straight, he pulled hard, stretching the rubber cords back to his chin. When he released the pad, the acorn flew high into the pine trees, clipping free a few needles as it whizzed through the branches. The crow hopped along the branch, cawed once, and flew away.



“You’re so mean,” Hillary said. “When I filled up your acorn bag, you promised me that you wouldn’t shoot at any animals. This is a state park and you’re breaking the rules. Stop it or I’ll dump the whole bag in the trash.”

“If you do, I’ll tell mom that you have makeup. You’re not supposed to use it until next year when you’re twelve. It’s stupid to wear it on a camping trip anyway.”

“It is not stupid,” Hillary said. She closed her tiny lipstick case and mirror and shoved it into the back pocket of her jeans. “Mom wouldn’t care.”

“Then why do you wipe it off before we go back to the tents?” Windslow said and moved the joystick control for his chair to pivot around and face his stepsister. “You’ve got lipstick on now.”

Hilary stuck her tongue out at him and ran ahead, deeper into the woods. After ducking behind the broad trunk of a pine tree, she pulled a small package of tissues from her shirt pocket and wiped her lips. “Ouch,” she said and snapped open her lipstick case. She puckered, trying to curl up her lip. “Stupid braces. Who cares, or even knows what an overbite is anyway.” She had

to twist and turn the lipstick case to look at her lip in the skinny mirror. Before she put it away, she saw a small reddish chip of bark. It nearly matched the color of her hair and clung to her curls near her shoulder. As she pulled it out, she winced, flicked it away, and sighed.

She liked camping. Bill, her stepfather, knew a lot about the woods and was fun--most of the time. At least he made her mother happy. Windslow was fun too--at first. Hillary liked having a stepbrother. Windslow had been like Bill. Windslow laughed a lot and could think of fun things to do until the accident. Now instead of thinking up adventures, he just got her into trouble. She felt like his personal servant. But even worse, she felt guilty about the accident. It was her stuffed bear that he was trying to rescue. He liked to show off and had made her watch while he climbed up on the roof of their house. He slipped and fell when he held the bear up like a trophy over his head.

Hillary picked up a handful of dry pine needles and threw them. The gentle breeze blew them back at her. She scowled as she brushed them off her flannel shirt. She knew she should check on Windslow, but also knew he'd yell for her if he needed anything. And almost anything he wanted, he got, including most of the attention. She couldn't imagine what not being able to walk must be like. But she missed the days when she and her mom would do things together. Now everything they did seemed to be for Windslow.

"Hillary? Hillary!"

Hillary jumped to her feet and ran back to the clearing. "Where are you?" she yelled.

"Look for my wheel tracks. I found something back in the trees. It's the ruins of an old cabin."

His wheels hadn't left a clear trail, but Hillary could see the direction he had gone and ran into the woods. "I can't follow your tracks!" she yelled. "Say something."

"You sound louder. Keep coming. I'm in another clearing. I've got a new adventure for us. It starts at midnight."

"Sure!" she yelled as she walked fast through the trees. "An adventure for you, but I'll just get grounded. It's not fair that you never get punished."

"This chair is the ultimate grounding. How'd you like to trade?"

He was right, Hillary thought as she batted away a branch and then saw his tracks just to her left. She was lucky and shouldn't complain. She ducked under a limb and saw him up ahead.

"Isn't this cool?" he said. Windslow had the side of his chair up against the remains of an old stone chimney. He held a dead branch and jabbed it at the old hearth. "We haven't had a good adventure since I got sentenced to this chair. Tonight, we're going to have one."

"Why at night?" Hillary asked as she walked around the chimney. She poked at the stones with the toe of her hiking boot. "This is just an old cabin."

"We need to come here at midnight so we can call up ghosts. That's the only time they come out, you know."

"How would you know?"

“TV. Remember? I watch a lot of it now. People who lived in old places like this didn’t use banks, either. Lots of them hid their valuables under the big rocks they made their fireplaces out of.”

“Just because you’re changing it to a treasure adventure doesn’t mean I’ll do it. Mom and Bill won’t let us come here after dark. You know that. And I don’t think they’d want us here now either.”

“You know they won’t do anything to me. They won’t even know. And it’s a ghost *and* treasure adventure. We need to call up a ghost to find out where the treasure is. Come on, Hillary. It’ll be fun. Just like the adventures we had before I got hurt trying to do something nice for you.” Windslow dropped the stick and drove his chair around the chimney to where his stepsister stood. “Please, Hillary?”

“All right,” she agreed. She knew it was useless to argue when he had his mind set. And after all, he was right. He used to do nice things for her all the time and she had encouraged him to show off that afternoon. She wanted to impress her friends and had them come watch when he climbed up on the roof. She bragged to her friends that she could get him to do anything for her. Maybe the tables had turned because she acted silly that day. She didn’t want to let those dark thoughts drag her back down again. Hillary forced a smile and gave him a playful punch in the shoulder. “But if I get grounded, I’m going to let the air out of your wheels.”

“You’re the best, sis. We better get back to the campsite. I need to recharge my battery for tonight. Grab an armful of those sticks over there. We’ll use them to mark the trail. Put one over there,” Windslow said, pointing as he drove his chair back toward the trees. “And another one there.”

Hillary grabbed some of the dried sticks. Each time he pointed, she either sighed or shook her head and then shoved a stick into the ground. Twice she threw one at him, but missed.

“Windslow,” Hillary said softly as she ducked inside his tent and knelt beside her brother.

“It’s about time you got here,” he said. “Help me outside.”

“How am I supposed to do that? I can’t lift you. And how are you going to get into your chair?”

“Easy. Just grab the blanket, wrap it around my feet and pull. Help me roll over onto my stomach first. Then I can push with my hands.”

“This is stupid,” Hillary said.

“Just do it. We need to get there before midnight.”

With his sister’s help, Windslow rolled over onto his stomach. He looked back over his shoulder and watched Hillary wrap the end of the blanket around his boots. “Pull,” he said and began pushing with his hands.

Hillary strained and pulled. She was surprised that the blanket slid easily on the grass. It was like dragging a big pile of dry leaves on a canvas. Just like they did before his accident,

when they raked the yard. But he was heavier than a pile of leaves and she knew he'd be the only one having fun this time.

The bigger challenge was getting him into his chair. Together they struggled, whispered a few sarcastic words back and forth, and finally managed to get him in the seat. When they heard Bill cough, they looked at the tent-trailer where their parents slept. The night stayed silent, except for the spring peepers calling down by the pond.

"Push me until we're away from the tent," Windslow whispered.

"Great adventure," Hillary whispered back a bit louder than he had. "I think it's just going to be a lot of work for me. And look over there. That's lightning off in the distance. There might be a storm coming. Maybe we--"

"Maybe you should push. This is our last chance. We go home tomorrow."

Hillary was about to give his chair a shove that he wouldn't forget. As she pushed, he moved the chair's joystick forward and sped ahead. She nearly fell before she caught her balance.

"Would you warn me before you do that?" she snapped, then ran ahead to catch up with him. Windslow suddenly stopped and she ran into the back of his chair.

"Watch out," he said to her and began searching his pack. "You could get hurt. One of us in a chair is enough. Maybe if I wasn't stuck in this thing, I could be a better brother and watch out for you."

Hillary wanted to both smack him and hug him. It was nice when he was like he used to be. 'In the time before the chair,' as Windslow would say. "Wait," she said and ran back to her tent. When she returned she carried a shawl, knitted from pale yellow yarn. "Here," she said and handed the shawl to her brother. "It's the one mom knitted for me with our names in it. Just in case you get cold."

"If she finds out you brought this camping she'll have a hyper-spaz. But thanks. Here." He handed his sister a long flashlight with a shiny red-metal case. "I fixed mine up with Velcro. Watch." He smiled at her after he pressed his flashlight against the side of the chair's armrest and the light stayed in place. "Come on," he said and pushed his joystick forward. "We're late for our meeting with the ghosts who are going to make us rich. What are you going to buy with your share?"

"A new servant for you so I can go on a vacation," she mumbled.

Black of night and midnight blue from the approaching storm chased colors away from the forest. The longer meadow grass bowed to puffs of wind the storm chased ahead of it through the valleys in the foothills. Night creatures sniffed the air and scurried back into den or thicket, giving the night up to those more courageous or foolhardy. They granted this night to the two children of the wind who moved steadily toward the ruins. Hovering high in readiness the clouds flashed with far off lightning and hid the ruins below from the stars, moon, and all else above.

“Windslow, it is going to storm. I saw lightning again. Maybe we should go back,” Hillary said and unconsciously clutched her lucky crystal pendant, hanging from a thin chain around her neck.

“We’re almost there. Look,” he said as the beam from his flashlight swept across the stones of the chimney up ahead. “Besides, it’s almost midnight.”

When they reached the ruins, Windslow tried to move his chair close to the chimney. As he struggled with his chair, the wind puffed stray gusts, cooler than the others. Hillary felt their chill and took the shawl from her brother’s lap and wrapped it around his shoulders.

“That’s as close as you’re going to get,” she told her brother. “Let’s just get started. I don’t like this adventure. We’re going to get rained on. And if you catch cold, mother is going to--”

“Hillary. Look there. At that stone. I saw something when the lightning flashed. Help me out of my chair.”

“Windslow. What are you doing?”

Hillary moved to her brother, who rocked his chair, trying to get out of it by himself. “All right. Here. Put your arms around me.”

She strained while Windslow helped with his arms. Moving him barely ten inches at a time, she boosted him closer to the chimney until he could lean against the pile of round stones.

“There,” Windslow said and pointed. “Brush off the hearthstone, that big flat one. That’s where I saw it.”

“Saw, what?”

“I don’t know. Something. When the lightning flashed. It was like the stone turned into a big block of ice. I could almost see through it. I wish it would lightning again.”

“If you’re doing this to scare me,” Hillary yelled at her brother, “then you have! Let’s go back. I don’t want any more lightning and your chair might attract it. Did you ever think of that?”

“Good. I want to find out what I saw. There. See that?”

Lightning flashed again, still far off. In the seconds between the flash and the distant thunder, the large two-foot square hearthstone turned nearly clear, like cloudy glass.

Brother and sister huddled together, each trying to get a better view of the stone. A stronger gust of cold air swirled past them. The wind rushed into trees and rattled a dead branch against a hollow trunk. Windslow sat up straight and looked into the forest as the branch kept rapping.

Hillary gave a short scream when she heard the sound. “What was that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe just the wind. It was nothing,” Windslow said. “Get my backpack.”

Hillary stayed on her hands and knees and scrambled to her brother’s chair. She unsnapped the bag and dragged it back to the chimney.

“What are you doing?” Hillary asked when her brother pulled out his slingshot and pouch of acorns.

“Just in case,” he answered and put an acorn into the leather slingshot pad.

Wind buffeted the trees, announcing the closeness of the storm. The dead branch broke loose and crashed to the ground. Windslow pulled back on the acorn, stretching the rubber bands tight. Both Hillary and Windslow screamed when one of the cords snapped. The acorn flew back, ricocheted off the chimney and struck Hillary in the cheek.

“Ow!” Hillary held both hands to the side of her face and began crying. “You shot me,” she said between sobs. “Look. You cut me!” She grabbed her brother’s flashlight and held her hand under the beam. Her palm had a smear of blood on it.

“It’s not that bad. I’m really sorry, Hillary. I--” Windslow’s mouth stayed open, but his words stopped. He stared down at the hearthstone.

Hillary looked at his expression and she couldn’t tell if she saw fear or excitement. She knew he wasn’t pretending. “Windslow?”

“Look. No wait. Sit up a little,” he said and used one hand to push her back.

Hillary sniffed and swept her hand across her cheek, both to wipe away the blood from the tiny cut on her face and her tears.

“Give me the flashlight.” Not waiting he grabbed it from her. “Lean forward again. Just a bit. Let your lucky crystal dangle into the light.”

“Windslow, what--”

“Do it, Hillary. Do it! It makes something happen.” He looked up at her, his eyes bright. “This is working. There’s something here. Really.”

She leaned forward until her crystal pendant hung over the hearthstone. Windslow moved the beam from the flashlight around until the tiny rainbow of light from the glass prism washed across the stone. Lightning flashed. The hearthstone turned milky white, then slowly turned clear as glass. While Windslow and Hillary stared at the clear stone, a single tear ran down the edge of Hillary’s nose and splashed near the rainbow. The clear stone shimmered. The change startled her and she sat up straight. Her quick movement shook a drop of blood from her cheek. It landed next to her tear.

Lightning flickered close this time. Thunder boomed and shook the ground. The hearthstone was gone.

“Don’t touch it,” Hillary said. She grabbed her brother, trying to force him back from the space where the hearthstone had been. “It could be--”

“Let me go!” Windslow yelled and wrenched his shoulder away from her hold. He fell forward and tried to thrust his hand into the hole. Hillary pinned him down.

The wind kicked up stray blades of grass and twigs. Lightning crackled in drawn out choruses that ended in loud, ground shaking booms. Hillary had to let go of her brother to grab the fallen flashlight.

“Hillary, it’s a book. Didn’t you see it? Help me reach it and then we can get out of here. All of this is starting to scare me too.”

She swept the light down into the hole as Windslow tried to get a look. His hand brushed his pouch of acorns and a single nut fell into the hole. They watched the acorn roll across the studded leather cover. When it touched the clasp that held the book closed, the acorn stopped. With a loud “click” it turned to brass and the leather strap fell away.

They both sat up and hugged each other when they heard the clear yet whispering voice carried on the wind that swirled around them.

Book in a stone stays out of sight.

Seek with a rainbow in the night.

Tears from a girl with an overbite.

Nut with a cap where the pine cones fall.

Names of love in a mother’s shawl.

Laughs from a boy who ain't too tall.

Lightning reveals.

A tear unseals.

Blood heals.

Windslow grabbed the book.

3: Fistlock

In the midst of his sleep, the muscles in Fistlock's jaw tightened under his skin like knotted ropes and worked his mouth, grinding his teeth. He began to sweat; beads across the furrows of his brow, moistness across his narrow shoulders and dampness down his back that soaked into his bedclothes. He twisted and snaked, rumpling his blankets until they slid from his spindly body to land in a heap on the floor. The trundle-wraith's shadowy fingers reached from under Fistlock's bed to snatch the blankets away, using its own trickery to entice creaking sounds from floorboards and muffled thumps from the walls and doors.

Fistlock sat up so quickly he frightened the gloom-spinner, a gentile shadow beast who gave a muffled scream from its hiding place in the depths of Fistlock's closet. Two startled shadow-glumps lost their holds on the ceiling at the corners of the room. They plopped to the floor and scurried away, changing to hide in the natural shadows shaped by moonlight draped across a high back chair. The trundle-wraith jerked its fingers back so fast that puffs of mingled lint, hair and dust swirled in the wake from its movement.



“The book,” Fistlock said at first in a whisper. Then a second time he screamed, “The Book!” so loud the words echoed through his castle, stilling all the night sounds; groans and creeping-cracks, scrapes and skittles. Unnatural shadows shrank away, glowing forms turned transparent and unseen. The crawlers vanished for the night.

“What book would that be, Master?” the trundle-wraith asked from under the bed, its voice insubstantial, more like wind than speech.

“The book of Second Chances,” Fistlock said as he slid from bed and kicked at a shadow-glump. “It's open!”

Haggerwolf settled back in his hammock strung between two hardy branches that curved gracefully up from under the porch of his tree-bode, as he called it. A tree house really, cradled high up in the stout and age-wrinkled limbs of the flute-bean tree. An afternoon breeze played quietly with the oblong leaves and long brown seed pods that gave the tree its name.

Small but sufficient, the house had only two rooms. He cooked, ate and slept in the large and spacious front room, except on pleasant days like today. An arched doorway tucked near the stove gave access to the second room, his laboratory. He spent most of his time on the porch, snoozing as he did now. Evening was for lab work, although he had seen little point to it lately. Fistlock controlled everything but the Forge-Twiddlers. All the races had united to defeat Fistlock many years ago, but lost in the end. And there would be no second chance at that.

“Not without the secrets of that book,” Haggerwolf said to himself, sighed, and draped one leg over the edge of the hammock to give himself a small push and swing. “At least the book is hidden away from Fistlock.”

Fistlock had been the first wizard to discover the book, secreted away by wizards in the *time before*. The old texts described many books stashed in hidey-holes hidden by magic that no one understood. Of them all, the book of Second Chances was the most powerful and the key to finding the others. Ownership changed several times, but no one had ever been able to figure out how the book worked. Just having the book brought danger enough, both for the holder and those who desired it.

“Oh well.” Haggerwolf sighed and struck a match to light his pipe.

The wind surged in a narrow blast, nearly lifting him from his hammock as the rope bed jumped and bounced from the air’s shove.

“I...

“can’t...

“breathe.”

His words squeezed out faint and forced, but there was no one else to hear them. His face reddened, making his long beard seem even whiter against the crimson. Close to passing out, he glanced down at his chest, then struggled to pull his short knife from the tangle of cloth that had been his pants. It wasn’t there, but his hand brushed across the pommel of a short sword. He pulled the blade from its scabbard and used the sharp edge to cut loose the top two buttons.

“Phew...” he said with his first breath as he cut off the rest of the vest buttons. With his next breath he yelled. “Larkstone, you idiot!” Haggerwolf knew his friend couldn’t hear him, but the yell made him feel better. When he looked at himself again, he saw more than Larkstone’s vest. Haggerwolf was squeezed into Fernbark’s pants and cover robe, which explained the sword.

That’s all he had time to notice. The smell of burning fibers grabbed his attention. His mind raced to the last time his clothes had scrambled. Without thinking he chopped off the bottom three inches of his beard and watched it float lazily down, one hundred feet to the ground. It was then that he discovered his mistake. With disgust, he spit on the charred hammock rope to extinguish the hot spot where his pipe had emptied.

He decided to summon a journey-wind to take him to Larkstone’s lakeside cottage. Before he could find his wand, an odd, yet vaguely familiar journey-wind swooped down over the top of his tree-bode and snatched him away.

Fistlock’s long stride carried him quickly down the hallway from his bedroom to his laboratory. Torches jutting out from skull-shaped wall sconces lit the way. Their fires bent not from flame-fluffers, but from the wind of Fistlock’s passing. The fluffers knew better than to puff out or tamper with a flame when their master overflowed with the mood they sensed. They shrunk away from him like his other dark shadow beasties.

When Fistlock neared his laboratory a shutterfling threw open the door for him. The copper clad boards banged with a dull thud against the mortared stones of the hallway and the shutterfling retreated back to its hiding place inside one of the hinges.

Panderflip was waiting.

Fistlock didn't bother to acknowledge his stout assistant who waited silently, shoulders slouched and head down, standing behind one of the many tables. Fistlock paced back and forth. His shadow followed; darting across the table, flowing over the glass beakers, clay mixing bowls, and spilled powders.

"I felt it," Fistlock said and continued pacing, still not looking at Panderflip. "I put a spell on it before that blasted Leaper stole it. I sensed it when he unlatched it, but he closed it again before I could find him. This time it's still unlatched, but very far away--faint.

"Use the Book of Worlds," Panderflip said, more as a question than a suggestion.

"Of course! Fetch it." A smile crossed Fistlock's lips for the first time since the spell's nagging had dragged him from his sleep. While his chamberlain hurried to the bookshelves covering the entire end of the laboratory, Fistlock dragged a heavy chair to the center worktable, sat down and waved his hand. Two tall thick candles scraped their way across the table, stopping far enough in front of him to provide room for the large book.

Panderflip gently placed the Book of Worlds in the pool of yellow light spread before his master.

With the sleeves of his black evening robe pushed back, Fistlock raised his wand above the book. Like a conductor ready to signal the orchestra, he tried to hold his hand steady, but the tip of his crooked somber-wood wand quivered. He drew in a deep breath to ready himself and recited the words the magic of the book required.

"Book of Worlds at my command

Open to a distant land.

Show a place and mark it well

That called to me from hidden spell."

Unseen flame-fluffers controlled by the book's magic bent first one candle flame and then the other. Their stronger cousin, the williwaw, puffed the flames out completely and ruffled Fistlock's sleeves with its icy rush of whispered air.

With his spindly, hairless arm still poised above the book, Fistlock twitched his wand and the candle flames relit. Quickly he tucked the somber-wood inside his robe and placed his hands flat on the table, one on either side of the book.

With no great hurry, the leather book cover opened revealing a blank age-yellowed page underneath. The cover stopped, sounding a small tap as it came to rest on the table. The yellow page flipped to join it. More blank pages lifted and turned, quickly now, filling the air with the musty scent of ancient parchment. Midway through the book, the pages stilled and Fistlock waited, watching. Letters appeared in bits and pieces here and there across the page, slowly

crowding together in neat, hand scripted lines. With no more space for them to fill, the page turned and underneath lay a map of stars connected by thin shapes and sharp angles marked with numbers and signs. Beneath it lay another map with continents and lines for navigation. Fistlock smiled as more maps and text hurried past his gaze, too fast for him to read. And then the pages stopped.

“There,” he said and leaned over the book to bring his eyes closer to the small text beside a blood-red dot.

“Ear -th?” Panderflip asked, leaning over Fistlock’s shoulder. “Like fourth, fifth, ear-th?”

When he sat up straight, Fistlock nearly banged the back of his head into Panderflip’s already crooked nose. “No, you shadow-brick. It’s Earth. Like the ground, like dirt. We’ll have to take a journey-wind. Summon one up in the courtyard while I get dressed. And do it right. If we get there and my clothes are mixed with yours, you’ll end up dead along with whoever has my book.

The journey-wind rotated slowly behind them in the five foot circle of flattened meadow grass where it waited. Fernbark, Larkstone and Haggerwolf didn’t bother to rearrange their mixed up clothes. They ran to the crumbling stone chimney and hearthstone that marked where they had hidden the book thirty years ago.

“It’s gone,” Fernbark said. “If Fistlock has it again...”

“It wasn’t him.” Haggerwolf sniffed the air by the hearthstone. He wet his finger, wiped it across the stone and touched the dusty tip to his tongue. “The elements of nature haven’t been fouled and there’s no scent of magic.”

“It was something powerful,” Fernbark said.

“No magic?” Larkstone asked. “Are you sure?” Ignoring Haggerwolf’s nod, Larkstone stooped, sniffed and tasted the ground himself. “Hagger’s right,” he said as he stood. “But there’s something more important. No evil.”

“But it was powerful,” Fernbark repeated and darted his eyes along the tree line until he had turned full circle. Slower this time, he searched again, taking time to look deeper into the trees as he twisted.

“I wish we had a Book of Worlds,” Larkstone said. “Haggerwolf, did your aunt say anything about wizards, or earth spirits, or--”

“Something powerful,” Fernbark said, interrupting.

Haggerwolf scowled at him. “Calm down.” Looking back at Larkstone he answered. “She never said anything. It must have been something with great intelligence. A fearless being.”

“Fistlock has one,” Fernbark said in a whisper and cleared his throat.

Haggerwolf rolled his eyes and shook his head. He opened his mouth to say something to Larkstone, but stopped and turned back to Fernbark. “What did you say?”

“I didn’t say ‘powerful’.” Fernbark held up his hands as if surrendering.

“You said Fistlock has one. One what?”

“A Book of Worlds.”

Haggerwolf and Larkstone stared at each other for an instant. “Fistlock. He’ll be right behind us,” Haggerwolf said.

They both grabbed one of Fernbark’s sleeves and began running toward the journey-wind. Fernbark stumbled at first as his friends pulled him along. His mind wasn’t concentrating on working his feet. It was too busy trying to figure out what he had said that panicked his companions. When he did, he broke away and reached the bent circle of grass before they did. As the other two jumped in behind him, Fernbark’s eyes widened. He bolted back toward the cabin. The journey-wind began to spin.

In a blink its smoke-grey streaks of magic swirled upward, covering its two travelers. The top of the reeling funnel broadened and tugged at the high branches of the pines. Bottom and top swaying out of sync, the journey wind wobbled after Fernbark.

“What in... are... idiot...” were the only words Fernbark understood. The sound of the journey wind sucked back the other words Haggerwolf had yelled.

The wind tried to suck him in too, but Fernbark braced himself against the pull and struggled forward to the chimney stones. He had to wrap both arms around them and clasp his fingers together to keep from being ripped away.

A second journey wind lowered from the clouds. Its sooty colored form ripped up clods of grass at the far side of the clearing.

“Dream snatch, opened clasp!” Fernbark screamed as well as he could. The collars of his cloak slapped painfully against his face. The smell of mold and decayed wood grew stronger as the other journey wind snaked like a predator across the meadow.

His own journey wind buffeted him, lifting his feet from the ground and sucked away one of his boots.

“Magic match, to the last!” He could barely hear his own words through the black screeching of the ominous funnel. The winds competed, one to feed on him, the other to carry him away, yet Fernbark held fast, his fingers unclasped now and bloody from digging into the stones. One more line and the winds could have him.

“From its lair to my...” He squeezed his eyes shut to save them from the bits of stinging sand and sticks that scratched at his face, as he searched for a rhyming word.

“To my...”

The funnels bumped and coiled around each other, pulling his hands away from the stones.

“Pink chair!” his voice boomed from where his body had been. Fernbark was gone.