

THE
LOST
WONDERLAND

DIARIES

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SHADOW
MOUNTAIN

Chapter epigraphs from Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

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CHAPTER 1

The Right Time



“Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!”

Is it time?

Is it time?

Is it time?

The question bounced about the Rabbit family warren like a well-hit croquet ball.

Uncle Lop Rabbit tugged his greatcoat tightly around his shoulders, despite the weather being unseasonably warm, and held a single glass lens up to his eye to examine those around him with great scrutiny mixed with a dash of befuddlement. “I’ve heard the Arithma Sea is as purple as an eggplant and the schools of numbers are in a tizzy. It must be time.”

Aunt Angora Rabbit squirmed in her corset and flicked one long ear. “I’ve heard it’s twice as purple as a plum. Creatures of enormous size and questionable integrity are rising from the depths. High time, I’d say.”

“Past time, if you ask me,” Cousin Lilac huffed. “The

queen has declared a quarantine over all of Wonderland. She's locked the castle gates, and the Cards are seizing anyone trying to get in or out."

"The Cards," whispered the rest of the family, twitching their noses and thumping their feet.

"Have you heard about what happened to . . . you know who?" asked Nephew Rex.

"He was attacked by a beast," whispered one voice.

"A monster," murmured another.

"A demon."

"A phantasm."

"A fiend."

"A haunstrosity," Grandmother Sable said with a shiver. "It got everyone at his house. And now . . ."

"They've gone madder than mad," Niece Satin said around a mouthful of carrot.

"It's getting worse every day." The twins, Perlfee and Pannon, spoke in unison like always. Although they were well-known as the gossips of the family, it was universally recognized that what they said was almost always true. "The gryphons turned savage in the middle of the last Lobster Quadrille and ate the entire class. Something's been horrificating the Avians. Rabid beasts have been reported in the Duchess's woods."

The two of them pressed their heads together, long ears quivering, as though sharing information, then nodded in unison. "Everyone is saying the end of Wonderland is near."

"The end of Wonderland?" Mother Marten squeaked.

Father Fauve's applewood pipe fell out of his mouth,

spreading hot ashes across his feet, but he barely noticed. “The end of Wonderland.”

“The end of Wonderland.”

“The end of Wonderland.”

“The end of Wonderland.”

It quickly turned into a chant, and the sound of thumping feet echoed for miles. The whole Rabbit family might have fled in a panic if Great-Great-Great-Grandfather Gotland Rabbit hadn’t chosen that moment to shuffle out of his den in a checkered bathrobe and a worn pair of bunny slippers, which bore a striking resemblance to fussy Aunt Rhinelander.

“Can’t a rabbit nap in peace around here?” he complained, rubbing the top of his bald head. “It’s bad enough that my bladder is bashful and my liver is laughable. Now I must put up with the ruckus of rambunctious relatives rioting above my room. What’s all this ruminating?”

“It’s the end of Wonderland,” shrilled Pika. No one was entirely sure how he was related, or if he was actually a member of the Rabbit family at all, but everyone nodded.

“A run on underwear, you say?” Grandfather Gotland asked with a scowl.

“The end of Wonderland,” Satin shouted, spraying bits of chewed carrot everywhere.

Grandfather Gotland flicked an orange sliver disdainfully from his robe. “Why would anyone want to listen to a *thunder band*?”

“For lettuce sake,” Great-Great-Great-Grandmother Gabali Rabbit said. She lifted one of Gotland’s floppy ears and yelled,

“The family thinks it might be the end of Wonderland. They. Want. To. Know. If. It. Is. Time.”

Grandfather rubbed his ear. “You don’t have to shout.” He twisted left and right—his spine cracking in at least a dozen places—then tugged up the waistband of his pajamas. “Bring out the clocks.”

“The clocks,” the family murmured as a pair of well-muscled rabbits in matching uniforms turned to two large wooden doors that hadn’t been opened for as long as any of them could remember.

It took the clock-keepers several minutes to figure out which of them had the key, and when they did, the lock was so rusty it refused to turn at first. But eventually it clicked, and the huge doors swung open with a squeak of rusty metal hinges.

A moment later, the rabbits rolled out a strange-looking contraption made of hundreds of differently shaped gears, dozens of springs, several pipes, numerous levers, and two large clock hands.

“The Clock of Dithering,” Uncle Lop whispered, studying it through his monocle.

Grandfather Gotland wagged his whiskers as the great mechanical clock was rolled up before him. “I seem to recall . . .” He reached for a lever with a red knob, but hesitated. “Or was it?” He began to twist a silver crank then shook his head. “That’s not right.”

After several minutes of starting and stopping, he finally grabbed the biggest handle he could find, closed his eyes, and tugged.

Springs sprung, gears whirled, pipes spewed clouds of smoke and whistled ear-piercing screeches. The two clock hands whirled until they were nothing but a blur before stopping abruptly with a loud double *clonk-clonk*.

Great-Great-Great-Grandfather Gotland studied the clock, tilting his head first one way, then the other.

“Well?” Cousin Lilac asked, wringing her paws. “Is it time?”

“I would say . . .” He shuffled his slippers. “That is . . . If I were to hazard a guess . . .”

Finally, Great-Great-Great Grandmother Gabali elbowed past him and studied the placement of the clock hands. “Good news,” she announced. “It is not quite time to panic.”

There was a general sigh of relief from the family, followed by a feeling of unrest.

“You told us what time it *isn't*,” Mother Marten said. “But what time *is* it?”

Grandfather puffed out his chest, resuming his spot at the front of the crowd. “Don't be ridiculous. The Clock of Dithering only tells what time it is *not*—an excellent choice when you are early enough to dawdle or late enough that there's no point in bothering. To learn what time it *is*, we will need the Clock of Action.”

Once again, the soldiers marched through the doors. A moment later, they rolled out an enormous wheel of—

“Cheese?” Father Fauve asked.

“The best carrots can buy,” Grandfather said.

“Created by a team of skilled artisan mice,” Grandmother added as the clock-keepers wheeled the cheese clock into place.

Sunlight shone through hundreds of holes in the large wheel, creating dozens of overlapping circles of light on the ground. The numbers on the clock face began at $1\frac{3}{4}$ and ended at $13\frac{10}{6}$. A silver butter knife pointed at $7\frac{1}{2}$ while a tarnished cake fork sat halfway between $3\frac{1}{3}$ and $4\frac{7}{10}$.

“The finest Swiss craftsmanship,” Aunt Angora said approvingly.

When, at last, the wheel was in place, Grandfather waved his hands. “A little to the left.”

The rabbits rotated the cheese wheel. The circles of sunlight in front of the clock began shifting toward one another.

“A little more,” Grandfather said.

Slowly, the rabbits moved the wheel until all the holes lined up just right to form a single perfect circle of light on the ground. A loud chime came from somewhere deep inside the cheese. Click by click, the fork and knife moved until they both aligned at the top.

Grandfather Gotland’s eyes widened. His ears flapped, and his whiskers wilted. “It. Is. Time.”

He reached into one of the holes in the cheese wheel and pulled out a sheet of parchment so old it looked like the barest breeze would tear it to shreds. It was covered with folds, wrinkles, and small tears. Several spots had clearly been glued back together.

“Many, many years ago,” Grandfather Gotland said in a trembling voice, “the outsider predicted that after he left us, Wonderland would one day face grave peril. On that day, he said, we should call another from his world—one who would come to Wonderland and save us all.”

A hushed silence fell over the family as Grandfather unrolled the parchment. “The one who will save us is . . .” Narrowing his eyes, he turned the paper one way and then another. Finally, he pulled a pair of gold spectacles from his robe pocket and nodded. “The one who will save us is the . . . *Alice*.”

“The Alice,” the family murmured.

“We must go far and wide, telling everyone in Wonderland to stay strong,” Grandmother said. “The Alice is on the way.”

“But who will summon The Alice?” one of the rabbits shouted.

“It should be the one who met the last outsider,” Grandfather said. “The queen’s original timekeeper. The one who gave the Rabbit family our great purpose in the first place.”

Pika’s round ears quivered. “You mean Whi—”

“Shh,” the rest of the family hissed.

Grandfather shivered and rubbed at a cabbage stain on the sleeve of his bathrobe. “Is anyone willing to speak to . . . ?”

All the Rabbit family members looked at one another, shaking their heads.

“He’s in no shape to call anyone,” the twins said in unison.

“Someone else must take his place,” Grandmother said. “Do we have a volunteer?”

“I have a, um, pressing engagement to . . .” Uncle Lop said, edging backward.

Aunt Angora shook her head. “I’d be happy to if I didn’t . . .”

“Under other circumstance, you see . . .” Cousin Velveteen began.

One by one, each mother, father, brother, sister, cousin,

grandmother, grandfather, child, in-law, and fiancée slipped away, each making half-hearted excuses, until only one rabbit was left.

Sylvan, one of the youngest members of the Rabbit family—barely out of her bunnyhood—had been sketching pictures in the dirt with a stick. Not paying attention to what was going on around her, it wasn't until the last of the relatives had disappeared that she looked up to discover her great-great-great-grandparents staring at her.

“Did someone say something?” she asked, having no idea what she was about to get herself into.

Great-Great-Great Grandmother and Great-Great-Great Grandfather looked at each other and nodded.

“She'll do perfectly.”

CHAPTER 2

The Last Week



“Who in the world am I?” Ah, that’s the great puzzle!

If I could have chosen one place to spend my final week of summer vacation, the library would have been last on the list. Lower than last. Negative one hundred sounded about right. Better yet, the square root of negative one hundred—a number so imaginary the option wouldn’t have existed at all.

Unfortunately, I didn’t have a choice in the matter, any more than I’d had a choice about moving from Grand Forks, North Dakota, to San Jose, California—more than a thousand miles away. My mom accepted a job as head librarian at the Santa Teresa Library and that was that.

The painters had taken over our new house, changing the walls from a boring shade of white to an equally boring shade of beige, and since we didn’t know anyone in California, I got to spend the last week before school with Mom.

In the library.

“How do you like the new circulation desk?” Mom asked,

waving at a line of computer screens as if she'd installed them herself. "The skylights are nice, don't you think?"

I must not have looked properly enthusiastic, because she shifted the box under her arm and nudged me in the ribs. "They're books, not prison bars, Celia. Try to smile a little."

I forced the corners of my mouth up, sure it looked more like a grimace than a smile. "When you said we were moving to California, you talked about going to the science museum and the beach—places that are actually *fun*."

"And we will, but this is a new job. I can't afford to take time off right now."

As if she'd taken time off from her last library job. Books had always been my mom's thing, but after my dad died three years ago, she'd taken her literary devotion to a whole new level. I would never have said it out loud, but I was halfway convinced she loved reading more than she loved me.

She put an arm around my shoulders. "I know you miss your old friends, but maybe you'll meet some new ones here before school starts."

Considering that ninety percent of the library's patrons appeared to either be kids under five looking at picture books or senior citizens reading newspapers, that didn't seem likely. Then again, the fact that Mom thought I had friends back home showed she didn't know me as well as she thought.

I shrugged. "I'm sure all the kids my age are hanging out back in the Biographies."

Mom sighed and set down the box of books. She handed me a sheet of paper filled from top to bottom with books and

authors. “Here’s your reading list. Pick at least three, and make sure one is a classic.”

“Couldn’t I do some math instead?” I loved numbers as much as she loved words. I could happily solve math problems forever.

Mom frowned. “I don’t want you anywhere near the math section until you’ve read at least three chapters from one of the books on the list. Don’t forget your green filter. I think it’s going to make a big difference in your IEP this year.”

“Mom!” I bit the inside of my cheek—a nervous habit I did so much that I had a callus inside my mouth. “You promised I wouldn’t have to do an IEP right away. I want to try things on my own first.”

“We’ll see,” she said. But I could tell she’d already turned her attention to an elderly woman examining the young adult romance new releases.

Angry, I snatched the list and the green plastic sheet from her hands and stepped directly into the path of a boy wearing a backpack so big it made him look like a tortoise.

He bobbed the stack of books he was carrying before catching his balance again. His eyes were brown behind the thick lenses of his glasses. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to run into you. I was just . . .” He held out the books as if that explained everything.

I peeked at the covers, felt my stomach grow queasy, and looked away. “It wasn’t your fault. I wasn’t watching where I was going.”

Although he was shorter than I was, he seemed about my

age. “I haven’t seen you here before,” he said, glancing at the plastic sheet in my hand.

I quickly hid it behind my back. “My mom’s the new librarian.”

His brown cheeks rose into a dimpled grin. “Your mom’s a librarian? That’s the coolest thing ever.”

He thought having a librarian for a mom was *cool*?

Any interest I’d had in talking more dried up like an apricot in the California sun. I was hoping to make friends here, where no one knew who—or *what*—I was, but I wasn’t about to start with a book nerd. “I better let you get back to your research.”

He pushed his glasses up on his nose. “Research?”

I waved at his books. “You’ve got two science fiction novels, something about architecture, an art book, and what looks like *The Magic School Bus*. Either you have really weird reading tastes or you’re researching something.”

His cheeks dimpled again. “You read fast.”

I didn’t bother telling him that it would have taken me at least five minutes to puzzle out what the letters said. Besides, the covers told me everything I needed to know. Figuring out context from pictures was something I’d gotten good at over the years.

“So . . .” I said, wondering how quickly I could leave without seeming rude. “Looks like you’re busy.”

“Oh, yeah.” He licked his lips, and his eyes flickered toward the front desk. “I guess I better get back to my, uh . . . research.”

As I began to turn away, he raised a hand. “See you around.”

Balanced on one arm, his stack of books shifted, and two of them fell to the floor with loud bangs. Several people turned in our direction, and I took the opportunity to make my escape.

Finding an empty spot as far in the back as possible, I plopped into a chair and slumped over the table. I slapped the green filter that was supposed to help me read onto the table, and the sight of it made my anger flare all over again.

Moving halfway across the country between my seventh- and eighth-grade years was bad. But maybe it could be a new chance for me. At my old North Dakota charter school, we all wore the same uniform of khaki skirts or pants paired with shirts in the approved school colors—a sea of sameness where anyone who was different stood out.

Here, in San Jose, the kids I'd seen back-to-school shopping at Target were much more diverse. Their clothes ranged from fashion-model dressy to flip-flops and shorts. Looking at so many different faces and styles, I dared to hope that maybe I could fit in here—be just another kid.

But that hope would disappear in a middle-school second if the other students found out I had an IEP.

Individualized Education Programs—IEPs, for short—are supposed to help kids like me, who struggle in school for one reason or another, find different ways of doing our assignments. The teachers learn what's hard for us, and we complete our work in whatever way we can. Win-win. Everybody's happy.

At least that's how it had been explained to me at my old school.

Instead, I had to take a bunch of tests and answer a million questions just to figure out if I really had a disability. After the

tests and interviews were finally done, I thought I'd made it through the worst part. It turned out it was only the beginning. Once the teachers learned about my IEP, I could tell that a lot of them were annoyed by having to make changes to the way they normally taught.

Not all of them, of course. Some were great about working with me, and the changes we made together seemed to help. But just when it felt like things were starting to click, the other kids discovered that I was different.

That's when the looks started. Then the jokes. Kids who used to be my friends stopped hanging around me. Even kids I didn't know looked at me funny. I wasn't "the kid with the reading disability." I was "the weird kid." The *stupid* kid. After that, it didn't matter what I did or said. I never managed to find a way to fit back in.

I wasn't about to let that happen at my new school, which meant making sure no one knew I had "issues." Pushing aside the reading list and the stupid piece of plastic, I gazed around the room.

In the children's section, a couple of four-year-old girls laughed at a picture book about dinosaurs dressed in Halloween costumes while two women I assumed were their moms chatted about romance novels. A college-aged guy with dreadlocks pulled books from the shelf while a girl with long blonde hair leaned against the wall with a magazine.

All of them sucked words from their books as easily as people slurped spaghetti noodles—none of them knowing how much easier their lives were because reading came naturally to them.

With a disgusted snort, I turned away only to see a pair of brown eyes peeking out at me from above a nearby row of books. As soon as I noticed them, the eyes disappeared, and a hunched figure scurried around the corner and into the reference section. But not before I recognized the thick glasses.

The boy with the giant backpack was spying on me.

CHAPTER 3

The Library Thief



“Stolen!” the King exclaimed, turning to the jury, who instantly made a memorandum of the fact.

I couldn’t believe the little snoop was stalking me.

Half of me wanted to get up and confront him. But that meant talking. And talking—like reading—wasn’t something my brain was very good at. Especially in stressful situations, which this would be.

Instead, I pulled out my phone to play Minecraft. It’s a great game for kids like me because you can play by yourself and there’s no dialogue to read.

I spent most of my game time in the Nether—an area filled with flames and lava—where I’d built a giant castle to hang out with the zombie pigmen, the outcasts of the Minecraft world. Unlike most of the aggressive creatures, as long as you leave the zombie pigmen alone, they leave you alone. It’s a life philosophy I relate well to.

I was upgrading my castle when I spotted Backpack Boy

near the front of the library. He wasn't spying on me anymore, but he was clearly up to something.

Glancing over his shoulder like a spy in a movie, he eased toward the front desk.

What was he doing?

Standing to get a better view, I slipped behind a Dr. Seuss display and watched him make his way to a metal cart filled with returned books. Waiting until no one was looking in his direction, he quickly grabbed an armful. After a furtive look at the covers, he darted into a row of nearby shelves.

No way!

I rubbed my eyes, barely able to believe what I had just seen. The dorky kid was a spy *and* a thief. What kind of person would steal random library books? Maybe it was a California thing. There couldn't be a lot of money in it. Still, catching a library thief sounded a lot more interesting than hanging out with zombie pigmen.

I hurried into the row of shelves he'd entered, wanting to catch him before he could add the books to his already overloaded pack, but the aisle was empty. Peering through an opening between two shelves, I spotted him a couple of rows over.

He was quick for a kid wearing a backpack bulky enough to stop a crossbow bolt, but I wasn't about to let him get away. Ducking out the other direction, I circled around and approached from the opposite side. I saw a stooped figure through a rack of paperbacks.

I leaped into the aisle and shouted, "Gotcha!"

Unfortunately, it was an old woman browsing a stack of

mysteries. She threw her hands in the air, books flying everywhere, and stared at me, her lips quivering. “What do you want?” she asked, clutching her purse to her chest.

My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth like a lump of peanut butter. My brain shorted out. “I, uh . . . sorry,” I muttered, hurrying away.

When my mom heard that her daughter had accosted a harmless old lady on my first day at the library, I’d be grounded for life.

Unless I could catch the library thief red-handed.

The kid might be one of those serial criminals who committed the same crime over and over. Who knew how many books he’d stolen? There could be a reward for his capture. Searching the main room for the telltale sign of his giant backpack, I spotted him in the children’s section. But when I got there, he was somehow clear across the building, disappearing into the reference shelves again.

He was like a library phantom, slipping in and out of the stacks through secret passages only he knew about. Taking a wide detour around the mystery section to avoid the old lady I’d scared, I hurried into the reference area, which contained books that were too expensive to check out. This was probably where Backpack Boy stole the good stuff.

Tiptoeing quietly, I peeked from one row to the next. He had to be somewhere close, and when I found him, I was going to make him return everything he’d taken. I might not be big, and I might not get good grades in school, and I might not have any friends, but I had a strong right punch.

At least I hoped I did. I mean, it wasn’t like I’d ever

actually punched anyone. I'd wanted to after Paisley had started teasing me at my old school. Instead, I'd stomped into the bathroom, glared in the mirror, and told my reflection everything I wanted to say to her.

But if the book-stealing pip-squeak wanted trouble, I'd be ready to give it to him.

Moving quietly from shelf to shelf, I heard something coming from the back of the building. As I went to investigate, a voice called out, "Hello?"

It didn't sound like the library thief. It sounded like a much younger kid.

"Can anyone hear me?" the voice called.

What was a little kid doing this far from the children's section? Probably got lost looking for the bathroom. It'd happened all the time at the library where my mom used to work.

"We need help," the voice called again.

We? How many kids were back there anyway?

I headed toward where I thought the voice had come from—the library thief could wait—but there was no one around.

"Hello?" I called. "It's all right. You can come on out."

The only thing that far back in the library was an emergency exit with a sign warning that alarms would go off if you pushed the door open and an office with a plate on the open door reading HEAD LIBRARIAN.

I looked inside the office, spotting a bunch of moving boxes, stacks of books, and a desk that had already started collecting fast-food wrappers. Definite signs that my mom worked there. No kids though.

“Hey, guys,” I called, using my talking-to-puppy-dogs-and-babies voice as I walked back through the shelves. “Are you lost? Do you need someone to take you to your parents?”

Whoever they’d been, they were gone now—along with Backpack Boy, probably. Except when I returned to my table, I saw the library thief himself standing beside my chair. He was reading my list and holding my green filter.

Spying on innocent people and stealing library books was bad enough, but taking my private belongings was going too far.

“Hold it right there,” I yelled, grabbing him by the pack and spinning him around.

My voice echoed through the quiet library, and several people glared in my direction, but I didn’t care.

“Put my things down and step away from the table slowly,” I said in my best grown-up voice.

At least that’s what I meant to say. What came out of my mouth was “Put my table down slowly and things away from the step.”

As usual, my brain fritzed out when I was stressed.

Backpack Boy stared at me, his mouth hanging open either because I’d caught him in the act of stealing or because he didn’t understand a word I’d said—possibly both.

I tried again. “Why are you stealing my stuff?” This time the words came out right.

He closed his mouth and swallowed. “I wasn’t stealing anything. I thought you must have left them behind. I was going to return them to you.”

Exactly the kind of thing a thief would say. Obviously, he'd had practice lying.

I took a deep breath and rehearsed in my head how I was going to respond. My brain had plenty of tricks it played on me, but I had a few tricks of my own. Practicing in my mind what I was going to say before I said it helped me speak when I was stressed.

"I suppose you *weren't* spying on me a few minutes ago from behind those books?"

Backpack Boy ducked his head. "I *was* watching you. But I wasn't spying. I just wanted to see what you were reading. There aren't many kids our age who come to the library during the summer. Especially not ones who are so smart and pretty."

As though realizing what he'd just said, his dark cheeks flamed nearly purple. "N-not that I'm saying you're pretty," he stammered. "That is, you *are*. But it's not anything I noticed. I mean, not in a way that . . ." He pulled off his glasses and rubbed them furiously on his shirt.

I didn't know what to say. I'd never been called smart or pretty by anyone except my mom. Never by a boy. And definitely not by a boy my own age, who I'd just met and who was a—

"You're a library thief," I sputtered, trying to ignore the burning in my cheeks. This was not the way I'd expected my big confrontation to go.

Apparently, it wasn't the response he'd been expecting either, because he put his glasses back on and blinked. "What?"

"Don't . . . try . . . to . . . deny it," I said, choosing my

words carefully so I wouldn't mess them up. "I saw you take books from the return cart."

"Oh. That." He dropped his head again, the guilt plain on his face. "I didn't take them. I mean, I *did* take them. But I didn't steal them."

I hadn't had this long of a conversation with someone my age for years, and it was getting way too awkward. I grabbed the zipper of his pack and yanked it open. Books spilled out like juice from a freshly cut watermelon.

"How do you explain that?" I demanded, pointing to the jumbled pile of paperbacks and hardbacks on the floor. For a brief moment, I felt the thrill of adrenaline rushing through my veins. He might be a good liar, but there was no way he could explain his way out of the evidence right in front of us.

Then, as I looked closer, a horrifying realization dawned on me. His pack was filled with books—I'd been right about that—but none of the paperbacks or hardbacks on the floor had stickers or plastic covers.

The books in his pack weren't from the library.