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CANDLEWICK PRESS

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*For the adventurers, the dreamers,  
and the secret keepers*



**D**ally paused with her hand on the doorknob and took a deep breath. In all her eleven and a half years, nothing had ever felt so important. Clutching the large folder that could make or break her fate, she turned the knob and pushed her way through the door, into the outer office. A bright blue-and-gold block-printed rug led like a runway toward the receptionist's desk, but a few steps in, Dally forced her gaze up from the carpet. She pulled her shoulders back, held her head high. Confident. Assertive. Determined to get what she wanted.

"Hi," she said to the curly-haired woman behind the L-shaped desk. "I have a three-thirty appointment."

"Hello, Miss Peteharrington," the receptionist said. "You can go right in, of course."

Dally glanced at the digital clock on the desk. It read 3:28. "I'm a bit early," she said, hugging her folder. "Should I wait?"

The receptionist smiled gently, a mix of kindness and sadness in her expression. "I suppose so. Let me just ring her." She picked up the desk phone and pressed a single button. "Your three-thirty is here."



Dally nodded. She rather liked the formal sound of that.

“Will do,” the receptionist said into the phone. To Dally, she said, “She’s ready for you. Go ahead.”

“Thank you,” Dally said. She opened her folder and glanced inside one last time.

“Good luck,” whispered the receptionist.

Dally hoped she wouldn’t need luck. She had prepared a very convincing presentation, if she did say so herself. But out loud, she said a polite “Thank you.”

Dally followed another blue-and-gold carpet toward the main office door, head high, folder in hand. The folder contained a tablet with her slideshow already cued up, plus a full backup printout of her presentation, complete with seventeen graphs, two pie charts, three research articles, and a flip chart of bulleted notes printed in her neatest handwriting.

If all that didn’t convince her mother, nothing would.

Dally was prepared. She had made the appointment on Friday for this Monday afternoon. She didn’t *always* have to make an appointment to see her mother, of course, but during business hours it was generally a good idea. Dally badly needed a yes today, and interrupting her mother’s work without warning was sure to put her in a bad mood.

For the last three school days, Dally had spent her free time—the unscheduled hour after school ended and before her business lessons began—doing research and organizing her thoughts. Then, over the weekend, she’d practiced her presentation several times in front of the mirror. Her mother needed

a good reason to do anything different, so Dally had a whole folder full of reasons.

“Hello, Delilah,” said Dally’s mother. She rounded the desk and held out her hand to her daughter. “It’s nice to see you.”

“It’s nice to see you, too,” Dally responded. She gripped her mother’s hand and shook firmly, the way she had been taught.

“Please,” her mother said, gesturing toward the chairs on the visitor side of the desk. It was a boss’s way of saying, *Have a seat, but remember who’s in charge here.*

The chairs were wingbacks and quite large. Dally perched on the very edge of one so that her feet still touched the floor. She usually enjoyed climbing into them and watching her feet stick straight out, but it wouldn’t do to be kicking and flailing while she was trying to seem responsible and businesslike.

Dally’s mother was always perfectly businesslike. Her wavy brown hair was tucked into a neat chignon at the base of her neck, resting on a crisply ironed blouse collar. The delicate features on her smooth, pale face appeared calm. Dally had not inherited the always-put-together gene. Her school uniform top was hopelessly wrinkled. She had restrained her generous black curls somewhat before this meeting, but her full, brown cheeks felt blotchy with heat that certainly was visible. Appearance was only one of the many, many ways that she and her mother were different.

Her mother settled back into her own chair behind the desk. “Interesting that you’ve made an appointment. I assume you have some business to discuss with me?”

Dally sat quietly for a moment. She had rehearsed this part

many times. She knew exactly where to begin, and yet it was all different now that she was in the stately office, with the huge brown desk and the glare of afternoon light through the windows and the pressure of her mother's gaze on her performance.

"This is your meeting," her mother prompted. "What's on your mind?"

Dally swallowed hard. "Yes, I have a presentation," she said, placing her tablet on the desk facing her mother and starting the slideshow. *Lead with the information, land on the ask*, she reminded herself. She opened her folder and pulled out page one.

"Did you know that ninety percent of students who get accepted to Ivy League colleges have a significant track record of participating in extracurricular activities?" She laid the research study on the desk and clicked to her next slide.

"And did you know that the life skills kids can learn from outdoor programs, like scouting and camping, enhance socialization, increase creativity, and actually improve their brains?" She laid the second research study on the desk.

"And did you know"—this was the tough one—"that children who are grieving benefit from finding a way to honor the memory of their loved one?"

Dally's mother glanced toward the framed photo beside her monitor: one quick, there-and-back tug of the eyeballs. If you blinked, you'd miss it. But Dally didn't blink, so her gaze followed automatically.

Dally did a double take. The photo was turned away from her mother. So instead of glancing at the back of the frame, as she

had the last time she'd been in her mother's office, Dally found herself looking directly at the best photo ever taken of her and Grandpa. They were sitting at the kitchen table, contemplating a chocolate cake. Forks in hand, he was smiling down at her and she was smiling up at him. Dally had this photo herself, in her room. She liked to look at it every day. Why did her mother have it turned away?

"Um . . ." Dally laid the third research study, the one about children and grief, on the desk. Then she started in on the ask. "There is a new after-school program beginning at my school this week," she said. "It's called Adventure Club, and I'd like your permission to join. Here is why it is a good idea."

Dally clicked through her carefully prepared slideshow of charts and facts, with the photo of Grandpa smiling over her. She hoped that he would bring good luck to her presentation. (Suddenly she feared she needed a splash of luck after all.)

For her whole life, Grandpa had been Dally's favorite person in the entire world. He had always been there, with his soft belly laugh and crinkly-eyed smile and big strong arms that were excellent for things like hugging and swing-pushing and tree-climbing assistance. He had lived in the estate with her and her mother and their live-in cook and housekeeper. The whole estate used to belong to him, but it had been handed down to Dally's mother when she took over the corporation after Grandpa retired.

The Peteharrington family was, in fact, quite wealthy, and Dally's mother's main concern was keeping them that way.

She worked all day and half the night, and she always worried about money, even though Dally was certain they had plenty. Grandpa called it a terrible preoccupation, and once upon a time, he'd threatened to "snatch the business out from under you and leave you without a dime so you can begin to appreciate what is important in life." But Dally's mother was a shrewd and careful businesswoman, and when Grandpa had said this, she'd produced a pile of papers that made his cheeks redden and his hands ball into tight white fists. Dally had seen it all from behind the suit of armor in the hall outside the study, where she'd hidden to see what the commotion was about. "You are not the daughter I raised," Grandpa said, voice shaking. To which Dally's mother coolly replied, "You no longer have any voting power in the corporation." And when Grandpa began poring over the documents, she added, "The paperwork is perfect. I may not be the daughter you wanted, but I'm *exactly* the daughter you raised."

Grandpa had inherited the business from Great-Grandpa, and Dally's mother had inherited it after that. Dally, too, was being groomed to take over someday. From a very early age, she had been placed in classes and given tutors to help her learn important business-ish things, like economics and bookkeeping and the essentiality of profit margins. These lessons bored Dally down to her bones. She hated charts and numbers. She loved words and stories, mysteries and adventures, but there weren't many of those to be had within the gates of Peteharrington Place—unless you used your imagination.

Dally had imagination to spare, and many wonderful toys, but she longed for someone to play with. She had no siblings, neighbors were few and far away, and her classmates thought she was *strange*. She was too energetic, perhaps, or too quick to invent elaborate, unusual games.

Grandpa had seen Dally's sorrow and loneliness and tried to fix it. He'd negotiated an hour a day of free play, outside of school and homework. After that, the afternoon business lessons began. For two long hours, Dally sat at a small desk in front of a whiteboard while her economics tutor droned on about some chart or another that was meant to illuminate for her the world of high finance. While he talked, Dally's mind would drift backward, reliving whatever fun she'd had earlier that afternoon. Those single hours after school spent with Grandpa in the backyard, climbing trees or working jigsaw puzzles or leaping off the pier into the lake (it was a very large estate indeed), or poring through the delightful old books in the family library—those single hours were the best of any given day, and the best of her entire life, when she added them all up.

They'd had summers together, too, of course, when Dally was free of her daily lessons. Her mother enrolled her in a series of enrichment camps—math and science camp, communications camp, occasionally a regular old sleepaway camp, all of which were more fun than the lessons—but when she was home, she and Grandpa would steal away for an occasional weekend on Grandpa's sailboat. They loved to explore the South Carolina coast on land and sea alike—there was plenty to do right in

their midsize hometown city of Welleston, from the downtown shopping district and historic harbor to the cultural centers and parks and dozens of diverse neighborhoods. They sometimes even ventured up the coast to Charleston or went camping in the Blue Ridge Mountains. There had been no shortage of adventure when Grandpa was around.

“In conclusion,” Dally said, wrapping up her presentation, “I feel that joining Adventure Club would be an excellent way for me to honor Grandpa and keep his memory alive, while learning new skills and making friends. As you can see in the scientific studies, all of these things are important for people my age.”

Dally let out a big breath. She had done a pretty good job making all her points and explaining each of the charts. She paused on the slide that said *Any questions?* and laid the print-out of the presentation on the desk, where her mother could see it. She would be proud of Dally for making a professional slideshow while also having a backup plan. “So, what do you think?”

“I think there’s enough of your grandfather in you as it is,” Dally’s mother said. “This is not bound to help.” She touched one of the research studies. “But I know that enrichment is important. That’s why you have your evening tutor.”

“Tutor in *business*,” Dally emphasized. “But like Grandpa always said, there’s more to life than work.” It was the wrong thing to say, and Dally felt it the moment the words left her mouth. *Oh, no*. To her mother, there was nothing more important in life than work.

“My father was not a responsible man,” Dally’s mother said.

"I know he seemed like a lot of fun to you, but—" She shook her head. She leaned back in her chair and gazed at the ceiling for a long moment.

Dally allowed the silence to grow. "Please," she said, after quite a while. "It's important to me."

"Your grandfather is gone," her mother said. "It's time to move on from his ways."

*Move on from his ways . . . and turn away his photo?*

"Don't you miss him?" Dally's voice rose and, distressingly, cracked. This was a business meeting. She had to stay cool and confident, her mother's only language. Her feelings would have to wait.

"He was my father," Dally's mother said, which wasn't really an answer to the question.

Dally sniffed hard, pulling herself together. "Of course," she said. "Well, I think he would have wanted me to continue certain things in his absence. Adventure Club meets only twice a week."

Her mother pursed her lips. "During your free hour?"

"Yes. Well, it's two and a half hours after school, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. But—" Dally had anticipated this question, and she clicked to the final slide. "That is still only five total hours per week." She had done the math and had a nice calendar graph to show for it. "If I study extra on Monday, Wednesday, and—"

"Your tutor's schedule is already fixed," her mother said. "We've signed an agreement, the three of us."

"Yes, but that was before."



“So, you want to go back on your word? How do you expect to succeed if the people you do business with can’t count on you to be reliable?”

“No, I . . . I want to adjust for . . . um . . .” Dally tried to find a professional thing to say. “I want to adjust the original plan . . . because of a change in information. The announcement about the new Adventure Club was only made last week.”

“I’m sorry, Delilah. My answer is no.”

“But . . .” Dally had expected the meeting to be hard, but she hadn’t expected it to fail. She had done research and made charts!

Her mother folded her hands. “So, if that’s all, you can see yourself out.”

“No. It’s not all.” Dally leaped to her feet. “You’re being unreasonable.”

“I am your mother. I don’t have to be reasonable.”

“But—”

“Your lessons are the priority. That is the end of the discussion. Show yourself out.”

“NO,” Dally said louder, stamping her foot. It made no sound against the plush carpet, making her feel all the more foolish for losing her cool.

Her mother pushed back from the desk and stood up. “Well, it is my office. You’ve come to make a presentation. It was very well thought out, and I’m proud of you for doing it. But sometimes in business, we don’t get what we want.”

“In family, too, I guess.” Dally sniffed again. The tears had

not yet arrived in her eyes, but down in her heart she could feel them packing their bags and boarding the train.

“In family more than anywhere,” Dally’s mother said, her voice quiet but firm. The horrible truth of what she was saying echoed throughout the fancy office. *I’m not the daughter my father wanted. You’re not the daughter I wanted.*

Dally abandoned her presentation papers and turned away, keeping her head high. She would be out the door before she cried. She would. *She must.*

Dally ran through the halls of Peteharrington Place, toward Grandpa's study. Fingers outstretched, she flung herself toward the door and—*oof!* Instead of passing smoothly through, as she expected, Dally slammed hard into the thick, carved wood. The familiar large brass handle would not budge.

The door had been locked since he died, but in her sadness and frustration, Dally had forgotten. She crumpled to the floor, pressed her back against the locked door, and let the train of her tears chug along.

"She's horrid," Dally whispered, wishing Grandpa were there to hear her. "How could you leave me?"

At the reading of Grandpa's will, she had learned that he had left her a bank account all her own, not to be touched until she was twenty-one. The lawyer had held out a big beige envelope with her name on it, and Dally had stepped forward to claim it, but her mother had gotten there first. "It'll go in the safe," she said. "Until you're of age."

Dally didn't understand. The envelope was for her. Even if she

couldn't use the money until she turned twenty-one, it would have been nice to hold in her hand the only thing Grandpa had left for her. She had sat very still in her school uniform, staring at the package on her mother's knee, while the lawyer droned on about real estate and investments and distributions and all manner of other things Dally barely understood.

However, she did know enough about banking (thanks to her lessons) to know that you didn't need an envelope that big to pass a bank account to someone. If all Grandpa had left her was money, he wouldn't have needed an envelope at all.

There was something more in that envelope—Dally was sure of it. But it was locked away.

At least for now.

Through the door, she heard the grandfather clock strike four. Dally had only fifteen minutes until her lessons started.

"Miss Dally?" Hannah, the housekeeper, came bustling around the corner and opened her arms wide. "Oh, there you are, baby. You all right, lovebug?"

Dally scrubbed her cheeks on her sweater sleeves. "Yes, I'm fine." She pushed herself to her feet and scooted out of Hannah's path. She wasn't in the mood to be comforted by anyone who wasn't Grandpa, no matter how warm and soft Hannah's hug was likely to be.

Hannah put one fist on her hip. "Umm-hmm. Now, you know I hear everything that goes on in this house, and I figure it's about time for a cheer-up . . ." She held out her hand, revealing one of Dally's favorite orange hard candies, drawn from a

hidden stash that Dally had spent days trying to locate when she was smaller. Hannah always had a “cheer-up” ready whenever Dally skinned a knee or took a hit to her pride.

Dally accepted the wrapped candy. “Thanks, Hannah. I’ll take this with me to my lessons.” There was a bit of time before she had to report to her tutor, but she wanted to be alone to think. As she rounded the corner, she tore off the plastic and popped in the tasty sweet. It didn’t make her feel a whole lot better, but it certainly didn’t make her feel worse.

It was tempting, of course, to blow off her lessons and go riding or something. Sometimes she imagined galloping off into the distance, never to be heard from again. No one would miss her. What would it be like, she wondered, to simply run away, make her own way in the world? But she was only eleven and a half.

The one thing that might change her fate: getting her hands on the envelope Grandpa left her.

That night, after the usual boring lessons and the usual dinner alone in the large dining room, Dally lay in her bed, thinking. Waiting.

She knew how to pick a lock. She and Grandpa had read about it in a book. They’d spent almost a whole week practicing on padlocks, and then they’d tried their skills on several different doors around Peteharrington Place, including Grandpa’s study.

Dally rolled toward her bedside table and opened the drawer.

She rummaged through the hair ties and scarves and nail clip-pers and whatnot until she felt the soft lump of a leather pouch wrapped in its own strings. Yes, there it was. She still had her lock-picking tools.

She pulled them out of their pouch. Three slim, flat pieces of metal, cool in her fingers but heat-searing her brain.

Dally slipped out from under the covers. The air was chilly, so she slid on her lavender dressing gown and stepped into the dim corridor, clutching the tools.

Dally tiptoed through the halls of Peteharrington Place. She could hear Grandpa's voice in her head, as clear as if he were standing right behind her. *Dally-bird, I said twenty-one, not almost twelve.*

"Extenuating circumstances, Grandpa," Dally whispered back. "If you were really here, you'd understand."

Picking the lock on Grandpa's study felt like shaking hands with a long-lost friend: familiar yet new, and warm with the promise of reconnection. The shadows in the hallway made it hard to see her own fingers, but Dally didn't dare light up the whole place at this hour. It didn't matter, anyway, because lock-picking was done mostly by feel.

The last time she'd been in the halls this late was with Grandpa, the final night they'd snuck out to the lake to swim: Grandpa in his hilarious crescent moon of a Speedo that her mother (and everyone) always made fun of, and Dally in her most comfortable black-and-purple racing suit, the one her mother said was not very feminine. *Alone in the dark, we can be*

*who we want to be, Dally-bird*, Grandpa had said. He was good at making her feel better about all the ways she didn't quite fit in the world. They had slapped five in solidarity, then run along the dock and dived in, splashing and giggling and racing out to the basking rocks. Grandpa always won, of course, because he was taller and stronger than Dally, but she was getting close. A small twinge struck her heart. Now she'd never have the chance to beat him, a milestone she had been looking forward to with every inch she grew.

Dally hadn't known that that swim would be their last dance under the moonlight, but if she had, she wouldn't have done a single thing differently, and there was a kind of joy in that, swirling next to the sadness. She smiled at the memory as the lock twisted open beneath her fingers.

Dally pushed the door inward, and Grandpa smells rushed at her. She closed her eyes and let them enfold her like a hug. Old books. Fresh wood polish. Echoes of pipe smoke. That ancient, woodsy cologne he loved that they didn't even make anymore. He had rationed his last few bottles carefully, but not too carefully. Dally moved toward the sideboard, where Grandpa kept a few spirits, his spare reading glasses, and the cologne in its leafy-green glass bottle. Dally remembered the day he'd cracked the seal on this final bottle. There was less than a quarter inch remaining in it now. "I don't want to outlive this bottle," Grandpa had said, "but I don't want it to outlive me, either."

"That's a conundrum," Dally had answered.

"More like a game," Grandpa had said. When Dally looked

confused, Grandpa had chuckled. “You’ll understand someday, Dally-bird.”

Dally touched the bottle. She supposed she remembered this conversation because it was one of the only times Grandpa had chosen not to explain something that confused her. He was usually the one person she could rely on to tell her the truth, no matter how long and complex and adult it might have been. Maybe that’s what was in the envelope. Something long and complex and adult.

With the door closed and the heavy curtains letting in only a sliver of moonlight, the study was like a cocoon, so Dally dared to reach over and pull the chain on the desk lamp. Then she moved toward the safe, which was hidden behind a simple gold frame containing Grandpa’s favorite map. Dally had never understood his affection for the ugly old scrap of canvas, but he’d once told her it had been a source of great adventure in his life. She barely gave it a glance now as she swung out the frame and reached for the lock.

She knew the combination, of course. Grandpa had been less than stealthy about dialing the eight numbers in front of her, and it was a sequence Dally was not likely to forget, given that those eight numbers spelled out her birthday in reverse.

She cranked the big dial, and the safe door popped open.



**I**t wasn't an extremely large safe, but it was quite full. Stacks of important-looking papers. Boxes containing the most valuable gemstones in Grandpa's beloved collection. Prints of a handful of precious family photographs. Dally rifled through a leaning stack of beige envelopes with labels like DEED, WILLS, CORPORATION until she found the one labeled DALLY.

She carefully closed the safe, leaving everything else as she'd found it. She laid her envelope on the carved mahogany desk and climbed into Grandpa's large leather chair. As an afterthought, she slid out again, grabbed the bottle of ancient cologne from the sideboard, and directed a spritz at the big chair. She settled herself into the fragrant cloud and breathed deeply. For some reason it felt right to read Grandpa's message to her here, in the closest thing to his arms that she'd ever know again.

The envelope was sealed with both regular flap glue *and* a flourish of Grandpa's fancy sealing wax, but Dally tore into it

without caution—there was no chance of covering her tracks with all that going on.

Inside were three items. The first was a floppy old checkbook cover, with a single check-sized piece of paper inside. It had the name of a bank Dally had never heard of and an account number written on it.

The second item appeared to be a map. It was hand-drawn in blue ink on a regular sheet of white printer paper, probably hastily plucked from one of the stacks and stacks of reams on the bookshelf behind her. Dally smiled fondly. That was Grandpa's go-to way of scribbling things down. He never had a proper notebook within reach, nor an ever-present tablet like her mother.

At a glance, the map didn't make much sense. It was sketchy, and everything was labeled with either letters—DS, PP, PL, AM, TSL, X—or tiny numbers—26, 85, 41. To anyone else it might look like an abstract drawing or a scratch page for someone's math homework, but Dally had looked at many, many maps with Grandpa, and she knew one when she saw one.

The third item was a letter on similar paper, in Grandpa's familiar stocky handwriting.

At the top of the page, typed, was a small notation that read "The Last Will and Testament of John Peteharrington Jr.: Addendum 17." That must have been added by the lawyer later, Dally figured. But all she cared about was what Grandpa had written to her.

My dearest Dally-bird,

It pains me to know you are reading this letter at the ripe old age of eleven and a half. (We both know you will not wait until you come of age, don't we?) My fondest wish would be to have the privilege to watch you grow into the beautiful woman I know you will become, but the world has seen fit to separate us now.

I would prefer that you wait until adulthood to read further, but as they say, the past is prologue, and I know too well your eager heart. So, here we are.

The map is for you and you alone, and you know everything you need to follow it. If you choose to follow the map, you must tell no one. It will be our final shared secret.

I love you, sweet granddaughter. You know I've never been one to speculate about what happens once we are gone, but I trust in this, my precious Dally: we shall meet again.

All my love,  
Grandpa

Dally read the letter three times, then hugged it to her chest. She slid it gently back into the envelope for safekeeping. The map she kept out. She needed more time with it. She didn't waste time

resealing the envelope with tape—if anyone bothered to look, it would still be immediately clear that the envelope had been opened. Anyway, Dally wasn't convinced that what she had done was wrong at all. She returned the envelope to the safe, turned out the light, and tiptoed back to her bedroom wing.

Peteharrington Place was the sort of mansion in which a family's only daughter could have a whole suite of rooms all to herself. Dally had a bedroom, a playroom, a sitting room, a bathroom, and a dressing room, not to mention a walk-in closet big enough that she could make snow angels in the carpet without disturbing a single shoe. Her wing was practically a house unto itself.

Dally headed for the brightest light in her suite: the bamboo reading lamp in the sitting room. She flicked it on, and its beam arced over her favorite purple beanbag chair, in front of the built-in bookcase, beneath her wall of special family photos. The familiar images usually blurred into the background, but tonight Dally took a moment to look. The largest frame, in the center, contained a full family portrait, professionally done: Dally, age one, sitting on her mother's lap. Wild black curls framed her smiling, chubby-cheeked, light-brown face. Her hands were frozen in front of her as if she'd been caught in the middle of a delighted clap. Her grandmother sat alongside her mother, and Grandpa and Dally's father stood behind them. Smiling, all together.

Most of the surrounding photos were of her and Grandpa, including their favorite cake photo. There was one with her grandmother, holding her as an infant. Grandma had died before

Dally turned two, and she barely remembered her. Two photos with her father when she was a toddler: one of her standing on skis between his knees, and one of her riding his shoulders in a hiking backpack. They were clearly related—Dally favored her late father’s dark skin and wide features. The final photo in the gallery was of her and her mother, smiling after kindergarten graduation.

*And then there were two.* Dally tore her eyes away from the photos, struck too hard by the sadness of that truth.

She pivoted the bamboo lamp toward the small tea party table nearby and plopped down alongside Raymond, her stuffed koala. She gave his paw a squeeze.

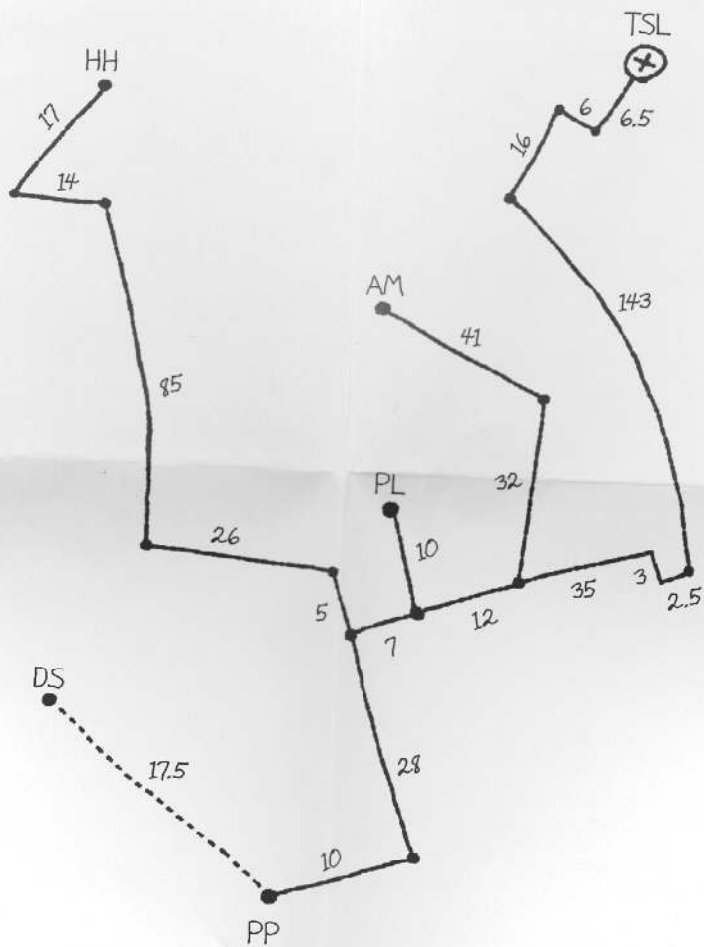
“It’s been quite a day, Raymond.”

Raymond’s glassy black eyes gazed back at her with sympathy. Though Dally was certainly too old for tea parties, she had to admit it was nice to have a familiar friend with her now.

“You pour the tea, and I’ll start on the map,” Dally said.

*Don’t mind if I do,* she imagined Raymond saying. She laid out the map and studied it closely now that she had proper light.

The first number that jumped out at her was 17.5. That was a significant number to Dally, and Grandpa had known it. It took Dally exactly seventeen and a half minutes to walk from her school to the front door of Peteharrington Place, though a good portion of the last minute was spent on the estate property, climbing the long drive. School let out at three o’clock, and Dally’s business lessons started at four fifteen. This timing had been a bone of contention between Dally and her mother. (That



was a very Grandpa phrase: “bone of contention.” It simply meant that Dally and her mother had argued.) Dally was supposed to have one free hour after school, and she did not think it was fair that she really had only 57.5 minutes. Dally thought her lessons should start at four thirty, to give her the full hour, but Dally’s mother felt that she was already being generous by not including the majority of the walking time in the hour and starting the lessons at four o’clock sharp. Stalemate. (Or, some might say, compromise.)

So Grandpa had met Dally on the steps every day at 3:17:30, and they’d have approximately fifty-six and a half minutes of fun, leaving her approximately one minute to scramble from wherever they were to her private classroom.

The important thing was, she’d solved the puzzle! If seventeen and a half Dally-walking minutes was the distance between Dally’s school (DS) and Peteharrington Place (PP), then that was the map key! All the other numbers on the map must represent Dally-walking distances, too.

There were two problems with this solution. First, naturally, her eye landed on the biggest number of them all: 143. A hundred and forty-three minutes would be almost two and a half hours. Dally simply didn’t have that kind of time on her hands. A round trip would take five hours or more, depending on what there was to do at wherever the map led. Even on the weekend, she could not get away with an excursion that long by herself.

The second problem was the unit of measurement. Distance equals 17.5 minutes at Dally speed. That was true all through

last school year. But she'd grown over the summer, and with her longer stride, she was now under seventeen minutes. It was another milestone Dally wished she'd been able to share with Grandpa. Especially now, because it would cause his math to be just slightly off. Dally knew it didn't really matter for the purposes of the map—17.5 was simply the key, and she could calculate the other distances accordingly—but that didn't stop her heart from twinging.

Where did the map lead? In the light, it was obvious that the X on the map was not just another letter, but the X that marks the spot, like on any good treasure map. It was right under the letters TSL. *Hmm*. TSL? The initials rang no bells, which of course made her all the more eager to get there and find out what they stood for.

Dally yawned.

*D, are you planning to get any sleep at all tonight?* she imagined Raymond saying, his beady gaze now one of concern.

"I'll figure it out," Dally told him. "But I guess I don't have to do it all tonight." She kissed his stitched gray nose and flicked off the bamboo light.

Patience wasn't really Dally's specialty, though. She crawled into bed and drifted off to sleep, her mind still a swirl of thoughts about things like map keys, how to convert walk time to drive time, and city bus schedules.



**A**t school the next morning, Dally went to the transportation section of the library and examined the local bus schedule. Welleston had plentiful buses and shuttles operating throughout the city, but few routes served her wealthy neighborhood. Unfortunately, none of the options suited Dally's needs. Fortunately, she had a backup plan.

Dally's mother refused to give her a cell phone until she was twelve, which was still a matter of months away. So Dally borrowed a phone from a classmate (it was not difficult to find one whose parents were not so restrictive) and dialed a number she knew by heart.

"Limos and Co.," said a pleasant man's voice.

"Hi, Mr. Jerry, this is Delilah Peteharrington."

"Ooooh, Miss Delilah." Mr. Jerry's tone spiked from neutral to friendly. "How can I help you today?"

"I'm going to need a ride after school," she said. "May I reserve a car for one hour?"

"What's mine is yours, sweet thing," Mr. Jerry said. A keyboard clicked on his end of the call. "Three p.m.?"

“Yes. And after my errand, I’ll need to be dropped home by four fifteen. So it’s a little bit more than an hour, I suppose.”

“That’s just fine, sugar.” Mr. Jerry clicked.

Dally swallowed hard. “Charged to our usual account, of course.” That part was a bit of a risk, but Dally’s mother ordered a lot of cars, so Dally suspected that the extra expense would go unnoticed.

“Of course. You are all set,” Mr. Jerry said. “Driver will be waiting in the pickup line at three.”

“Thanks, Mr. Jerry. You’re the best.”

“Don’t you forget it, Miss Thing.”

Dally clicked off and headed back toward Chip, the boy she’d borrowed the phone from. He was standing with two of his friends, talking excitedly about Adventure Club. It felt awkward to interrupt their conversation, so she lingered a few feet away. She endured the sting of witnessing their banter and their closeness and their plans for a fun afternoon. Then one of them, Amir, declared, “It’s gonna be next level!” and spun away to speak to someone else.

“Hey, Dally,” said the other kid, noticing her.

“Hi, Evan.” She was careful to use his correct name. Evan had recently come out as trans and changed his pronouns.

“So, what did your mom say?” Chip asked, coming over to Dally as Evan went after Amir.

“Say?” she echoed.

“About Adventure Club.” He slid a piece of paper out of his folder: the signed permission slip.

Dally sighed with envy. “Oh. She said no.” How did Chip know she was interested in Adventure Club in the first place?

“So what?” he told her, waving his permission slip. “There’s still a way . . .”

Dally wasn’t sure what he meant, and she didn’t know how to ask him. Sixth grade was proving difficult like that. She handed the phone back to Chip. “Anyway, thanks,” she said.

“Sure.” The redheaded boy plucked his phone from Dally’s fingers and smiled. “It’s kinda nice to know I have something you don’t have.”

Dally smiled, too, but his words made her feel a little funny. Chip had several things she didn’t have, in her estimation. The phone, for one, and friends like Amir and Evan, and also the permission slip to join Adventure Club that very afternoon. That was something Dally could not buy or borrow. But she refrained from saying anything about it. She had learned that she should never complain about the things she didn’t have. People had trouble understanding how you could have a lot of money and still be wanting.

Chip came from a family that was quite well-off, as did most students at Dally’s private school. But the Peteharringtons were “richer than God,” according to a recent newspaper article. Quite a few of Dally’s classmates’ parents worked for the corporation, which made Dally the boss’s daughter. When they were little, her friends from school had loved to come play and explore at Peteharrington Place. But as they got older, the other children began to regard her as different. Dally gradually found

herself with fewer playmates. Even when she did meet someone she liked, it was harder to make time for playdates now that she had her business lessons to contend with.

Money made life easy; Dally knew that. She would likely never want for food, or books, or toys, and that made her very lucky. But there were a great many things that money couldn't buy: laughter, and the right people to laugh with, for example. Free time for adventures.

Dally watched Chip proudly wave his permission slip a moment longer. Then she squared her shoulders and walked to her classroom.

Adventure Club would go on for the rest of the school year. Perhaps there was still time. Regardless, this very afternoon she was going to have an adventure of her own making. For now, that would have to do.

Dally spent her quiet study time comparing Grandpa's map to the city map and deciding on an address to give the driver. First, she measured the actual distance from school to home using the small ruler at the bottom of the city map. Then she made a ruler of her own, representing ten Dally-walking minutes (at her old speed). She used that ruler to trace each leg of distance marked on Grandpa's map along the real map of the city.

For example, Grandpa's map showed three turns between "PP" and "PL," totaling fifty-five Dally-walking minutes. When Dally traced that route on the city map, she could see that it led from Peteharrington Place to the public library. She and

Grandpa had walked there many times, and it had always taken about an hour. So Dally concluded that “PL” meant public library. When she mapped the path to “AM,” it led her to the local art museum.

Yes! She was cracking the code!

Excited, Dally began measuring the journey between “PP” and the X that marked the mysterious “TSL.” She double-checked her work, then chose a location that she was hoping would be about three blocks shy of the X. The final destination had to remain between her and Grandpa. The letter had been clear about that.

When she walked out of school and scanned the pickup line, it wasn’t an anonymous driver in a town car waiting for her but Mr. Jerry himself, in a stretch limo. He was parked front and center in the line of parents and nannies in high-end station wagons and SUVs.

“Okay, fancy-pants,” one of the boys from her class called out as she approached the limo. Her stomach dropped a bit. It was things like this, exactly like this, that made her not quite like everyone else. It hadn’t occurred to her to request a plainer car. Her mother might have loved a splashy exit, but Dally was trying to fly under the radar here.

Still, she smiled involuntarily as Mr. Jerry climbed out of the car and waved. Mr. Jerry’s answering smile was bright and cheerful. He wore a little chauffeur’s hat and a dapper black tie and vest with a gold flower stitched to the lapel. He doffed his cap to Dally and soft-shoed toward the back door with the

presence of a performer onstage. She could practically hear strains of old jazz emanating from his bones as he moved.

“Well, I’ll be,” Dally said. “The man himself.”

“Only the best for milady.” Mr. Jerry tapped his hat brim again and offered a short bow as he opened the door for her.

“It’s good to see you, Mr. Jerry.” It was, despite her desire to keep a low profile.

“And you, Miss Delilah.”

She settled in, dumping her backpack on the seat beside her. Mr. Jerry closed the door. Dally opened one of the short water bottles waiting in the cupholder. Hydration was important before an adventure.

“Where to, sweet thing?” Mr. Jerry eased the limo out of the pickup line as he spoke.

Dally gave the address she had chosen. It was a bakery, according to the city map, which seemed like a plausible place to want to go.

“You sure about that?” Mr. Jerry said.

“Yes, why?” Dally asked.

“Not really your part of town,” Mr. Jerry said. “Your mother’s okay with it?”

Dally hadn’t expected to be put on the spot quite so directly about the issue of permission. She sipped water from the bottle and searched her brain for a true thing to say.

“There are lessons my mother wants me to learn, to prepare for being an adult,” Dally said. “I get an hour after school to explore. I have to be home by four fifteen.”

Mr. Jerry nodded like this explanation made sense. “Well, you’re growing up right fast, Miss D.”

They chatted as the car whipped past the glittering storefronts of the shopping district, then the less-glamorous strip malls, and, finally, to a stretch of blocks that had a more industrial feel. Wide sidewalks fit for window-shopping gave way to dingy parking lots, weedy fields, and chained-up warehouses. Past the warehouses, storefronts appeared again, though everything here seemed more muted and worn. The sidewalks opened up, and they were teeming with people—walking, shopping, sitting on stoops, rushing here and there, even dancing. So many people! Dally scanned the faces, in all colors from pale to dark. A Black neighborhood, one she didn’t recall ever visiting on her explorations with Grandpa. That was surprising. Even though he was white, Grandpa had always worked hard to show Dally a diverse world. They’d explored Black communities much farther from home, so why not this close one?

The limo turned a corner and slowed. A large crowd filled the street.

“Dang,” Mr. Jerry said. “This place is poppin’.”

Music blasted from a radio that Dally couldn’t see. Some people in the crowd shimmied to the beat. Mr. Jerry honked, and folks slid back toward the sidewalk in a wave to let the car pass.

“Is there a party?” Dally asked.

“New fried chicken joint opened up down the block,” Mr. Jerry said. “S’posed to be good. Biscuits that melt in your mouth, whatnot.”

"All these people are in line for chicken?" Dally was incredulous.

"Everyone's turning out. You know, how Black folks are gonna do." Mr. Jerry chuckled.

Dally smiled and nodded, as she knew she was meant to, but the truth was, she *didn't* know. Dally was biracial, but since her father had died when she was small and he didn't have much living family, she didn't have a lot of experience being immersed in a Black community. Dally's mother being the way she was meant Dally had lived most of her life surrounded by white people—at her school, in the business, in the community. She knew exactly what Mr. Jerry had meant when he said this wasn't her part of town, and it made her very sad.

Looking out the rear window at the spontaneous block party, Dally thought it all seemed very exciting. The sense of community, strangers making friends in the street. The laughter, the music, the dancing.

*The oppression*, said a tiny voice in Dally's mind. She leaned against the seat and sighed. It was her mother's voice, no doubt. Her mother, who believed that money was all you needed to overcome the problems that could come with having brown skin, that rising out of poverty and moving across town, as Dally's father had done, could insulate you from the ill effects of racism. Her mother clearly felt that was all that mattered, but Dally suspected the privilege she enjoyed came with other costs.

Moments later, Mr. Jerry pulled up in front of the bakery.



This building, too, looked rather dusty and run-down, but the lights inside the shop were bright and inviting.

“You sure?” Mr. Jerry said again. His eyes met hers in the rearview.

“Oh, yes,” Dally said. She checked the clock. The drive had taken only about twenty minutes. “I’ll be back in time to be home by four fifteen.”

“I’ll be here,” Mr. Jerry said. He raised his newspaper, as if to prove that he’d be easily occupied.

Dally grabbed her backpack, hopped out, and entered the bakery. The sweet, bready scent that met her nose nearly derailed her from her mission. She made a note to purchase a cupcake on the way back, if there was time.

Luckily, the shop had a back door. It didn’t look meant for customers, but it was unlocked. Dally held her breath as she tried the door, then exhaled in relief as she burst into the alley. She followed Grandpa’s map from memory, skipping eagerly along the sidewalk for the final three blocks.

The destination was . . . unimpressive. Anticlimactic in the extreme. So disappointing that Dally began recalculating the math in her head. After a moment’s reflection, she was still sure she’d done it correctly.

But there was nothing. Less than nothing, somehow. It was simply a field of scrub grass growing through what once might have been a patch of pavement, ugly and ordinary, with the trees of a park forming a distant backdrop beyond.

She studied Grandpa's map and the city map side by side one more time. The map he'd left her led here, she was certain. She was good with directions, and Grandpa had known that.

Dally put her hands on her hips. "Well, I'm here," she said aloud. "So now what?"

A slight humming sound filled Dally's ears. She tugged an earlobe, hoping to clear the feeling. Then she blinked. Not a special blink, but a normal, super-quick close-and-open. The kind you never even think about.

But Dally thought about this one. Because before she closed her eyes, she was staring at nothing—and when she opened them, everything was different.

A large old building, made of cut stones and sparkling glass, rose up in front of her. It stood steady, as if it had been there a hundred years. A flight of wide, shallow stairs ran up from the sidewalk where Dally stood to an ornate doorway. Carved into the stone above the pillars were three simple words: THE SECRET LIBRARY.

**I**t was mid-afternoon, but the sun seemed to set as Dally climbed the twenty stairs toward the stately old library building. She passed between tall marble columns, shivering in the surprising early dark. Her patent-leather school shoes clicked across the landing, and she squinted through the shadows at the entrance ahead.

A sign on the wide wooden door said:

# **WARNING!**

**BEFORE YOU SET FOOT ON THE PREMISES,  
THE FIRST THING TO KNOW IS THAT IT'S NOT  
THE SECRET LIBRARY; IT'S THE SECRET LIBRARY.  
A LIBRARY OF SECRETS. YOU CAN EVEN CHECK  
THEM OUT, AT YOUR OWN PERIL.**

A little shiver crossed Dally's shoulders. *Peril* had been on her vocabulary list this week, so its definition was fresh in her mind; it meant: "horrible, life-threatening danger."

Well, then. *No guts, no glory*, she thought. That had been

Grandpa's way of saying, *Have courage*. People who were brave and took risks (within reason) enjoyed the greatest rewards in life.

This seemed well within reason. It was just a library, right?

Dally reached for the doorknob. Her fingers gripped the burnished metal, and she could have sworn she felt the tiniest of jolts singe her palm. A voice in the air, possibly female, said:

*"You might think that the best place for secrets would be a vault. Somewhere to deposit deep dark truths and leave them to fester among the cobwebs for all eternity, never again to see the light of day. You would be right.*

*"The Secret Library used to be a vault. That's what it was meant to be, just as the great pyramids were meant to be tombs for the sarcophagi of Egyptian pharaohs, sealed forever. But then a little bit of time passed, and some archaeologists decided that forever didn't really need to be forever, and the things contained in the tombs might be more valuable if they were known to the world instead of hidden away in reverence. So they cracked through the hardened sand and dug out the treasures of the pyramids.*

*"A great wealth was contained within. The archaeologists came away with gold, silver, precious jewels, expensive artifacts, and knowledge. But such power never comes without a price . . .*

*"The pyramids are not the point. The point is that humans are ever tempted by knowledge that should be out of reach. They can't help but meddle in things much larger than themselves. Do you know the legend of Pandora's box? This library was once such a vault, you see, but it is no longer sealed beneath the sand. Such choices have consequences—that is the point.*

*"Understand, stranger: the building you are about to step into is a dangerous place. Enter at your own risk."*

With that, the door swung open, revealing a cool, dim foyer. Dally folded the maps and then stuck them in her backpack. Swallowing hard, she slid inside, and the door closed behind her with an echo that faded to stark silence. She listened to the nothingness until she felt a prickle on the back of her neck.

"Hello?" she called, spinning toward the sensation. Coming here might have been a terrible idea. Perhaps she should go. But the wall behind her—which had once held the door—was smooth and white, hung with paintings Dally couldn't make out. Startled, she turned forward again.

The voice in the air whispered, *"It seems you are persistent. There is great wealth within, for those who are brave enough."*

Courage was all well and good in theory, but living it was something else entirely. The soft voice made Dally's skin crawl, and she clutched her backpack across her chest as if holding it there might afford some measure of protection. Protection

from what, she could not say. And that was the crux of her nervousness.

The voice in the air said, *"Please read the letter."*

"The letter?" Dally repeated. At the sound of her voice, there was a strange curling in the air in front of her. It wasn't the sort of thing that could be described, because by the time Dally blinked, it was over. A thin piece of stained parchment unfurled as if from nowhere.

*Dear Patron,*

*Welcome to the Secret Library. I trust you will find what you're looking for, and more. Should you require any assistance, the librarian on duty will be happy to help you.*

*The rules of the library are as follows:*

*You may peruse the stacks, but you may not remove any secrets without permission.*

*Secrets may not be shared.*

*Finally, please maintain a reverent tone.*

*There are many secrets resting here, and you would do well not to disturb them unduly.*

*Thank you for your attention. Please proceed with our well wishes.*

*Sincerely,*

*Magdalene Mitchall  
7th Grande Dame of  
the Whisper Society*

As soon as Dally finished reading, the parchment caught fire, as if lit by an invisible match. Dally's eyes widened. Her mouth formed a shocked little O as the flames crackled and licked, devouring the paper. Soon it was but a cloud of smoke that wafted into the air, leaving behind a surprisingly peachy aroma.

*Grandpa*, Dally thought, *did you really mean for me to come here?*

"Yes, you're in the right place," said a new voice, beside her. "Only those who are meant to find the library do so."

This time, the voice belonged to an actual body. A woman appeared, stepping forward out of the dark as if she'd been there all along, which Dally was certain she hadn't. Well, almost certain.

Dally leaped backward, clamping her hands over her mouth. She was sure she hadn't spoken aloud. "How . . . how did you—?"

The woman smiled. "I'm a librarian of secrets," she said. "I know one when I see it."

As the startled feeling dissipated, Dally stared. She couldn't really help it—the librarian was the most beautiful person Dally had ever seen in real life. She had long flowing brown hair that went down past her waist, with two thin braids snaking back from her ears and holding it all in place behind her shoulders. Her face, throat, and hands were made up of smooth, pale skin with the lightest dappling of freckles. She wore a soft-looking turquoise gown that fit every round edge of her body perfectly. The delicate, arching glasses across her nose matched her dress,

and she wore a sparkling silver necklace with a turquoise stone.

After a moment, Dally realized her mouth had dropped all the way open. She carefully closed it, clicking her teeth for good measure.

“My name is Jennacake. I’m the secret librarian. How can I help you?”

Dally unclenched her hands and smoothed them over the front of her pleated skirt, attempting to dry the nervousness from her palms. She no longer felt quite as scared, now that she wasn’t all alone and the voice without a body seemed to have stopped. Instead she felt awkward and somewhat silly-looking, in her uniform skirt that was a size too big (her mother said she’d grow into it, but she hadn’t yet), stockings with a hole in the shin (there was always a hole somewhere), and a shirt that was missing a button (she just noticed it now, as her slightly-less-scared fingers picked at her shirt for something to do). Her hair had been neatly combed at one point but now probably looked unruly. She sensed more stray black curls leaping forward as she stood there.

“I—I’m not sure,” Dally said.

Jennacake smiled, which made her even prettier. Dally tried to pull her shoulders out of their after-school slouch. “Well, that’s okay,” the librarian said. “We’ll figure it out. Why don’t you start by telling me your name.”

“I’m Dally.” She thought the librarian seemed strikingly pleasant. “Hello, Ms. Cake.”

“Actually, Jennacake is my first name. It’s unusual.”



“Cake is part of your first name?” Dally smiled. “That should be more common.”

The librarian clapped her hands lightly. “You are the first to put it that way. I like your logic.”

“My name is also unusual.” Dally had never met another Dally.

“Well, then we are two peas in a pod, aren’t we?”

Dally smiled again. She would’ve very much liked to have anything at all in common with Jennacake. “I suppose so.”

“Why don’t you come inside,” said the librarian. “I’ll show you around.”

Jennacake turned and walked—glided, really—down a wide corridor that seemed to glow with candlelight as she moved. Dally followed. The hall appeared to be made of stone or marble, and while their path was lit now, when Dally looked over her shoulder, she saw nothing but darkness behind them.

“Have you got a last name?” she asked, because talking made the surroundings seem less strange. “I hope it involves ice cream.”

Jennacake laughed, a delightful throaty tinkle that made Dally’s skin feel warm. “Yes, I have a last name.” Dally noticed she didn’t say what it was. “How about you?”

“Peteharrington,” Dally reported. “My whole name together is a bit of a mouthful.”

“Oh.” Jennacake’s steps faltered just a little bit. “Oh, my.” The light around her glowed stronger, bringing the corridor from dusk toward daylight. She whirled to face Dally, her gorgeous

features pursed in alarm. “Dally is a nickname? You’re Delilah Peteharrington?”

“Y-yes?” Dally blurted it out like a question, which was silly, because she perfectly well knew her own name. “Yes. Delilah Richmond Peteharrington.”

Jennacake sighed. “Well, then, that’s enough of the theatrics, I suppose.” She glanced toward the ceiling, and the air began to hum with the buzz of fluorescent lights coming on. The marble hallway shone white, ahead and behind. Its walls were etched with the most intricate pattern Dally had ever seen.

“Wow,” she breathed, in spite of herself. She reached out and touched the cool wall. Even her smallest finger was too big to fit in the carved lines.

“Yes,” Jennacake murmured absently. “Come along, sweetheart.” She continued down the corridor, head slightly bowed, kneading her forehead with her fingertips. Her ethereal calm had been replaced with something akin to worry, perhaps even edging toward panic.

“What’s wrong?” Dally’s nervousness ticked back up a few notches (it had never gone totally away). She hurried after the librarian, who didn’t answer.

“What is it?” Dally insisted, but then all words faded from her mind as they reached the end of the hallway; it spilled into a high-ceilinged room awash with pale golden light and lined floor to rafters with marble bookshelves packed with slender, aged volumes.

The Secret Library.

Dally spun in a slow circle, hearing a soundless sound that seemed deafening to her, a silence that could only be described as the sound of millions of voices about to speak. It made her ears pound, not to mention her heart. It made her want to listen; it made her want to scream. It made the curious corners of her mind begin to itch.

“Whoa,” muttered Dally, because it was the kind of room that changed everything.

The librarian turned to her. “I’m afraid you’ve come to the right place, my dear.” Jennacake’s lovely brown eyes swam with tears. “I’m just so very sorry you had to find us so soon.”

Dally stood perfectly still, overwhelmed. The questions on her tongue included: *What is that sound?* and *What does that mean, “so soon”?* But she found herself not saying anything. The silence in the room was far too loud to speak into. It practically immobilized her.

Jennacake drifted a short distance away, then returned. Her face had smoothed itself back to cool perfection. She held out a lightly steaming mug of pale-blue liquid. It didn't look like any drink Dally had ever seen.

“Sip this,” the librarian said. “You'll feel better.”

Dally hesitated. She had indeed started feeling quite awful, but not so awful that she'd forgotten the general rule of not drinking unusual potions handed to her by strangers. “No, thank you,” she managed to say. It felt like she screamed it over the pounding in her head.

“I'll taste it first, if you'd like,” Jennacake said. “You're really going to want to drink this.” She brought forth a spoon, dipped it into the lake-like surface of the drink, and gathered a small

puddle, which she raised to her lips and slurped up like soup. “See?” She extended the mug to Dally.

Dally grasped it between her fingers. It was warm. She smelled the strange steam, and it began to calm the pressure in her ears, the curious itch along the underside of her scalp. Casting her better judgment aside, she took a tiny sip.

At once, the air around her head widened back to normal, as if a great weight had been lifted.

“Oh,” Dally said. “Yes, that’s better.” She took another sip. It tasted like a mixture of raindrops and sunshine, with a slight earthy undertone of fresh-mown grass—surprising, but delicious. Dally drank some more.

“A little is enough,” Jennacake told her, “but it won’t hurt you a bit if you choose to drink the rest.”

Dally took a final sip, then handed the mug back to the librarian. “Thank you,” she said politely.

“It’s no trouble,” Jennacake said. “Now, first things first. What brings you to the library today?”

Dally had a different idea about what first things should come first. “What did you mean, I’ve found you too soon?”

Jennacake sighed. “It’s like I said—everyone who finds the library is meant to be here. So, you are meant to be here. I just wasn’t expecting you yet.”

“Do you *expect* everybody who comes to the library?”

“Heavens, no,” the librarian said. She reached out with pale, slender fingers and squeezed Dally’s arm. “You, Dally, are quite special.”

Dally ducked her head, suddenly feeling sad. It was pleasant to be called special, of course, but the only other person who had ever thought that about her was Grandpa. He used to say it all the time. *Dally-bird, never forget how special you are.* Here, in the now-quiet library, she could practically hear the echo of his voice. She missed him very much.

"I've lost you to your thoughts, it would appear," Jennacake said, startling Dally out of her swirl of sad-happy memories.

"I only have an hour," Dally blurted out. "I forgot to mention that."

"We have plenty of time," the librarian said. "But if you want to dive right in, Minor Transgressions would be a good place to start." Jennacake pointed to a brightly lit section toward the front of the library.

"They're not really labeled," Dally observed, walking toward the bookshelves to get a closer look. Each book's spine had some texture on it—something like braille, perhaps—and, at the very bottom, a small row of six to eight numbers, but they were unlike any Dewey decimal labels Dally had ever seen in a normal library.

"That's right," Jennacake said. "You just choose the right one."

"Any one?"

"Yes."

Dally studied the rows of narrow spines. Some were thinner than others, but none were any thicker than a picture book.

Her finger traced the books on the shelf at her eye level, and then the one just below. As she touched the spines, the

strangest sensations suffused her. Each book seemed to come with a *feeling*: happiness, sadness, frustration, calm. The faster she dragged her finger, the faster the emotional roller coaster.

“Whoa,” Dally said, pulling back. “How do they do that?”

“Strange, isn’t it?” Jennacake seemed to know what she was talking about. “But also exciting?”

Dally nodded. She moved to another shelf. Sometimes a word rang out in her ears, as though each book were speaking to her. *Locket. Carousel. Transit. Trouble.* She lingered on that last spine and tugged it out. It wasn’t the word that drew her so much as the feeling of relief that surged up in her.

“Okay,” Jennacake said. “Bring it here.” She began walking toward a door at the far side of the room, beyond the reference desk.

Dally studied the thin volume as they went. It had a flimsy starched-cloth cover that bound just a few pages. The numbers on the spine read 202377. At the side where the book should open, a thin strip of the cloth sealed the back to the front, buckled by a tiny latch.

“It’s locked,” Dally noted. “Like a diary.”

“We can’t have secrets falling open on their own,” Jennacake said. “Sometimes what is powerful has to be protected.” She produced a slender key. “Come with me.”

Jennacake led Dally to a stone door with the words *READING ROOM* above it in gold script. The door opened to a small, cramped space, barely bigger than a study carrel, with a single desk and chair and no windows, lit by a dim overhead bulb. *By*

*rights, Dally thought, a reading room should be much brighter.*

“A bit dark in here, isn’t it?” she said as Jennacake motioned for her to take a seat at the desk. The gentle glow of light emanating from the librarian illuminated the white stone walls, which were carved with thin gold lines like the entry hall. In one corner, several stacks of books lay, dusty and cobwebbed.

Dally set the book on the desk, and Jennacake applied her key to the tiny lock. The thin strap flopped loose.

Dally reached for the cloth lip of the cover.

“No!” Jennacake cried, slamming her hands over the book. “No, dear, you must wait until I’m out of the room. I can’t come with you.”

“Come with me?” Dally echoed.

There followed a slow, spreading silence, in which Jennacake’s liquid brown eyes began to shimmer. “You’re just so young,” she whispered finally. “As it is, I can only give you a crash course in secret navigation.”

Dally’s pulse ticked steadily beneath her skin. She could feel it in her throat, her wrists, her knees. “Secret navigation?” Dally was beginning to feel like a cave of a person, empty of knowledge with nothing to offer but echoes and a pitch-dark heart. The nervous speed of the blood in her vessels made her skin flush. It was either that, or the anger that suddenly flooded her from the roots of her hair to the tips of her toenails. *How could you leave me, Grandpa? How could you leave me in such a mess? Why didn’t you tell me about the library before you died? I hate you for leaving without telling me.*



Dally immediately felt ashamed of the horrible thoughts. She didn't mean it—she just wanted Grandpa back.

Jennacake closed her eyes.

"Each secret exists in a world of its own," she said. "A world built upon the memory of the person whose secret it is. Or a compilation of memories, if the secret is shared."

"Like a collage?"

"Sometimes. Secret navigation is . . . a bit of a journey."

"Like diving into someone's head?"

"Yes, except the world is real."

Dally's eyes widened. "Real? You mean, I will see another place?" The volume on the desk seemed too thin to contain such magic, but the possibility made her breathless with anticipation.

"Very much so," Jennacake said. "You will travel to the moment when the secret occurred, or a moment when it was revealed or shared. You may even interact with the secret holder."

"You mean, like a glimpse into the past?" Dally asked.

"Not a glimpse," Jennacake said. "It's more complicated."

"I don't get it," said Dally.

Jennacake tipped up her chin and gazed at the intricate ceiling. "You will enter the actual past."

"What?" Dally said, not quite sure she had heard right.

"We have been taught that time is linear," Jennacake said. "Because that's how most people experience it. The library is different."

"But doesn't going to the past affect the present? Or the future?"

"You're not affecting history. The why of that is hard to explain. From where we stand today, the things you do there have already happened. But for you and those you meet, it will all be happening for the first time. The secret will be revealed in time, but the bigger the secret, the larger the lead-up. Usually."

"How long will it take?" Dally had fleeting thoughts of Mr. Jerry waiting for her on the corner and her tutor waiting for her at home.

"Time is . . . different . . . in the library," Jennacake said. "It may feel like you're gone a long while, but it will be much less than an hour in real time."

"Gone?" Dally said. "It's just a book."

Jennacake shook her head. "Once you enter the pages, it's no longer just a book."

Dally's heart fluttered. "It's an adventure?"

Jennacake reached out a finger and brushed a wandering curl off Dally's cheek. Even though they had only just met, it felt like a loving touch, and it calmed Dally's racing pulse.

"You could call it an adventure," Jennacake said. "One last thing to know: Each secret has a boundary. It's white, like clouds or fog. A traveler must never cross this boundary. You must stay within the circle created by the fog, no matter what happens. No matter what you have to do. The fog is how the library keeps you safe. Do you understand?"

Dally understood Jennacake's words, but not the larger meaning of them. Nevertheless, she nodded.

"Okay, then." Jennacake's lovely frown flashed as she moved

away. "Once the door is closed, you may go." The librarian then closed it, leaving Dally alone in the shadowy room.

She waited a beat for good measure, then flipped the secret open. "Well, here goes."

Dally's head began to spin. Darkness engulfed her. She clutched the edges of the cloth-bound book until she could no longer feel it, and her hands folded in on themselves in two tight fists.

When the spinning stopped, Dally opened her eyes. She relaxed her fists. She was standing on grass, among bushes. Not just any bushes: the carefully trimmed and cultivated hedges of the topiary garden at Peteharrington Place. Why, it seemed she had been transported to her own backyard!

It was a rather impressive feat, but what did it have to do with any kind of secret?

Dally shook off the remnants of dizziness and took a few steps. To her left was the white fog Jennacake had described—the secret’s edge. The fog swirled and billowed in place, like smoke caught behind a pane of glass. It stretched as high as she could see, like a wall to the sky.

*A traveler must never cross this boundary.* So Dally turned right, in order to stay inside the circle created by the fog. It must be quite a large circle, she reasoned, because from here she could not see the other side of it. Behind her, the slightly curved wall of fog ran straight through one of the six-foot hedges and disappeared beyond.

Otherwise, the gardens looked surprisingly . . . normal. This

part of the hedge was a simple labyrinth leading toward the flowers and topiaries at the center. At first Dally heard only her own footsteps and a solitary chirping bird, but soon the sound of light humming and the blade-on-blade rasp of pruning shears reached her.

The humming paused. “Sí,” said a man’s voice. He fired off a few orders in rapid Spanish. Dally peeked around the hedge. Hector, the grounds manager, was directing a small crew of workers. He had clippers in his hands, and the others had rakes and shovels. Dally understood enough Spanish to know they were talking about preparations for her mother’s annual garden party. But that had taken place months ago, in the early summer!

When Hector finished the instructions, the others scurried off into the bushes to do their tasks, leaving him alone. He walked around, humming and examining each topiary: the antelope, the giraffe, the lion, the elephant. A smattering of tools lay in the clearing, but Hector had his eyes raised to the leafy beasts. He didn’t notice the rake in the grass until his toe caught it.

“¡Ay Dios mío!” Hector exclaimed as he stumbled, falling backward toward the elephant. His arms flailed and instinctively reached for something to break his fall. The closest thing was the elephant’s trunk. It did break Hector’s fall, but his momentum broke the trunk.

Dally’s stomach sank. Seeing the now-dangling trunk brought back a memory. Not from this past summer but from the summer before.

“Oh, no—oh, madre de Dios.” Hector whispered a swift and urgent prayer, holding the trunk in place as if hoping to heal it by magic. “It’s hopeless.”

Dally’s distraction had made her careless, apparently. She had moved closer and closer while listening, and when Hector turned at the sound of her, she had no choice but to step into the clearing.

“Hello, Miss Dally,” Hector said. “My, you’ve gotten tall, haven’t you?”

“Like a weed, Grandpa says. Gotta go, Hector!” Dally skittered on by, not wanting to prolong the encounter. She was indeed much taller now than she had been two summers ago.

She ducked behind a large shrub just as her mother’s shriek rang out. “Hector, what have you done? How could this happen?”

“I—I don’t rightly know, Ms. Peteharrington,” Hector stammered.

“Did one of your people do this?” Dally’s mother demanded. “When you find out who, I want them off the property immediately. Carelessness is not acceptable.”

“I—I don’t believe it was one of them,” he said. “I’m the only one who works on the topiaries, as you know.” He quickly added, “This could easily have been an accident. Maybe an animal? Or . . . a child?”

Dally’s mother’s eyes narrowed. “Hector, have you seen Delilah? Has she been playing out here today?”

A surge of anger flooded Dally. She remembered this day,

indeed. She recalled the scolding, her confusion, the miserable week she'd spent banned from the garden.

"I—I don't think so, ma'am. That is, I did see her a short while ago. But I don't rightly know."

"That child treats this whole property like her personal playground," Dally's mother complained. "I shall have a word with her about her recklessness."

"As you wish, ma'am." Hector hung his head.

"The garden party is next weekend, you know. Everything must be in shape. Fix this immediately."

"Yes, ma'am."

Dally's mother stalked away. Hector let the trunk dangle once again and dropped his head into his hands.

Dally's skin began to tingle. The air began to spin. The fog swiftly darkened from white to gray to black, then billowed close and closer, from all sides. She shut her eyes.

Hector's secret would be safe with her. In fact, now that she knew the truth, she felt quite a bit better about her own memory of that day, and the undeserved punishment she had endured. Her mother might have fired Hector on the spot for making such a human error. But no matter how much her mother might want to, she couldn't fire Dally.

Dally opened her eyes and found herself alone in the dim stone room again, clutching the closed book in her hands as though she had simply finished reading. She dutifully snapped the slim lock into place.

“Good, you’re back,” Jennacake said as Dally emerged from the reading room. “That should have been a short one.”

“It was amazing!” Dally gushed. “I went to—”

“Shhh.” Jennacake hushed her, pressing cool fingers against Dally’s lips. “It’s a secret, remember?”

“Even from you?”

“You mustn’t tell,” Jennacake insisted. “Outside these walls, you must take care to protect what you learn here. Best to practice discretion even within the library, so you always remember.”

Dally shook her head. “There’s no one out there I’d want to tell anyway.”

“Hmm,” Jennacake said. “It seems that loneliness is something we have in common.”

Dally swiftly handed over the book to hide the twinge in her tummy. Jennacake placed it on the reshelving cart.



“The secret was about someone I know,” Dally said. She had so many questions about what had occurred. Maybe there was a way to ask them without revealing the secret itself.

“Secrets aren’t meaningful unless you know the person, or at least understand the context,” Jennacake answered. “That’s part of what makes the library so dangerous.”

Dally nodded. “Powerful things are always considered dangerous.”

“Very true,” Jennacake agreed. She paused. “Does your grandfather know you’re here, Delilah?”

Dally reached into her backpack and extracted Grandpa’s map. “I have this map,” she said. “He left it to me when he died.”

Jennacake’s face folded in sadness. “Oh, I’m so sorry, my dear. When did he pass?”

“About two months ago.”

“Such a lovely man,” Jennacake murmured.

“You knew him?” Dally supposed that since he’d drawn her a map to the place, it stood to reason that he’d met Jennacake himself.

“Sure,” Jennacake said. “He loved it here.”

Dally imagined Grandpa’s eyes sparkling at the sight of all the wonderful book-shaped secrets. “Can I read another?”

“Not today,” Jennacake said. “Didn’t you say you only have an hour?”

“Yes. What time is it? I have to get home.”

“You won’t be late,” Jennacake said. “It hasn’t been much time at all.”

“Can I come back tomorrow?” Dally asked. “Will you be open?”

Jennacake’s expression turned wistful again. “You can come back anytime you wish. And in your case, it’s best that you go and come back another day. We must draw this out as long as possible.”

“Draw what out?” Dally asked.

Jennacake’s pristine forehead furrowed. “Your journey.”

*Cryptic much?* Dally thought as she descended the steps of the library toward the sidewalk. The good news was, Grandpa had left her a way to continue having adventures. And clearly he had known she wouldn’t wait until she was twenty-one. How could he have even *wanted* her to wait? Knowing the magic the library held, she was vaguely annoyed with him for not telling her sooner. They could have come together, just as they had often gone to the public library.

Mr. Jerry looked up from his newspaper when Dally opened the rear passenger door, carrying the cupcake she had procured from the bakery.

“That was fast.”

Dally consulted the dashboard clock. Then she blinked hard and looked again. Only nine minutes had passed since Mr. Jerry dropped her off. But that was impossible. She knew perfectly well she’d been gone for more than nine minutes. It had taken her that long just to walk to the library and back, plus buying the cupcake! She had spent much longer than

nine minutes inside the library, talking with Jennacake and reading the secret.

*Time is different in the library*, Jennacake had said. Different, indeed.

“Where to now?” Mr. Jerry asked.

“Home, please.”

Dally asked Mr. Jerry to drop her outside the gate so that she could walk up the drive as usual and not call attention to herself.

“I need to go again tomorrow, please,” she said.

Mr. Jerry met her gaze in the rearview. “Oh?”

“Yes, please. And the day after.”

“Must be good cupcakes,” Mr. Jerry mused.

“Oh, yes,” Dally agreed. She made a note in her mind to bring him a cupcake tomorrow.

It was all she could do to concentrate on her business lesson that afternoon. She was fairly bursting with the desire to tell someone, anyone, what she had experienced. Hector rode by on the lawn mower outside Dally’s private classroom window, and the very thought of his secret tickled her to distraction.

“Dally,” said her tutor. “Are you with me?”

“What?” she said. “Oh, yes. I’m sorry.”

Her tutor frowned but continued the economics lesson. Dally stared at the laptop screen and tried harder to focus, but his voice soon droned into a dull roar in the background. She was surprised when he ended the lesson half an hour early.

“Your mother requested that you join her in the dining room tonight,” the tutor said.

“She isn’t working?” Dally usually had dinner alone during the week because her mother kept very long hours in the office, typically taking the evening meal on a tray.

The tutor shrugged. “Apparently not.” He winked. “But, hey, it’s nice that we’re off the hook for a bit, right?”

Dally respectfully pounded the fist he held out to her. She liked him all right as a person, though she did not like the concept of having a tutor in the first place.

But his words did not calm her. She could not be happy about a sudden change in plans when her mother had made such a big deal just yesterday about keeping to the schedule.

Dally marched down the hall to the formal dining room.

“How was today’s lesson?” her mother inquired as she entered.

Dally tried hard to let it go—she really did. But sometimes her mouth had a mind of its own. “So, you can change the schedule whenever you feel like it, and that isn’t going back on your word? *‘We’ve signed an agreement.’*” Her tone turned mocking at the end.

It would not help anything to have such a fit, but what was done was done.

Her mother’s lips tightened. “I thought we could have a nice dinner,” she said. “But clearly you are still angry.”

Dally thumped into her chair, crossing her arms. Jasper, the

cook, bustled in and set a plate of meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and peas in front of her. It was one of Dally's favorite meals (apart from the peas, which were merely the lesser of the possible vegetable-shaped evils).

She sat up and lifted her fork. "It's not fair."

"The opportunity came up at the last minute," her mother said. She glanced at her watch. "I could have scheduled dinner for after my last meeting, I suppose. But I thought it best to let your tutor go early rather than keep Jasper an hour later."

Dally knew all about opportunities coming up at the last minute that might cause someone to want to change a plan. She shoved a big bite of meatloaf into her mouth and got an even bigger bite of potatoes ready to follow it. The surest way to keep from talking was to be chewing.

If Grandpa were here, he'd jump right in with a funny story to break the tension, something bright and entertaining that would have Dally laughing around mouthfuls and her mother rolling her eyes.

After a silence, Dally's mother spoke again. "How was your day?"

Dally swallowed. "It was good."

"Is it strange, to be switching classes and using a locker?"

"Yes, but I like it." She'd been doing it for two months now. Managing her schedule and moving through the halls made her feel important. She enjoyed dialing the combination on her locker. The door made satisfying metal sounds when opening and closing. Sixth grade had many new and exciting

aspects, but Dally hadn't known that her mother was aware of them.

"I like the stickers you chose to decorate your cubby in the art room."

That took Dally by surprise. "You saw them?"

"Last night was Caregivers' Night," her mother said.

"Right," Dally said. "You went?" Usually Grandpa had gone to that type of thing. He had been treasurer of the PCTA, the Parent-Caregiver-Teacher Association. She smiled now at the thought of him in his favorite apron, manning the bake sale table at the Fall Carnival. Someone else would have to run it this year, she supposed. It wouldn't be the same.

"Your teachers seem capable." Her mother sliced a delicate bite of meatloaf and lifted it to her mouth.

"Yeah, they're fine."

"Which is your favorite class?"

"Gym and English and pre-algebra," Dally said. Math wasn't her best subject, but Mr. Datchev had a way of making it make sense. "Ms. Tompa always picks really good books for our assignments. She had us write special essays for Caregivers' Night. Did you see mine? And if you were in the art room, did you see the sculptures? My dolphin?" In spite of everything, Dally found herself getting excited that her mother had seen some of the schoolwork she was proud of.

"Hmm. I'm glad you like pre-algebra," her mother said. "It'll complement your studies here."

Leave it to her mother to comment only on the math, out of

all the things Dally had mentioned. She jammed in a huge bite of meatloaf to keep from expressing the thought out loud.

“And you went on a field trip for history class recently?”

Dally swallowed. “Yes, to a few downtown museums.”

“Including the Historic Harbor Jail and the Zebediah Douglas House,” her mother said. “We’re major donors to both of those museums, you know.”

Always back to the money. “Yes,” Dally said. The docent giving the tour at the jail had made a point of mentioning the Peteharringtons’ generosity several times. Embarrassing.

“What did you think of the tours?” her mother asked.

At least her mother was trying, Dally supposed. Maybe that counted for something. Plus, whether she meant to or not, her mother had proved she *was* willing to change Dally’s tutoring schedule, if the reason suited her.

Dally shrugged. “They were fun. Field trips are usually fun.”

“What I really mean is, do you think we should continue our contributions there in the future?”

Dally readied a forkful of mashed potatoes, vowing to be entirely non-petulant for the rest of the meal. Her mother seemed to care about her opinion, and that felt nice.

“Oh, sure,” Dally said, smiling. “It’s amazing what a glimpse into the past can teach you.”

When Dally arrived at the library the next day, it recognized her. “*Delilah Peteharrington*,” the eerie-yet-pleasant voice greeted her.

This time there was no scroll, no haze, no dire warnings—just the candlelit hall with its intricate carvings. Dally traced the lines on the wall as she walked.

Jennacake was waiting with a teacup of the special blue brew. “Welcome back,” she said.

“Thank you.” Dally took the cup and sipped politely. Once again, it surprised her how the pressure between her ears instantly eased. “No entryway theatrics today?” she inquired.

“It’s only the first time, for anyone,” Jennacake explained. “The way a person reacts to the warnings tells me a lot about who they will be as a traveler.”

“What did you learn about me?” Dally asked.

Jennacake continued as though she hadn’t spoken. “It’s important, you see, to be sure that our patrons understand the purpose of this place. Secret keeping can be serious business.”

Dally could take a hint. She handed the cup back, then



strolled around the room, studying the sections. She had chosen from Minor Transgressions yesterday. There was also Guilty Pleasures. Little White Lies. Locker Combinations. Hiding Places.

Dally turned to Jennacake. “Locker combinations?” she asked.

“They’re secret, aren’t they?” the librarian offered.

Dally laughed to herself. In the first weeks of school, several of her sixth-grade classmates had written their locker combinations on the backs of their hands. They could be sure to remember them that way—but so could everyone else!

“It seems a bit silly,” Dally said. She touched the spines. Most of them left her feeling neutral. The words that came were pretty boring. Most were simply numbers: *locker number 6*, *locker number 252*. Occasionally something different would come to mind, like *garage*, *gym*, *tackle box*.

But one volume in particular gave her a sharp stab of jealousy. The word that accompanied it: *forgery*. That sounded interesting. Dally pulled the volume and handed it to Jennacake, who smiled. “Ah,” she said. “Very nice.”

Moments later, Dally sat alone in the reading room, waiting for the door to close behind Jennacake. Then she opened the book.

Dally swirled and snapped through the darkness. The secret carried her to another familiar place—her very own school. Luckily, no one was around when she appeared as if from nowhere in the second-floor hallway outside the art room.

Dally walked ahead, nudged by the billowing white fog at

her back. She rounded the corner and saw Chip, the redheaded boy, bent over his locker dial. “Dang it,” he said. He kicked the locker and began spinning the dial again.

Everything else was quiet. No voices echoing from classrooms. No footsteps or laughter in the hall. It must’ve been after school.

Dally stood still, unsure how to proceed.

“Oh, hi,” Chip said, spotting Dally. “I thought everyone left.” He looked a little embarrassed. He spun his locker dial rather pointlessly, as if waiting for her to pass by.

“Need a hand?” she asked.

“Does it go left-right-left, or right-left-right?” Chip asked. “I can’t get it straight.”

“Right-left-right,” Dally said.

“Thanks.” He spun the dial to the left.

“Your other right,” she corrected.

Chip’s cheeks pinked. “I’m not so good at lefts and rights,” he mumbled.

Dally thought for a moment. “How about up versus down? Is that easier?”

“Well, yeah. Duh.”

“Here, look.” Dally put her right hand on the dial of the locker next to his. “Forget about right and left. Watch my thumb. Thumb spins up for the first number. Thumb spins down for the second. Thumb spins up again for the third.”

Dally watched as he spun out the numbers: 46-22-38. Then he tugged the little tab and the locker popped open.

Chip grinned. "Hey, that works! Thanks."

"Sure thing," Dally said.

Chip reached into his locker and pulled out some papers. According to the class schedule sheet clipped to his folder, it was Monday. Just two days ago.

Among his stacks of papers, Dally noticed the Adventure Club permission slip poking out. "Adventure Club?" she asked, pointing to the form. "Didn't you turn that in already?"

"Not yet," said Chip. "It's due tomorrow. Are you joining?"

Wait, she was getting confused. The forms were due on Tuesday, which was . . . tomorrow. It was funny to realize that, at this exact moment, her two-days-ago self was walking home, nervous about making her presentation to her mother. Not knowing it was going to fail.

"I would love to join, if only my mother would let me." Dally smiled wistfully.

Chip tugged the permission slip to the top of the pile. It was blank. "Oops. I forgot to ask my parents this weekend. And they're on a business trip now."

"Too bad," Dally said. "Maybe you can join later." But . . . she was sure she'd seen his form completed, on Tuesday, in real time.

Chip pulled out a pen. "I have a better solution." He clicked the pen and scrawled his mother's name across the parental permission line.

"Whoa," Dally said. "Won't you get in trouble for doing that?"

"No one will know." He winked. "Our little secret, right? Like the thumb thing."

"Surely your parents will notice when you don't come home after school two days a week."

"Nah," Chip said. "They're away a lot. I'll say I have something after school, and my nanny will pick me up later."

Dally wished she could be so carefree. "Wow."

"Good luck convincing your mom," Chip said. "And thanks again." He waved and walked off down the hall, disappearing through the fog. A moment later, the fog swooped in close and darkened, bringing Dally back to the library.

Alone in the dim, quiet reading room, she realized: this was why Chip had said the things he did on Tuesday morning, when she'd borrowed his phone. He'd seen her and talked to her about Adventure Club the afternoon before!

Jennacake greeted her when she emerged. "You look puzzled," the librarian said.

"The people I see in the secrets already know what happened," Dally said as the realization sunk in. "I mean, it's a memory that exists in their brain today, in the present. Even if I haven't read their secret yet . . . because for them, it's the past, but for me, it's still in the future?"

"Yes," Jennacake said. "For most people, time moves in one straight line. The library lets you jump back and forth along that line, from secret to secret. So, yes. When you go into a secret, you are entering someone's past."

“So these things are really happening. They’ve *already* happened.” Dally paused. “That’s cool.”

“Very cool,” Jennacake agreed.

After final bell on Thursday, Dally noticed Chip and a large group of others clustering near the gymnasium. No doubt they were headed to the very first meeting of Adventure Club.

Dally searched her heart for the stake of jealousy that had pierced her only two days ago, watching Chip turn in his permission slip. She had hoped for and imagined the joys of Adventure Club ever since the school had announced the club was forming. But missing out didn’t feel so bad anymore. Now she had an adventure of her own to pursue—one her classmates couldn’t possibly fathom.

When she got to the library, Dally explored the section labeled Hiding Places. She chose a secret that made her feel like laughing when she touched its spine, and gave her a blast of delicious flavor on her tongue. She’d never *tasted* a secret before, but this one tasted sweet.

After the now-familiar whirl of entering a secret, she found herself in the pantry at Peteharrington Place. Outside, in the kitchen, she heard Hannah and Jasper speaking.

“You got how many bags?” the housekeeper said. “I know I didn’t hear you say a dozen . . .”

“I told you, they were on sale,” Jasper grumbled. “You know you’re gonna go through them.”