

Finding Faith Within the Fantasy:
Helping Middle Graders Conquer Foes and Fears

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Abstract

The Balance of Time is a work of middle grade fantasy that explores the struggles of children in the world today. It was written with the intent to help all children understand the world and the people around them. The story follows a pre-teen protagonist as she navigates familial relationships, loss, and a world in chaos. Along with her siblings, she finds herself in a position to restore a sense of balance in her own life and in the world. The critical review, “Finding Faith Within the Fantasy: Helping Middle Graders Conquer Foes and Fears,” examines previous works of middle grade fantasy literature and the elements within them that have helped children navigate in the world for generations. The essay highlights the power of portals in literature and the journey of self-discovery children embark upon within the realm of fantasy. It also examines the divine influence within the works that helps children navigate through a world in need of balance—a world where we all must learn to live in the tension that is life.

Keywords: fantasy, portals, psychology, religion, self-discovery

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I am so thankful God led me to Liberty University. Each program I have enrolled in has enriched my mind and my spirit, bringing me to this point. As awful as the pandemic has been, it has provided me with the opportunity to focus on my studies. My husband, my children, and my mother have been constant supports on this journey, foregoing hours of family time for my benefit and taking care of the household as my head was stuck in one book or another. My daughters have inspired my story. My son has challenged my plot and approach. My students pushed me to keep going. My coworkers and colleagues have been great sounding boards through the process. The feedback from my classmates during the writing workshops both encouraged me and helped me refine my work. I have had excellent instructors in my time at Liberty, particularly Professors Durrell Nelson and Timothy Christian; both men stretched me as a writer, gave me the opportunity to explore my story from multiple angles, and made me more confident in the merit of my work. My advisor, Professor Mary Dixon freely offered her guidance, provided me with thoughtful feedback, and shared her wisdom. Every person God placed in my path during this process has helped shape this particular story and my life.

Dedication

To Temperance, Cadence, and Kevin, may you continue to find ways to maintain balance in a world full of chaos, and may your paths remain divinely illuminated.

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Artist Statement

Impetus and Approach

As a mother of teen and tween girls, I have struggled to find ways to make society understandable for my children. Of course, as a Christian, I can provide a multitude of true, although often used, statements like “God has a plan” and “God is always in control,” but they often fall short of providing comfort to children. Day in and day out, children, both actively and passively, consume information that makes them question the world and their place in it. They can feel powerless and, as a parent, I often feel the same way. However, when faced with the challenge of creating an original work of fiction, I took the opportunity to provide my children with a source of empowerment—a lens through which to understand the world just a little better and a means to understand me better as well. Out of this endeavor, *The Balance of Time* and its protagonist Lacuna Latish, Lacey for short, were born. After all, it is within the pages of books where many can meet children find a space to face their fears, learn to understand the people around them, and find strength within themselves to meet the inevitable antagonists they will encounter in life.

To accomplish the task of writing an effective work, I had to revisit the authors who had successfully met children where they were. I happen to be a lover of middle grade fantasy and Young Adult fiction. I love the innocence of them. I love their simplicity in addition to their well formulated plots and rich characters. The fantasy works of J. K. Rowling, Madeleine L’Engle, and C. S. Lewis provide dynamic characters who journey into other worlds where they get to affect change—where their differences are what make them special. They offer children an escape. They have also offered me an escape. However, when I read them, I still process them through the eyes of an adult. The dependence on perspective makes it difficult for me to

compartmentalize my life experiences and consume the works as a child would. Like an adult watching a Disney movie, I often catch the double entendre and miss the simple joke meant to tickle a child. It is a selfish endeavor on my part that simultaneously exposes the absence of my youth and reveals my ability to process the complexity of the world in which we live.

Therefore, to provide my daughters with an authentic tale that spoke to them, I needed to take a deep dive into middle grade fiction, particularly fantasy. Middle grade fiction is categorized as catering to children between the ages of 8 and 12. It typically lacks significant romantic elements but maintains all the other aspects of the subgenre under which it falls. The children in these stories struggle through the basic elements of growing up and often do so in extreme circumstances. At the tender age of 7, Alice goes down a rabbit hole and learns that the world does not always make sense. She also gains a greater appreciation of who she is. At the age of 12, Percy Jackson learns that divinity is in his blood and struggles to embrace who he is in that new reality. At the ages of 13, 12, 10, and 8, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy learn about courage, forgiveness, and the importance of family as they realize their identities as the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve and take their rightful place as royalty. In *Ender's Game*, readers see a young boy grow from age 6 to age 13, challenge authority, and embody compassion. At the age of 11, Harry Potter struggles with death and the reverberating sadness it leaves behind while he must defeat the greatest dark wizard of all time over and over again in different forms. In L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, 13-year old Meg embraces her moral responsibility and recognizes the power of family ties. In each of these stories, the overarching theme is good versus "bad" or evil; however, each provides its young readers with a means of understanding the world in which they live and the people they love.

Background

As I began to craft my original work, I had to force myself to be my character. I had to challenge myself to empathize with children who only know what they know and are forced to process all the heaviness of the world—a weight that, though every parent tries, children cannot be fully protected from. Therefore, they need to be taught to work through and process the world around them. They need to see that, despite the presence of chaos, order can be found; balance can be achieved. By using the mythological representations of Chaos and Concordia, I sought to personify the chaos and harmony present in the world to make it easier for children to understand. However, I stopped short of calling one purely good and the other purely bad to emphasize the fact that both are necessary; the world requires a balance of the two. Chaos often leads to innovation and solutions. A focus on order can sometimes result in sameness and stagnancy. And because it so easy for children to villainize the antagonist, I made sure I added a physical representation of the “bad guy” in the character of Dolos—Chaos’s right-hand man. In him, children find the self-serving motives they associate with a villain. However, as absolute order is not always “good,” readers find the physical representation of Concordia in both Lacey’s mother—one who seeks to bring order to the world—and Lacey—the one who seeks to get everything to make sense despite not having all the information to do so. In this manner, Lacey’s mother acts as another antagonist, as she seems to value order above all else. Lacey’s self-righteousness also works against her. In many ways, the book began to reflect what I believed was occurring with children in society today, even my own. They were seeking balance—something the world in which we live seems to be in short supply of.

The idea for the story came to me in the middle of teaching a class. I was trying to get my students to understand the concept behind a descriptive essay. We were discussing the need to

look beyond the obvious. We talked about focusing on what was outside of the frame—the smells, the sounds, the chatter—that could make a scene come to life. I mentioned being able to hear the chimes from a grandfather clock while sitting in the dining room and how it could add perspective for the readers. That was it. In that moment, all the difficult conversations I had been having with my daughters about the world began to swirl around in my head. As if from the sands of time, the characters began to form. Prior to that moment, I had no creative outlet to help my daughters. However, that moment helped affirm my theory that my intentions could never surpass God’s inspiration. God had a plan, and I now had a direction.

I began to look for God’s inspiration in other works of middle grade literature—the signs that, despite the author’s intentions, God was at work behind the scenes. I started to explore the other works and consider what the authors were trying to accomplish, how they accomplished it, and whether there was something more supernatural at work—something that aligned with the very Christian elements I was trying to use to explain the world to my children. I began to note the ages of the children in some popular middle grader works as well as what they encountered as they moved through the stories. I thought back to the previous comment that “God is always in control” and the fact that the phrase is often not enough to pacify the fear and anxiety that children face. These protagonists, and the young audiences for which they were created, were too young to have experienced God’s redemption, faithfulness, and constancy. So, God, as He often does, steps into the world to provide an example. In this case, without permission and with or without the author’s conscious awareness, He steps into the literary realm and onto the pages of these works to provide children with insight beyond simple Christianese. He meets them where they are and speaks to them in a language they understand, providing stories that will help

children for generations to come. God appears in middle grade fiction to provide an anchor for children in their formative years.

God's anchors often occur in the themes within middle grade literature, and they are frequently analogous with lessons of morality children would be taught in Sunday school or children's church. The stories give children hope. In John 16:33, Jesus says "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). Then, in 1 John 4:4, it states, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). In journey after journey, these young protagonists encounter the trouble of which Jesus speaks and find the courage to overcome them, as John suggests. The repetition and serial nature of middle grade fiction also demonstrates to young readers that life is not about conquering one foe or facing one fear; it is a journey on which they will encounter problem after problem and somehow find solution after solution. Whether the author's intention or not, young audiences face their fears and fight their foes by getting in touch with something inside of themselves—something bigger and greater than them.

Summary

In my work, *The Balance of Time*, readers find themselves amid a struggle for balance in a family and in the world. The protagonist, Lacey, is a little girl whose family has a secret. She is part of a legacy of time guardians—people who guard time by keeping order in the midst of chaos. Lacey is born on the day her grandfather disappears and lives for almost 12 years thinking he is dead. Although her brother, Emit, and two sisters, Patience and Cadence, readily accept the status quo, Lacey constantly questions the world around her and is critical of what she perceives as apathy on her mother's part. Lacey's father is doting and understanding. He knows both who

and what his wife is, but his children have no idea that their mother sits on the Council of Chronos as one of its twelve members. Lacey's mother is stern, calculating, and a little distant, but, unbeknownst to her children, she carries the weight of the world on her shoulders. To share her responsibility with her children could earn her a level of empathy, but it could also expose the children to realities she does not believe they have the capacity to process.

The tension in the Latish house increases as the world slips into turmoil. Lacey watches as acts of social injustice lead to racial unrest and rioting. She witnesses a growing political divide that pits party against party and tears families apart. She is forced to isolate from the world as it is ravaged by a pandemic. She also witnesses an insurrection that makes all Americans question the health of the democracy in one way or another; the event also serves as the inciting incident that starts Lacey on her journey. While Lacey watches the chaos in the world, the Council of Chronos is in the middle of its own struggle. The council is split down the middle on what an appropriate response to the chaos in the world should be. While one side, made up of members from monochronic cultures who approach time more stringently, believes in handling situations in the more conservative and traditional manner, the other side, made up of members from polychronic countries who approach time in a more fluid fashion, thinks it is time for a change and suggests approaching the issues in a more extreme manner. The struggle results in two separate councils: the Council of Chronos and the, newly formed, Council of Kairos. This fracture mimics the political division in the fictional world in which the work is set and the non-fictional world in which we live.

In the days leading up to the start of her adventure, Lacey witnesses something magical when she sees her mother exit the family's grandfather clock. As she begins to investigate, she finds clues and riddles that baffle her. They give Lacey a puzzle that must be solved. However, it

is not until her mother disappears that Lacey finds herself desperately seeking a solution to the puzzle. She learns that she must enter the clock. She uncovers facts she struggles to believe and is given a set of nearly impossible challenges—find her grandfather in the Great-in-Between and rescue her mother from Chaos. But first, she must convince her brother and sisters to come along. On their journey, the Latish children face deception, overcome obstacles, and find what was stolen from them. Their journey empowers the Latish children and serves as an example for children everywhere. Balance can be achieved, and they can play an active role in it.

Fulfilling the Objective

While I can search for and find God in the pages of the works of other authors with ease, I initially struggled to identify Him in my own work. My work contains the battle of good versus evil just as all the other works do. I can easily find divine significance in the Deathly Hallows, the wise words of Dumbledore, and the *Expecto Patronum* charm in *Harry Potter*, but I find His presence less obvious in my own work. However, when I take a step back, I notice Him in the inevitability of chaos and disruption. The inevitability of the antagonist directly correlates to the trouble children will encounter in the real world. I recognize the intentionality of God in finding a means to balance this world we live in and provide us with learning opportunities in our journey through it. In Proverbs 16:4, it states, “The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble” (*Holy Bible: English Standard Version*). God is the god of balance. And, although He is indeed a good God, everything that happens in His world is not inherently good. It is a lesson that children learn, and one they must be equipped to process.

When I began the process of writing *The Balance of Time*, I did not write it with a conscious emphasis on spirituality. Unlike C. S. Lewis, I did not place a Christ figure in my work. I did not provide a sacrificial lamb that would die and be resurrected. I had a singular

goal—help my children deal with a world in chaos. My work would be classified as middle grade fantasy. However, despite the venture into an expanded reality, the whole story occurs in a world where the events of the day are very present. Some of these features may be frowned upon by some because they are inherently divisive. People are polarized on each of the matters alluded to in the text. However, the goal is not to sway children in one way or the other; it is to demonstrate situations that are familiar to them.

Although the children in *The Balance of Time* must travel to fantastical places, the problems they solve are realized in their own reality. They balance time in the real world. They learn to have compassion and strengthen their familial bonds. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis resolves the storyline in Narnia, but wartime England is still in chaos. In the *Harry Potter* series, despite the success and notoriety Harry experiences in the wizarding world, his life in the muggle world is virtually unchanged. In my manuscript, the resolution found in the realm of fantasy coincides directly with the resolution in the real world, as it pertains to the family and stability. Through the protagonist's efforts, the world is not plunged further into chaos because balance is temporarily restored. The children are victorious in this one battle.

I did not start off with the intention to make this work a series. However, I have changed my approach based on my research, the events in the world, and feedback I received. *The Balance of Time* will now be a trilogy that will allow young readers to face additional trials, solve more problems, and emerge victorious.

Conclusion

Battles are inevitable, and the topic of learning to face opposition and find balance are ones that all people must learn, especially children. Children are cognizant of the presence of forces that seek to work against them. Many children struggle daily to battle anxiety and face

their fears. All the while, the adults in their lives convince themselves that the children either are not affected or do not need to be exposed to these truths. Whether parents and those in authority recognize it, the opposition is similar but not the same as it once was. The world is constantly changing. Thankfully, God stays the same; He will show up in the works no matter how heavy the topic or how fantastical the world in which it occurs. It is, therefore, important that writers continue to create works that demonstrate and acknowledge the challenges young children face while reminding them that they are not alone. It is important that they provide more realistic challenges and make them relevant for the children who will consume the stories. It is imperative that they realize that although all children will express their anxiety in different ways, it by no means indicates acceptance of the world around them. They need guidance, and the stories we create, with the divine intervention we receive, can provide it for them.

God meets us where we are. I hope my work can demonstrate that although troubles and antagonists are inevitable, they are not insurmountable.

Finding Faith Within the Fantasy: Helping Middle Graders Conquer Foes and Fears

Myths, fables, and fairytales have all been used to entertain children while inspiring them and teaching them life lessons. These stories have also been a great source of light for children in the often dark and daunting nature of reality. Although all people are forced to navigate in this darkness, children, ill-prepared and unequipped, face a much more difficult task. Every turn they take, they are faced with the inevitability of an antagonist, some form of darkness seeking to stop them from realizing a goal. They may face real-life monsters in the form of bullies, abusive adults, or anyone seeking to make them feel unvalued or less than. They may face looming threats like the possibility of school shootings, war, or civil unrest. Or they may face internal struggles with darkness because of their perceived otherness or differentness. They are forced to face darkness every day. For this very reason, middle grade fantasy, catering to those old enough to acknowledge the gravity of situations in the world in which they live but too young to be confident enough to navigate through it, highlights the need for the light—how to seek it in other worlds and their own, find it within themselves and in others, use it to find their way, and recognize the need to wield it again and again as challenges in life arise. By combining the elements of several of its predecessors in children’s literature, middle grade fantasy provides a landscape for the intersection of psychology and spirituality, making it the perfect place for children to face their fears and find their faith.

History Behind Middle Grade Fantasy

In general, it is the ages of the children to which a work caters that determine its classification. Middle grade literature caters to children ages 8–12 years old who are in the middle grades of their educational careers. Prior to this classification, stories now associated with

children fell into much broader categories and were not always meant solely for children at all; they were written for the benefit of adults as well.

In a brief overview of children's literature, and not in full consideration of its Transatlantic evolution, one can see how the genre's focus has shifted. Between 1600 and 1800, authors sought to provide young readers with text that would reinforce the desired behavior of children, particularly as it pertained to religious beliefs. According to Tunnell and Jacobs, early children's literature was intended to indoctrinate children and reinforce the fact that the children were "wicked and therefore in need of saving" (80). The texts were not meant to help children process the world; they were meant to get children to behave the way the adults wanted them to. In 1744, John Newberry, published *A Pretty Little Pocket-Book*, which, like its predecessors, featured works that focused more on lessons and morals more than the development of the stories (Tunnell and Jacobs). Newberry was intentional about what children should learn in the stories; he provided children with the answers, but Bettelheim states, "Adult interpretations, as correct as they may be, rob the child of the opportunity to feel that he...has coped successfully with a difficult situation" (19). Although Newberry did not afford his readers the freedom of self-guided discovery, he valued children as an audience and did seek to offer them recreation. A medal named in Newberry's honor has been awarded every year since 1922 to an author with the most notable contribution in children's literature. Newberry's creation of the first publishing house devoted solely to books for children and the hundreds of books he published was the start of the evolution of children's literature; children were a new target audience.

In the 1800s, authors began penning stories that were intended for the enjoyment of children. They started giving children more to explore where, although there was a message to be found within, it was for the child to find. These tales, while hearkening back to the oral tradition

and folklore that lie at the heart of myths, fairytales, and fables, these authors were creating new tales with windows into different worlds. In 1865, Lewis Carroll penned the classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that took children down into a rabbit hole with the juvenile protagonist as she made her way through a non-sensical world to discover more about herself. These types of fantastical tales afforded children a much-needed escape from the harsh work in factories they had known during the Industrial Revolution and the wars through which they were living.

This approach to storytelling was the beginning of a new era in children's literature, one where catering to the children became the new norm. However, despite appealing to a juvenile audience, authors could not alienate the parents and gatekeepers for the children. According to Westman, "children's literature from the start serves at least two audiences: even if younger readers are the intended addressees, adults are not far away" (466). In the 1940s and 50s, writers found ways to keep parents happy by maintaining the "basic decency and restrained fun" (Tunnell and Jacobs 83), while providing children with the excitement they wanted in a story. In 1950, C. S. Lewis penned the classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* that transported children into the land of Narnia where they would encounter aspects of myth, fairytale, and religion. As this type of storytelling grew, publishers began categorizing the literature based on the reading levels, maturity, desires, and ages of the children who would eventually read them. Out of this movement, the category of middle grade fiction was born. Works within the category tackle issues that appeal to children between the end of the elementary school years and their middle school years. As society has become more diverse and complex, these works have expanded as well. They are still intended to teach, but they do so by offering full-blown storylines and characters with whom readers can sympathize or empathize. From the inception of

child focused fiction, the audience has remained the same, but the intent has changed. Now, authors concentrate on creating content that speaks rather than preaches to the children. However, despite the lack of intention to preach to readers, through cross-cultural transmission, elements of religion, both voluntarily and involuntarily, find their way into these stories.

The inclusion of the supernatural elements of religion are apparent in middle grade works of fantasy. Within the broad genre of middle grade fiction, fantasy is one of the many sub-genres. Tales of fantasy use common themes and struggles to guide young readers to the answers they seek. Although the intent may not be to show children they are evil and need to be saved, it is to show them how they can be saved from whatever or whomever the antagonist is in a given story. In this manner, the stories come full circle and contain elements of the tales from the 1600s to the 1800s. However, fantasy provides readers with a new landscape in which to find these answers for themselves. The themes covered in these works often directly align with the ones children are taught in the Christian faith. The very verses children study and memorize in children's Bible studies and vacation Bible schools around the world come to life on the pages of middle grade fantasy fiction.

Middle Grade Fantasy and Religion

Despite the connections one can draw between fantasy and religion, the subtlety of the link can vary greatly. In some literary works, the presence of the supernatural, or forces existing outside of oneself, are placed at the forefront. Angels, demons, gods, or God are active participants in the story. However, it is more common to find threads of the supernatural, particularly, religious motifs, built into the story in the form of morals or guiding principles. Some of these inclusions are not done by the authors intentionally. Hollindale states, "A large part of any book is written not by its author, but by the world its author lives in" (32). There is,

as Stephens and MacCullum term it, a “metanarrative” (227) occurring within any text, one that expresses an author’s ideologies. When paired with the cross-cultural transmission of behavioral and societal norms afforded an author via his or her contribution to literature, one cannot help but make their beliefs known in a work. In addition, the lens of the reader will dictate what conclusions can and cannot be drawn from a work. If children have already been taught these lessons in their homes, schools, or churches, they will become more apparent to them when reading a work. Therefore, the pages of fantasy fiction provide another opportunity for children to reinforce their faith and encounter God. Intentionality on the part of either the writer or the reader is not an indicator of the inherent meaning in the text.

The question of any author’s intentionality is sure to arise when trying to tie God to the fantastical worlds depicted in middle grade literature. In C. S. Lewis’s series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Narnia, the fantasy world, is its own being, apart from a direct Christian allegory. If one is Christian, the correlations are made easily. If one is not Christian, the story is able to stand alone; Narnia is still viable. Henceforth, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is not dependent on allegory any more than any other work of fiction. *A Wrinkle in Time* was widely banned and criticized by both Christian groups for promoting New Age spirituality and witchcraft and non-Christians for being too overtly religious (Jones Voiklis). Again, the story is subject to the reader’s perspective regardless of the author’s intent. The *Harry Potter* series, despite the Christian undertones, has also been widely banned. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the *Alice in Wonderland* series also address these common Christian themes. Whether people choose to find or deny the existence of God in these works, the message is not for adults; it is for children. Biblical truths and principles are used to provide children with the tools they need to process the world around them in these classic tales, both old and new. Authors Lewis, Rowling, Baum,

L'Engle, and Carroll were successful in employing a combination of themes and situations in which young readers found threads of divine truth that helped them navigate their mental and emotional landscapes while exploring new worlds.

The Darkness and the Light

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5, *Holy Bible: New International Version*).

Parents try to protect their children from that which they think is beyond their understanding. They do their best to protect them from the darkness, but in doing so they sometimes prevent them from being able to find the light in the darkness. No matter how hard parents try, children will learn about the “unpleasant truths of life” (Jones 58). In fact, “Everyday children enter a world where they must confront dark forces, fleeing and fighting for their lives” (Gotschall 32). For their own mental health, children must find ways to process the world around them and their feelings. Many dismiss the value of fantasy worlds because they think children are engaging with them simply to feel better. However, when children engage with fantasy, they often find themselves working through real-life issues. Twentieth century psychologist Bruno Bettelheim states, a story must “give full credence to the seriousness of the child’s predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and his future” (5). Children’s stories should not merely be modes of escape for the sake of contentment; they must provide children with a holistic experience.

After writing *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum stated that it “was written solely to please children of today” (*Introduction*), but the presence of death, slavery, and deception suggest that Baum was either downplaying his intentions or there was another force at work. The story demonstrated that the fantasy world was no less “unkind or unreasonable” (Jones 59) than

the real world, and both good and bad people suffer. “If the escapist theory were true...everything would go right, and good people would never suffer” (Gotschall 48). Fantasy does not merely offer an escape for the purpose of pleasure; it offers children a space to process the world.

Stories can shine light in a dark world. According to Tatar, stories “have the power to create light out of darkness and worlds out of words” (34). In fantasy worlds, children can encounter the darkness, even within themselves, and find the light to overcome it. It is in stories that children can lose themselves (Jones), define and find themselves, and “take control” over what they think and how they feel (Gotschall 60). It is in this influential arena where children find a light that, although they may not be able to name it, guides them on the journey. It is on the pages of these stories that God helps them battle the darkness.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the protagonists, the Pevensie children, enter the land of Narnia through a wardrobe. However, the two youngest children have already been in Narnia. During Edmund’s visit, The White Witch promises him dominion in Narnia after tempting him with Turkish delights and asking that he bring his siblings to her. Edmund now has motive to side with the White Witch. When it comes time to make a choice, he asks, “If it comes to that, which is the right side?” (Lewis 62). It is a question people ask frequently. While his elder brother is left to use discernment, Edmund’s knowledge taints his judgment. In Mark 8:36, it states, “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). As more of the story is revealed, young readers subconsciously become aware of the foreshadowing inherent in Edmund’s question. When one has much to gain, discernment becomes more difficult.

The *Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* also touches on crises children often find themselves in—determining exactly who the “bad guy” is. Middle grade literature helps establish more concrete distinctions by creating a clear antagonist. However, there is often evidence of a less clear antagonist and, many times, it comes in the form of one’s internal battle against self-righteousness, selfishness, pride, etc. The character of Edmund Pevensie presents a perfect example of a flawed individual. Of the four Pevensie children, he is the one readers do not want to like. Bettelheim states, “a child’s choices are based, not so much on right versus wrong, as on who arouses his sympathy and who his antipathy” (9). Edmund does not warrant the reader’s sympathy. He is an antagonist from the very beginning of the book, and yet his path to redemption exemplifies the Christian walk. He causes conflict between his siblings, is enticed due to his own ambition, and yet he is saved, forgiven, and accepted.

The fantasy realm becomes a perfect place to explore both the external and internal antagonists, as well as the unexpected ones. There are no limits on who an antagonist can be in a fantasy world. Unlike some other types of fiction, fantasy “relies on a moral universe” (Mendelsohn 4); one where children can make distinctions. Bettelheim states, “The manner in which a child can bring some order into his world view is by dividing everything into opposites” (74); he points to the fact that this method is both psychologically beneficial for children and scriptural. In Genesis 1:4, it states, “God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). Fantasy helps children distinguish between what is good and bad by creating opportunities for them to question it, and they typically do not have to do it alone. They are provided with a guide who is “wiser or more knowledgeable,” and their success is often dependent on them taking heed of their guides advice (Mendelsohn 4). Again, the presence of God can be seen in the embodiment of the Word or the

Holy Spirit as an advisor, who is perceived as good, that guides and protects the characters through their words or actions.

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the main characters find themselves with a slew of guides. “As they transcend time, space, and the limitations of their own minds, they get help from individuals of great goodness: Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Which, Mrs Who, the Happy Medium, and Aunt Beast” (Quindlen 2). The children were battling darkness incarnate, and great goodness was required for them to be successful. They needed guidance to find their way in the darkness. There is a dependency on other people but, just like in life, it is one that will be challenged as they continue on their journey.

Like *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* and *A Wrinkle in Time*, the *Harry Potter* series includes several guides for the characters to follow. The most notable is Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Dumbledore is known for sowing seeds of wisdom in the young protagonist, Harry; one of which comes directly from scripture. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore says, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Rowling, Book Seven, 325); but it is also found in the King James Version of Matthew 6:21 and Luke 12:34. Harry’s godfather who he first meets in the third book in the series, Sirius Black, also offers him food for thought regarding the concept of good and bad when he says, “Yes, but the world isn’t split into good people and Death Eaters” (Rowling, Book Five, 302). As simple as people would like it to be, they find that guidance is needed to place everything in perspective. It is not an easy task to navigate in darkness and find the light.

These stories of fantasy highlight the fact that life is complex; it takes experience to maneuver through it. “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice”

(*Proverbs 12:15, Holy Bible: New International Version*). Through these fantasies, children see the need for wisdom and discernment.

The Power of Portals

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (*Matthew 7:7-8, Holy Bible: New International Version*).

Middle grade fantasy usually takes place somewhere else. It is a place in which they are not afraid to ask questions, and they have the freedom to seek the answers without fear of dismissal. Children leave the world they know and journey into other worlds to face their fears and get the answers to questions that have eluded them in the real world. According to Mendelsohn, “A portal fantasy is simply a fantastic world entered through a portal” (xix). Children slip through a door of some kind to face their external and internal antagonists. Following the characters in the story, they can traverse both space and time to cover significant spans of both in a short period. Mendelsohn muses that the portal-quest fantasy should be recognized as “a metaphor for a coming of age—it provides space for the protagonist to grow up” (7). It is not an escape; it is a rite of passage. It is a refuge to mature in a safe environment. According to Jones, children get to process the things that bother them by playing with them until they “feel safer” (12). The fantasy worlds give children a place outside of reality to work through issues. Mendelsohn posits, “Most significant, the portal fantasy allows and relies upon both protagonist and reader to gain experience” (xix). In the worlds that exist through these doors, readers learn how to deal with the antagonists in their lives. This departure from the real world provides the perfect opportunity for the supernatural to intervene. When one is out of their comfort zone and free from the weight of reality, it is easier to encounter God.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice first goes down a seemingly never-ending rabbit hole where she has time to process the mundane while still making her way into a world of pure fantasy and nonsense. When she arrives at the bottom of the hole, she finds yet another door she wishes to go through to get to the Queen's Gardens. In the second installment of the series, Alice gets to go *Through the Looking Glass* and can view things from a different perspective.

In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, a cyclone takes Dorothy from an uneventful, dull, gray world into a land full of color and problems to which she has never been exposed. Tatar states, "In children's fantasy literature, having the 'right eyes to see' often means turning from the optically observable to using the inner eye to behold the wonders of someplace else" (30). Without entering these fantasy realms, the characters in the stories and the readers of the tales view the world only through the lenses with which they are familiar.

In a similar manner, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children go through a wardrobe to find themselves empowered but in grave danger as the future kings and queens of Narnia. According to Conkan, "These worlds guide, on a mythical level, unconscious fears and reformulate characters. The wardrobe is, in the end, a projection of an internal portal Lucy must approach and enter, in order to find the land of Narnia hidden inside of her" (112). Again, these journeys do not act as mere escapes. These journeys into fantasy worlds expose the children to greater wonders but greater threats, just as increased knowledge of the real world does.

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the protagonist, Meg, is transported through a quantum tesseract—a folding of space and time—to worlds where she learns to find her father and accept herself. In the archival edition of her book, L'Engle has a message for her young readers; she states, "Too many grown-ups tend to put themselves into little rooms with windows that don't open and doors

that are locked. And they want to close themselves off to new ideas, and you're ready and open for new ideas" (L'Engle, *Introduction*, 00:00:57). These portals are not merely doors to escape into; they are doors that lead the protagonists to answers. They allow the protagonists and all willing readers to see the world in a different light.

Protagonist Harry Potter finds his answers only after he enters the wizarding world. Readers of the series are transported from a world in which Harry Potter is an ill-treated, unwanted boy into a world where he is a hero of great means and even greater fame. However, his troubles are far greater in the Wizarding World than they are in his reality on Privet Drive in England. There are several portals the reader follows Harry through: a trip through the door of a bar called the Leaky Cauldron, a brick wall leading to the marketplace in Diagon Alley, and another brick wall to Platform 9¾ and onto the Hogwarts Express. Through each door Harry learns more about who he really is and the world to which he belongs. However, he also learns about the greatest threat to him and the Wizarding World.

These characters get to "confront the problems of the human condition head-on" (Gotschall 32), using the lens of fantasy. Intentionally or unintentionally, the authors of these works create opportunities for God to step in and guide readers to the answers they seek on the other side of these portals. The children are provided with a safe space to face their doubts and their demons, which helps them cope in their reality.

The Power to Save

"I can do all things through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13, *Holy Bible: New International Version*).

Middle grade literature is often a place where children who feel powerless find they are more powerful than they could ever imagine. This realization comes in many forms. One

common trope in middle grade fiction is that the protagonists all find their strength within—the power they seek was in them all along. The sentiment echoes a truth that exists in the pages of scripture. 1 John 4:4 states, “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). On the pages of middle grade literature, children come to understand this truth.

Children who wrestle with their own powerlessness and smallness every day get to overcome those feelings (Jones). In his book, *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim states, “These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed” (24). In these fantasy worlds, children face their self-doubt and unworthiness by recognizing what lies within them and accepting the love that has been freely given to them.

While it is easy to celebrate with the protagonist who recognizes the power within them, it is reasonable to find oneself questioning why they had to struggle or suffer prior to discovering it. However, therein lies the lesson. “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10, *New International Version*). There is purpose in suffering and the story lines in the literature often reveal the reasons for the suffering or the need for the protagonist to come to their own conclusions. However, suffering and love tend to work hand in hand, just as they do in the Christian narrative. After readers have learned to discern the differences between what is good and what is bad and establish that they have both great power and great responsibility, they realize that love lies at the heart of it all. In 1 John 4:16, it states, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). As the characters move through these fantasy realms, many of them find

themselves with a hedge of protection over them. They have something that the external enemies they fight know nothing of. Despite their suffering, they are the bearers of the strength and love afforded to them by one who came before them.

In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, after being nearly killed and captured by the Wicked Witch of the West, Glinda the Good Witch tells Dorothy that the very slippers she has had since arriving in the land of Oz could have taken her home. Before the reader even gets the chance to feel sorry for Dorothy, her friends remind her that they would never have received what they desired most if she had gone back to Kansas right away. Dorothy responds, “I am glad I was of use to these good friends” (Baum 123), affirming that her suffering was purposeful. In Psalm 119, David writes, “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). Suffering is sometimes required to learn that God’s ways are higher than one’s own ways.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children experience something similar as they wait on Aslan to come and defeat Jadis, the White Witch, for good. However, Peter and Edmund find themselves in a battle for their lives; one in which Edmund almost loses his life. The children needed to fight for what they knew to be good. While they waited for Aslan, there was still work for them to do. Again, the children find that they have strength within, and they cannot expect that salvation will come without action.

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg Murry encounters the same dilemma when she *tessers* through time and space to Camazotz to find her incarnate father and assumes he will make all things right. L’Engle writes, “She had been so certain that the moment she found her father everything would be all right...All the problems would be taken out of her hands. She would no longer be

responsible for anything” (172). Later she writes, “She had found her father and he had not made everything all right. Everything kept getting worse and worse” (189).

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, after she realizes that her father cannot make everything better, Meg knows she must do something. It is love that makes her fight to get back to save her brother. It is love she gets from Aunt Beast and Mrs Whatsit, and love that IT does not have. One of the first gifts Meg receives from her guides is glasses that help her see the world differently. However, L’Engle writes, “But what we can give you now is nothing you can touch with your hands. I give you my love, Meg. Never forget that. My love always” (222). As Meg *tessers*, she hears the voice of Mrs Which saying, “Yyou hhave ssomethinnngg thatt ITT hass not. This ssomethinnngg iss yyourr onlly wwearpponn. Bbutt yyou mmusstt ffinndd itt fforr yyourrselfff” (L’Engle 223). It is not until Meg is face to face with IT that she realizes the power is love. L’Engle writes, “Love. That was what she had that IT did not have. She had Mrs Whatsit’s love, and her father’s, and her mother’s, and the real Charles Wallace’s love, and the twins’, and Aunt Beast’s. And she had her love for them” (228). Love is what helps Meg triumph over the darkness that is IT. In both stories, young readers witness the binding power of love. They see the protection that comes with being loved but also the need to use love to defeat their antagonists.

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry believes his father is the one who saves him and his godfather, Sirius. As the dementors begin to suck the souls out of Harry and Sirius, Harry realizes that he has been expecting his father when the power has been in him the whole time. Rowling presents the purpose of the dementors as prison guards who so deplete the souls of those they encounter that they are left with no will to fight. This depiction helps reinforce the concept that when people are at their lowest, they must actively call on a power

beyond themselves and yet within them. When Harry finds himself in this situation, children read as he casts the charm *Expecto Patronum* and conjures a stag of protection to ward off the dementors. While the charm and the stag could be interpreted as allegorical, to categorize them as such would be a moot point. The scene in the book satisfies the purpose of demonstrating that children need not wait for someone to save them; there is something in them that is far greater than them. They can call on the Father who is not an external force but an internal one.

It is also in the *Harry Potter* series that Harry's life was saved by his mother's love when he was a baby. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Dumbledore tells Harry, "Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. Love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark" (Rowling, Book One, 299). The scar on Harry's head serves as a visible reminder of that love. However, it is the love of the one who created him, the one who loved him so completely they sacrificed their life for him, that exists in his very being as a protection. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Dumbledore tells Harry "You are protected, in short, by your ability to love!...The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort's!" (Rowling, Book Six, 23). The love Harry experienced as a child and his love for others is what helps him triumph over each iteration of Voldemort. "Thus, in short, it is love and care for the life of others that motivates Harry" (Tumminio 83). Love is what empowers Harry to triumph over evil.

These passages suggest that people have a part to play in their own salvation. They must get in touch with the Father that lives in them. They must recognize that the strength of the Father is always with them. However, they must also recognize how much they are loved; it is a strength that cannot be touched by outside forces. The knowledge that one has power within

them and the ability to use love to defeat their enemies can make any child feel more powerful, which aligns with the psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs of children.

Making Sense of It All

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5, *Holy Bible: New International Version*).

Their first question out of most children’s mouths is undoubtedly “Why?”. As they experience the world, they formulate more questions that they need answered. They need to make sense of the world in which they live, and many times they cannot draw the answers out of those who care for them the most. When the answers do not come, they must learn to simply trust. Thankfully, middle grade fantasy offers children an alternative space to seek and find answers. In these other worlds, children learn to process through chaos, think critically, and see that they are not the only ones struggling to find answers.

Change is inherently disruptive, but the only way to grow is to change. Revolution must occur for evolution to occur, and chaos abounds in the pages of children’s literature. However, through fantasy, children come to understand that all chaos is not bad, and order, when subjective, is not always good. In the end, chaos gives way to order. Bettelheim argues that modern stories fail to address the real hardships one will face in life (8). However, middle grade fantasy does not shy away from difficulties; in this way, it is akin to fairytales, which helps children process the world. Galli and Larson contend, “One of the great themes in Scripture is that the confusion of this age will, in the age to come, give way to peace and order” (50). Children learn through chaos. They work through problems and puzzles to create order. A happy ending is only achieved after they face an antagonist and work through a challenge. According to

Gotschall, “The thornier the predicament faced by the hero, the more we like the story” (53). Overcoming chaos equates to celebrating a victory, and victories make children feel powerful. However, many authors also include a means of highlighting the need for humility while providing children with additional context. According to Bettelheim, “Before a child can come to grips with reality, he must have some frame of reference to evaluate it” (117). As children work through their own chaos, they are becoming aware of the issues others are facing, which has a balancing effect. The reader, like the character in which they invest, recognizes that it is more than their needs and desires at stake. It affords them the benefit of perspective.

Wonderland is a non-sensical place where roses are painted red by playing cards imbued with life; rabbits and caterpillars can talk; cats disappear into thin air; and a child can grow and shrink by simply eating or drinking something. Nothing makes sense in Wonderland, and yet Alice gets more comfortable with who she is and stands up for herself and others against bullies. In the midst of all of her physical changes, Alice says, “It’s no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then” (Carroll 93). As Alice works through one chaotic scene after another, she grows, shrinks, and humbles herself until she arrives at what becomes her new normal. In her reality, Alice would have moved through the motions of ordered society and would not have been challenged to think outside of society’s box. She finds her own sense of order, acknowledging that although she is in Wonderland, she is not of Wonderland.

In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, readers are introduced to a young girl who soon finds herself lost and longing to get home. Most of the new iterations of the story focus on Dorothy’s struggles. However, Baum makes sure that with each new traveling companion Dorothy picks up, she learns their backstory as well. It is not merely about Dorothy, and readers get to process

the woes of others. In doing so, they recognize that chaos is not a singular occurrence; many people experience it and all at once.

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg Murry finds that order for the sheer purpose of control is not good. In her reality, Meg does not fit in. She is misunderstood, and she struggles to accept who she is. However, through the repetition of sameness and order, as well as the help of Calvin, she comes to the realization that her differentness and the chaos it causes in her world are the very things she must embrace to achieve her own sense of peace and order. There is beauty in the mess. Young readers work through chaos to find order and, ultimately, find peace in the chaos individuality provides. They do the very same things the world requires of them and, in doing so, get a better sense of who they are.

However, in *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg also gets a lesson in humility as Calvin O'Keefe shares his own problems with her. While Meg focuses on the loss of her father, Calvin tells Meg how lucky she is to have the family and home life she does. He says, "Maybe that's why I call when I'm not going to be home. Because I care. Nobody else does. You don't know how lucky you are to be loved" (47). Meg just assumes that her suffering is greater than everyone else's. However, the stories that these characters have serve as a means of teaching them empathy.

In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling provides characters who have their own struggles to walk alongside Harry. Luna Lovegood is motherless, and Neville Longbottom lost his parents when Voldemort's Death Eaters performed the *Cruciatius* curse on them. Ron Weasley struggles with his lack of finances and social status despite being a pure-blood wizard. Hermione Granger is the victim of racial discrimination as she is a Mudblood—not pure-blooded. Rubeus Hagrid is portrayed as having a marred past, which makes others perceive him as incompetent. Although Harry is indeed special, he is not alone in his struggles.

Everyone struggles. It is a lesson children need to learn to be able to put the world around them in perspective. While children move through fantasy and learn to understand the worlds in which they live and themselves better, they learn to understand others better as well. In these works, hearing the stories of others acts as a revelation and provides children with clarity. In Ephesians 4:2, Paul writes, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). In the realm of fantasy, young readers are called upon to appreciate the faults and journeys of others, to understand that chaos is everywhere. They are called seek to understand the others around them as well because to fail to do so could make them an antagonist in someone else’s story.

One After Another

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17, *Holy Bible: New International Version*).

Authors of middle grade literature often provide their young consumers with characters they can follow through multiple journeys and adventures. They allow their readers to see the characters they have come to love mature as they face one challenge or another against the same antagonist or a completely different one. In this way, they model what children can expect to find as the move through life. “As you grow up you conquer more tasks and gain more power, but you're also hit with new frustrations” (Jones 65). Just as children begin to see their favorite characters find strength and triumph over their adversaries, they see them faced with another battle. James 1:2-3 states, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). The problems one faces by simply being human are a universal point of focus in most stories (Gotschall). The very nature of serial literature aligns with James’ statement in scripture.

The more trials one faces and makes it through, the greater their faith and their endurance. When consuming middle grade serial literature, readers are exposed to Biblical truths.

Authors can send their characters on multiple journeys. Serials also allow for authors to provide the backstories of supporting characters and send them on their own adventures, proving that everyone has a story. The *Alice in Wonderland* quartet follows Alice on her journeys in the nonsensical Wonderland, providing its readers with riddle after riddle to solve and no resolution. The much beloved classic *The Wizard of Oz* begins with good triumphing over evil when Dorothy's house lands on the Wicked Witch of the East; it ends with her victorious again as she melts the Wicked Witch of the West and sets the witch's slaves free. However, Baum's series went on to explore more of Oz and its inhabitants in fourteen additional books. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a seven-book series that allows readers to become fully engrossed in the world of Narnia and both the dangers and revelations within it. L'Engle began her series with the award-winning novel *A Wrinkle in Time*; however, there were four more books in the series after it and an additional three novels outside of the quintet that follow the stories of some of the series's characters. The *Harry Potter* series contains seven books as well. In all of the books, the protagonist—Harry—is battling, either directly or indirectly, some form of his archenemy—Lord Voldemort. Lovers of the series get to watch Harry as he, first passively and then actively, seeks to destroy Voldemort. In book six of the series—*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*—Headmaster Dumbledore states, “It is important to fight and fight again, and keep fighting, for only then can evil be kept at bay, though never quite eradicated” (Rowling, Book Six, 644-645). In this one line, Rowling, whether divinely inspired or not, touches on the endurance of which James speaks and the inevitability of the antagonist.

In Romans 5:3-5, Paul states, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (*Holy Bible: New International Version*). Another aspect of the serial nature of middle grade literature is the fact that the trials the protagonists face get more complex as they mature, get stronger, and are more capable of facing their antagonists. With each passing obstacle, the reader completes a rite of passage to the next stage.

Implications and Recommendations

There is inherent value in the pages of middle grade literature. Sometimes, because of the subject matter, parents and gatekeepers seek to protect children from certain works. However, these works can contain seeds of wisdom and solace that can help children work through their thoughts and feelings. In addition, these works, regardless of the presence of fantastical elements and the occult, can help children reinforce the lessons they learn in their faith. They can also find new value in messages they have come to see as trite. Christian fantasy writers must also continue to write. They need not preach to their audience because who they are and what they believe will make itself known on the page.

Unfortunately, children are regularly exposed to more of the atrocities and realities of the world. They see it in social media feeds, hear about it from friends, and passively consume it. Try as their gatekeepers might, they cannot protect children from it. Therefore, the genre must continue to push the boundaries by providing worlds in which children can face new struggles and challenges that mirror the ones they face in reality. Rather than ban books of fantasy that seem to be in opposition of their values, gatekeepers should read the stories with children and use them as teaching and counseling tools.

Conclusion

Middle grade fantasy provides a space for children to leave a reality with which they struggle, safely engage their antagonists, and return victorious. It is on the pages of these stories and in each step of their journeys that young readers face fears and encounter something greater than themselves. Due to the metanarratives imbedded in the stories and the cross-cultural transmission that ensures cultural norms find their way into works of literature, gatekeepers can be assured that children will receive valuable lessons. Whether an author intentionally includes God or does not, God's all-access pass allows Him to meet young readers where they are and work within story lines to teach them lessons that one could easily find in scripture if one were inclined to look. In books that take place in worlds that do not even exist, God shows children how to live in their realities, struggle with issues, defeat their foes again and again, and return home—straight to the heart of the Father.

The Balance of Time

by Joy Johnson-Summerville

The Balance of Time

PROLOGUE

Just as his granddaughter Lacey was making her grand entrance into the world, Grampa Horatio was receiving word that the Council of Chronos needed to meet immediately. He asked Sarah, a family friend who had come to help him take care of the children, to go warm a bottle for one-year-old Emit. He then grabbed a pen out of the toddler-proofed drawer and wrote a quick note saying he had to leave. He left the note on the table, tucked the pen into his breast pocket, and used the portal in the Latishes' grandfather clock to make his way to Big Ben.

When Horatio arrived, he and the other 11 members of the council of which he was the head, began to discuss the matter at hand. They'd received word that Chaos, the sower of discord, was planning to attack during the inauguration of the new president in the United States. Horatio Stewart knew the council had to act; however, stopping Chaos in time would mean traveling into the Great In-Between—the place where there were no clocks and no way to keep track of time. Horatio was the only one who had ever stepped foot into the Great In-Between, and he had only narrowly made it back. He couldn't let anyone else take the risk. He had to go. So, Horatio left his journal on the living room side table and set off into the grandfather clock to journey through the Great In-Between to find Chaos.

Horatio never returned.

* * * * *

Five Days Earlier

Robert Latish decided to take full advantage of his wife's rare exuberance. Cybil Latish, despite what she felt on the inside, hardly ever let the full extent of her emotions show. With the upcoming inauguration of the first African American president of the United States, it seemed

like the whole world was excited, including Cybil who felt it was time for change. And on that day, Robert convinced her to do something uncharacteristic and amazing—compromise.

As he knew how dear time and scheduling were to his wife, Robert asked Cybil if she would meet him in the kitchen for tea at exactly four o'clock. She agreed. Nine months pregnant, Cybil waddled around the pile of toys left in the living room by their three little ones who were all under the age of three. Then, she awkwardly squatted down to pick up a deserted teddy bear and headed into the kitchen to sit for tea at four o'clock on the dot.

In just two short days, the Latishes were scheduled to have another child and, as was customary in Cybil's family, she was waiting to select a name. They knew the child was going to be a girl, so they could've picked a name right away, but Cybil refused to name a child until after the baby was born. To her, and to all of her Nigerian ancestors, that was the right time.

Furthermore, her father, Horatio Stewart, or Grampa Horatio, despite being a proper British gentleman just twice removed from royalty, fully supported his daughter and her adherence to her mother's customs. Robert Latish had no issue with waiting, but he did have one request. He wanted to name their daughter.

Robert had given into Cybil's desires to name their other children, but he didn't think he would get another chance. This would be their fourth child and even he had to admit that four was quite enough to love. So, Robert humbly insisted he be given the opportunity to name this little one. To make his wife happy, he even promised he would name their little girl something associated with time, as was customary on the Stewart side of Cybil's family. However, even in her cheerful state, Cybil was reluctant to agree, and Robert thought he would lose yet another battle. But, after just a few minutes, Cybil agreed. So, it was settled. Robert would get the honor of naming the family's fourth and final child.

On January 17th, Cybil announced, just as calmly as ever, that it was time to head to St. Joseph's Hospital. Mr. Latish grabbed their bright purple duffle bag and headed to the car. Cybil carefully shuffled over to Horatio.

"Dad, thanks so much for watching the children. Sarah will be here shortly," Cybil said.

"Darling, you know I am happy to watch them. I know your mother would have loved to have been here, but your grandmother needed her," Horatio said. He kissed Cybil on the forehead, squeezed her hand, and said, "I can't wait to meet the new little one."

"Patience will need to go to the potty in 20 minutes. Cadence will be ready for her nap in one hour. Emit will need a bottle right at 2:00pm," Cybil said.

"Cybil," Horatio said, "go and have that baby. Sarah and I will handle it."

Then, Cybil took one last look at the clock and headed to the car where Robert was waiting anxiously. With the close of her door and a slight lurch of their brand new, and now very necessary minivan, they headed to St. Joe's to have a baby. It was 12:05pm.

Robert tripped over himself to get Cybil out of the car and situated in the wheelchair. It was his fourth time making this same trip, but this time felt different. The nurse took over and rolled Cybil into the elevator. She pressed the button for the maternity ward and unsuccessfully tried to make a little small talk with Cybil. They exited the elevator and passed the nurses' station, rooms 301, 302, and 303 before the nurse wheeled her into room 304. It was a little cold in the room, but the nurse quickly helped her undress and get into her hospital gown and under the sheets. Cybil remained quiet the entire time.

Robert was still parking the car. When he looked at his watch, it was 12:23pm. By the time he arrived at the room, Cybil was settled in, eating ice chips, humming, and looking at her watch. It was 12:30pm.

“We only have an hour and a half before she gets here,” Cybil said.

The nurse standing by the door simply smirked and raised an eyebrow at Robert. He could see she put no faith in Cybil’s prediction; she had probably witnessed women try to control situations just like this many times before. The nurse put her hand on Robert’s shoulder and said, “This baby will come when she is good and ready.”

Robert, on the other hand, knew his wife all too well. And, if she said the baby was coming at 2:00pm, the baby was coming right at that time; after all, she had never been wrong before. January 17th at two o’clock p.m. was the same date and time that each of his other three children had come. There was no reason to believe today would be any different, and yet Robert was not quite as certain as he had been in the past.

At 1:45pm, Cybil told her husband to call for the doctor. She was breathing slowly and steadily. She closed her eyes as if to travel somewhere else at times. Whenever she would open her eyes, it was only to look briefly at her husband and then at her watch. But, at 1:50pm, with the doctor and nurse in position, she kept her eyes closed for several minutes.

When she finally opened them, Cybil softly asked, “What time is it?”

“It is 1:57pm,” Robert replied.

To which Cybil responded, “It’s time.”

And, after four minutes, imprecisely and yet exactly at 2:01pm, Cybil Latish gave birth to a beautiful baby girl with a head full of hair and poor timing.

But the question of the name was still up in the air and, because of their agreement, completely up to Robert. As agreed, in the one and only compromise Cybil ever made, he gave their new baby girl a name associated with time. He picked a name that meant “time off.”

“Lacuna,” he said. “Lacey for short. It’s a good name, and we all need a break sometimes.”

Cybil, exasperated, exhausted, perplexed, and slightly tickled, laughed and in the quietest voice said, “Hello Lacey.”

And so, the world was introduced to little Lacuna “Lacey” Latish.

* * * * *

When Cybil arrived home from the hospital just three days later, she was so excited to see her other three children. As soon as Robert opened the door, she carefully pushed past him, lightly brushing against the baby carrier he held in his other hand. Her eyes fell on little Emit’s sleeping face as he rested in her best friend Sarah’s arms. She smiled broadly as she reached to smooth his unruly, golden-brown hair, but her smile disappeared when she saw Sarah’s expression.

“What’s wrong?” Cybil said.

“You need to call your mother,” Sarah said, her voice trembling.

“Why? Is she okay? Is it my grandmother?” Cybil asked.

“Please just call your mother,” pleaded Sarah.

Cybil gave her husband a quick look, headed to the study, and shut the door behind her. She quickly placed a long-distance video call to her mother in Nigeria and waited impatiently for her to pick up. She could not understand why Sarah had not told her what was going on. She turned to face the wall, pressed her head against the mahogany panel, and ran through every possibility. Then she heard her mother’s voice.

“Cybil? My sweet dear,” said her mother, Ezinne.

“Mama, what’s wrong? Are you okay? Has grandmother gotten worse?” she asked.

“We are both fine,” Ezinne said, wiping the tears from her eyes. “It is your father dear.” Her mother paused and tried to gather herself as much as possible. “I do not have all of the details, but I can tell you that he has disappeared, and the council fears he may not return.”

“He was just here at the house three days ago. When did this happen? Why did they let him go? What are they going to do about it?” Cybil rambled off question after question but received no response. She stirred herself into a frenzy and slumped to the floor. Her curly black hair hid her face as she started to cry. There was no sound, only tears.

“Cybil dear, your father must have had his reasons. I know this is hard for you. It is hard for me too. However, you know what you must do. You know what your father would need you to do,” Ezinne said.

“But Mama, the children, Lacey. I just got home. I..” Her words trailed off as she composed herself. She wiped the remaining tears from her hair and said, “I understand. I love you Mama.”

CHAPTER 1

The Council of Chronos

Since its inception, the Council of Chronos had never operated without a member of the Stewart family. They were the first family to be given the responsibility to be guardians of time by the goddess Concordia herself. The council was given the power to make small changes in the timeline to fix or prevent the damage Chaos caused.

In her father's absence, Cybil had a duty to fulfill. She gave her mother a smile heavy with resignation and ended the call. She immediately placed a video call to Astrid Glashütte, the new head of the council. Astrid picked up on the first ring. With her head slightly tilted to the side, Astrid said sympathetically, "Cybil, I am so sorry about your father." But her tone changed as she said, "I know you've just returned from the hospital, but I must insist..."

Cybil cut her off. "Astrid, I understand. What time do I need to be there tonight?"

"Eleven," said Astrid.

Cybil gave a single nod and disconnected the call. She walked to the study door, pushed a stray curl behind her ear, took a deep breath, and walked into the living room where her husband, Sarah, her three toddlers, and little Lacey were all waiting. She smiled as best as she could and Patience, Cadence, and Emit giggled as they moved as fast as they could to hug on their mother's legs. Cybil bent down and gathered all three of them in her arms. She looked at her husband holding Lacey and tried unsuccessfully to swallow the lump in her throat. Her world would never be the same.

At two minutes to eleven, she kissed her husband on the head, reached in her jewelry box for the amber bracelet her father had given her, and headed downstairs. At 11pm, the grandfather clock began the Westminster chime. The amber stone on the moon dial shone a warm orange, as

did the one on Cybil's bracelet. She pushed the stone on the clock and the bottom cabinet popped open, revealing a bright prismatic light. Cybil stepped into the clock and quietly shut the door behind her. When she stepped out on the other side, she was in the council's inner chamber.

Cybil had heard her father describe the room several times, but she never could have imagined it would look quite the way it did. The room was all stone with ornate bronze light fixtures glowing a warm yellowy orange, like honey. Each light was dim, but together the lights made it surprisingly bright in the room. In the middle of the room, there was a round stone table with the face of a clock engraved on it. In front of each hour mark was an intricately carved wooden chair with a plush red velvet seat. And exactly 12 feet behind each seat, there was a gigantic grandfather clock. Each one was different, but each one was just as beautiful as the next. Cybil watched as 10 of the other council members emerged from their clocks and made their way to their respective seats. She looked around and saw Astrid who appeared to be finishing a conversation with the council's historian, Tessa Pantazis. Astrid acknowledged Cybil and pointed to the seat at the six o'clock hour mark on the table, right in front of the clock she had just walked through.

Astrid called the meeting to order and asked that each of the council members introduce themselves. Councilman Amandi was seated at the one o'clock mark. He was the first to speak. "I am Adisa Amandi. I have served on the council for over 12 years. We are sorry for the circumstance under which you came to the council, but we welcome your presence."

"Thank you, Councilman Amandi," said Astrid. She nodded for the council member at the two o'clock hour to continue.

"I am Verena Klocken of Switzerland."

"My name is Amalya Samay of India."

The council member at the four o'clock hour stood and bowed. "I am Tadashi Koro of Japan."

"Hola, Señora Latish. I am Vez Alvarez of Mexico."

Cybil heard a soft voice one chair to her left at the seven o'clock mark.

"I am Sigan Ji Woo of South Korea. I have only served on the council for two years. Your father was a great friend to me. I use his wise words to guide me in my diplomatic endeavors with North Korea."

"Seth Gregory of England. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

Cybil had not even thought about the fact that her father represented England and she represented the United States.

"What happened to the former representative from the U. S.?" Cybil asked

"She secured a position in your new president's cabinet," said Ji Woo.

Councilman Gregory cleared his throat. "I took over the seat for your father."

Cybil nodded politely at him but felt a tear begin to form. A lilting, bright voice snapped her out of her momentary sadness.

"I am Aline Relagio from the beautiful country of Brazil. I am so happy to meet you Cybil."

A man with a gruff voice spoke next.

"I was right gobsmacked when ya dad disappeared. Good man he was. My name is William Bunda and, as you may have guessed, I'm from the land down under. Catchy eh! But I digress. In my part of the world, one of the most pressing issues is the environment. We can't seem to be able to strike the right balance, but I'm sure we will in time."

The man seated at the eleven o'clock mark on the table spoke up last. "My name is Zao Deng of China."

Astrid thanked the council members for the introductions and directed her next comments to Cybil. "I needed you to come here to meet your fellow council members. However, I also needed you to know that the current situation in your own country is what your father was working on when he disappeared. It affects us all. We need to find a way to manage Chaos and his minions before it disrupts the delicate balance we seek to keep. I know we have all said a lot. Take some time to consider everything said and know that when the council calls, it is now your duty to answer."

Cybil heard every word they said, and each one weighed on her heavier than the one before. When Astrid adjourned the meeting, Cybil turned and walked back through the clock. She didn't know how right she was when she had said it earlier, but her world would truly never be the same. This would be her new normal.

CHAPTER 2

Twelve Years Later

The Latish House

In 2021, the world was in the middle of a pandemic. It seemed like everything outside of the Latish house was in complete chaos. However, for the most part, inside of the house, it appeared things were fairly normal. The Latishes lived in a house where it seemed every floorboard creaked when stepped on and paint chips needed to be swept daily. They lived in one of the few remaining old Victorian homes in downtown Phoenix in the Coronado Historic district. It was not a gigantic house, but there were four bedrooms, a living room, a study, an often fought over bathroom, and a kitchen, which served as the meeting place for all. Eleven-year-old Lacey Latish had lived there with her parents, her brother Emit, and her two sisters Patience and Cadence. It was the only home she'd ever known.

An old grandfather clock sat in the entryway of the home and was far larger than it needed to be for a house of its size. It was mahogany brown with a polished brass lyre pendulum, mirrored back, and delicate beveled glass etched with what appeared to be a million fine scrolls. On the upper portion of the clock, there was a moon dial, and in the center of it, there was a perfectly polished amber stone that seemed to glow a brilliant orange at times. The bottom half of the clock was enormous. Lacey had often fantasized about undoing the latch and hiding inside the clock, but she knew if her mother caught her, she would soon regret it.

“Lacey,” Cybil called. “You have exactly fifteen seconds to make it to the table. You know tardiness is never acceptable.” Lacey’s mom, Cybil, was not one for spontaneity. The family’s meetings, the ones for the purpose of being fed physically, spiritually, or as a form of chastisement, were always called by Cybil, who the children affectionately referred to as Mama.

She was strict in the scheduling of every meeting, no matter the kind. And it seemed she and their old grandfather clock were partners somehow because a meeting could not occur unless the clock had just chimed. In fact, a meeting never occurred without it being exactly on the hour.

“I’m coming Mama. I was just finishing up some reading,” said Lacey.

Cybil began the countdown, perfectly synchronized with the chimes of the clock, and Lacey’s brother and sisters joined in. “Ten, nine, eight...” they all chanted. Lacey bounded down the stairs and before they could reach seven, she was standing in front of them with a smug but slightly panicked look on her face. It was 8:00am, exactly seven seconds before the grandfather clock had finished its chime, which meant it was time for breakfast.

“See, I never miss a deadline,” she said.

To which her father, Robert, replied, “I seem to recall a little girl arriving a whole minute late almost 12 years ago.” His comment was met with a glare from Cybil that was part playful and part something else.

“C’mon Daddy,” Lacey said. “You know that was my grand entrance. I haven’t been late since.”

“Patience, please say grace,” said Cybil.

“Of course, Mama. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this food and this family no matter how strange some of them are. You always provide, and we thank you. Amen.”

Lacey raised her head and rolled her eyes at her sister.

Emit laughed before tapping Cadence on the hand. “Can you please pass me the biscuits?”

As they sat at the table, Lacey turned to her father, who was self-proclaimed news junkie, and said, “Daddy, did you hear the story about—”

Cybil cut her off. “Lacey, the breakfast table is not the place for your stories about social activism,” she said.

“But Mama, if I can’t talk about it with you all, where can I talk about it? And when? It’s like you don’t even care,” Lacey said.

Cybil locked eyes with Lacey and said, “There is a proper time and place for such conversations. This is neither the place nor the right time.”

Lacey pushed back insistently and between gritted teeth said, “You didn’t answer my question.” In her best British accent, to mock her mother, she said, “When and where would a conversation topic such as this fit in your ‘shed-yool’?”

“Lacey, that is not fair. You know your mother...,” Robert said, but Cybil kicked his foot under the table and shook her head ever so slightly.

“No, Robert. There is no need to speak on my behalf. I have had quite enough of this. Little girl, you have no idea how or what I feel,” said Cybil.

“You’re right. I don’t because you never really talk to us.”

Cybil adjusted herself in her chair and cleared her throat. Lacey let out an exasperated sigh and began to eat her food. Patience glared at Lacey and then smiled at Cybil and said, “Mama, you always make the best eggs.”

* * * * *

Days in the Latish house typically started the same way—on time and full of banter. After breakfast and in consideration of the ongoing and seemingly never-ending pandemic, they retreated to their respective corners of the house. Cybil went to the study. Robert worked in the corner of the living room. Patience, who was the oldest girl at 14, and Emit, who was 12 and the

only boy, went to their own rooms and started their schoolwork. Cadence, 13, and Lacey, 11, went to their shared room to hop online for class.

Lacey always received good grades in school; however, before the pandemic, she was always late because she just didn't want to be there. She wanted to be reading. She was always reading. Now that the whole world was shut down because of the virus, Lacey tried to find time to read whenever she could, which often meant making excuses to her teacher for why her webcam didn't work and reading when she was supposed to be paying attention in class. Her sister, Cadence, knew what she was doing, but there was no convincing Lacey.

"Lacey, why don't you take school seriously?" asked Cadence. "I don't like school either, but you can't treat everything like a big joke."

"There is nothing funny about school. It's just boring. I want to learn. I just think we should be learning about more important things," said Lacey.

Cadence fiddled with her headphones as she plugged them in. "You can always learn more, but you still need to learn what they teach us. I would rather be in music class all day long. But I know the other subjects are important too."

Lacey logged into her class, put her name in the chat, turned her camera off, and started walking out the door. By the time Cadence turned around to get Lacey's response, she was gone.

Lacey was running out of things to read, so she went downstairs to see her dad. He was busy watching the news on his tablet. Lacey cleared her throat loudly enough for her father to hear her but not loud enough for her mom to hear her in the study.

"Ahem," said Lacey, clearing her throat for a second time. Her father must have been lost in his thoughts because he did not hear her. Lacey walked over, took her father's tablet out of his hand and sat on his lap.

“Really Lacey! Aren’t you supposed to be in class?” Robert said.

“I am in class. I just have a question.”

“Shoot, honey. I may just have an answer for you,” said Robert.

“Can we go to the store? I have finished reading all my books and have read through my graphic novels twice already,” Lacey said.

“First, what does that have to do with school? I thought you said you had a question about your class,” said Robert as he eyed Lacey.

“I never said that.”

“Always the sly one. Honey, we are in the middle of a pandemic. I don’t think braving the germs to buy new comics is a priority.”

“Absolutely not,” said Mama from the other room. “Go back upstairs and get in class.”

“Please daddy,” whispered Lacey.

“Lacey, why don’t you head up to the attic when class is over and try to find my old comics. I have boxes and boxes of them,” Robert said winking at his daughter.

Lacey’s mouth dropped. “Why are you just telling me this now? We have been stuck in this house for almost a year,” she whined.

“You never asked. Haven’t I always told you to ask when you want to know something.”

CHAPTER 3

A Visit to the Attic

As soon as Lacey finished her last class, she made her way to the attic. She knew she only had about twenty minutes before lunch, and she had one mission—to find Daddy’s boxes of comics. She had been in the attic several times, but it was always for a very specific reason. She had helped her dad take down the Christmas decorations and put them back up each year. She had helped her mom get the luggage a few times when the family went on vacation. However, Lacey had never taken the opportunity to explore the attic.

Lacey’s brother Emit had seen her head up to the attic and decided to follow her there.

“Whatcha lookin’ for Lace?” He asked.

“Can you believe dad has a whole collection of comics he never told me about?”

Emit made his way over to Lacey. “No way! Where are they?”

“Not sure. Can you help me look?” Lacey said as she started moving a box.

The two of them went to different corners of the attic and began to move box after box. The attic was full of dust and webs, and the large circular stained-glass window let in tons of sunlight. As Lacey moved the boxes, she watched the colors and dust particles dance in the light.

Lacey had just pushed an iridescent web to the side to move an unmarked box when she heard Emit say, “I think I found something.” Lacey did not respond. She was transfixed on a box that had been underneath the one she moved; it was labeled “Horatio Stewart.” Emit spoke a little louder and asked, “Did you hear me, Lacey? There are tons of comics in these boxes over here.”

Lacey quickly dismissed her brother and appeased him by saying, “Thanks, Emit.” She opened the box in front of her. She moved several items around, taking the time to examine each

one. She was halfway into the box when she saw a leather-bound journal and, next to it, a bracelet with a smooth amber stone in it. She put the bracelet on, opened the journal, and started flipping through the pages.

Dissatisfied with his sister's response, Emit walked over to Lacey. "I thought we were here to find comic books. What are you lookin' at?"

Lacey snapped out of her trance. "Huh? Sorry, Emit. It is just an old book."

"You and your books. Do you want me to bring some of these comics down?" asked Emit.

"Sure. Thank you. I could use the help." Lacey closed the box she was looking in and placed the journal next to the comics she was bringing downstairs.

* * * * *

Cadence was sitting at her desk looking through the day's assignments. She was squinting because she refused to put her glasses on. Emit sat down on the edge of Lacey's bed and began looking through one of the boxes of comics. Lacey reached into the box she brought down and grabbed the journal. She sat down in the window seat and started to thumb through the book. It was full of her grandfather's scribbings. There were cohesive statements and things that did not make any sense at all. There were drawings in the margin and times and random words. It was also full of short poems. Some of them appeared to be riddles. Lacey looked up and peered out of the window. She snapped out of her daze when she heard her brother's voice.

"Lacey, you know you shouldn't be so hard on Mama. She obviously has a lot going on," said Emit.

"A lot that is more important than us?" Lacey said after redirecting her gaze from the lemon tree in the backyard to Emit.

“That’s not what I said,” Emit responded.

“No, but that is what I meant at breakfast. I bet you Grampa Horatio was amazing. I think he did the same kind of work as Mama, but both Grandma Ezinne and Daddy always talk about how warm he was. I get that feeling from his journal too,” said Lacey.

Cadence jerked her head up from the computer. “Where did you even get that?” Cadence said, pointing at the old journal. “Does Mama know you have it?”

“The attic. And does it matter?”

“It only matters to me because when you get caught by Patience or Mama, the rest of us will pay for it somehow,” said Cadence. “You know I like to fly under the radar as much as possible. Call me ‘Invisagirl’”

Emit chuckled lightly. “We know Cadence.” Then, Emit got serious again and said, “Lace, you gotta ease up on Mama. Everyone is different. Mama had you and lost her dad in the same week. She was even forced to take over his business.”

As if a wave of sadness had washed over the room, Cadence said, “I wish we’d really known Grampa Horatio.”

“We all do,” said Lacey. “And you’re right Emit. Mama has been through a lot, but she’s still our mom. I may never know Grampa Horatio, but I want to know my mom.” With that, Lacey stood up and began walking to the door.

“Where are you going?” asked Emit.

“To talk to mom.”

“I wouldn’t interr...,” said Emit, but he was too late. Lacey was already headed downstairs.

* * * * *

Through the door, Lacey could hear her mother on the phone with someone. She knocked lightly on the door. It was just light enough for her to honestly say she knocked but too light to be heard. She could just make out her mother's last sentence.

"I understand, Astrid," said Cybil.

Just as Cybil ended the call, Lacey barged into the study.

"Lacuna Latish, you need to mind your manners," Cybil huffed.

Lacey could tell her mother was annoyed with her, but it seemed there was something else. It was almost as if her mother was frightened. "Mama, I just wanted to talk to you for a minute."

"Well, whatever it is will have to wait. I don't have time right now. I have a few more calls to make and lunch will not make itself," said Cybil.

CHAPTER 4

A Chime at an Unexpected Time

Lacey hadn't even gotten dressed for school after breakfast, but she knew coming downstairs for lunch in her pajamas was not an option. She had already made her mom mad twice: once at breakfast and once when she busted into the study. She threw on one of her graphic tees and her light blue jeans and piled her curly brown hair into a messy bun on top of her head. She went to reach for her sneakers but couldn't figure out whether she wanted to wear her Vans or her Converse.

On her way down to lunch, Patience stopped by Lacey and Cadence's room. She looked disapprovingly at Lacey's outfit and then shifted her attention to Cadence. With the tiniest of smiles she said, "Come on Cadence. You know some people are rarely on time."

"She'll make it downstairs on time. Right Lacey?" said Cadence encouragingly.

Lacey smiled at Cadence, but as soon as her sister had left the room, she grabbed her grandfather's journal from under her pillow and began flipping through it again. She was interrupted by Emit.

"Lacey, we aren't going anywhere. Just throw on your Crocs if you have to," said Emit.

Lacey was startled when she heard Emit's voice. She quickly tucked the journal away.

"Pandemic or no pandemic. I need to feel..."

"Feel what? It's just as ridiculous as lip gloss under a mask," he said sarcastically.

Cybil yelled upstairs to Lacey and Emit. Lunch is at 12:30pm sharp.

"Let's go, Lacey!" barked Emit. "We don't want to make Mama mad." Emit began walking out of the room.

“I’ll be right there. I promise,” said Lacey. She looked over at her pillow and promised herself she would actually get to read the journal after lunch.

Downstairs, Cybil was looking at the clock and the siblings were making silent bets as to whether Lacey would make it on time. Much to Patience’s disappointment, Lacey was right on time. The Westminster chime rang just as Lacey sat down at the table.

“Well, since you were the last one to the table, you can say grace,” said Cybil.

“I feel like I always say grace,” argued Lacey.

“You are always last.”

Robert looked back and forth between them and said, “Perhaps I should say grace before the ice in the lemonade melts”

Cybil threw her husband an icy stare, but Robert cleared his throat and began to speak.

“For food for the hungry, faith for the fearful, and friends for the lonely, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.”

* * * * *

Despite its rough start, the Lastishes had an uneventful lunch until Robert got a notification on his phone. He groaned in frustration.

“Honey, what’s wrong?”, she asked.

“You all have to see this,” he said while flipping his phone sideways and placing it on the kitchen table.

They all sat in disbelief as they saw the reporters outside of the Capitol Building. Protestors were trying to make their way in. The police were trying to hold them at bay. It was a truly chaotic scene that the family sat and watched without stirring until Cybil, in her normal

composed manner, announced, "Please turn it off and let us enjoy what is left of lunch," but Lacey could hear the tension in her mother's voice.

Everyone was quiet for the rest of lunch. Outside of the occasional "Pass the chips" or "Pass the lemonade," no one said a word. However, at 1:33pm, something strange happened. The grandfather clock, which had already chimed at 1:30pm, chimed again, and Cybil was visibly alarmed. She looked as if she did not know what to do, and her children had never seen her so startled.

After a moment, Cybil snapped out of it. "Kids, can you please help your father clear the table? I need to check the clock and take care of something in the study," she said hurriedly.

"Of course, Mama. I'll make sure they take care of it," said Patience.

"We got it honey," said Robert.

It was not like Cybil to excuse herself so abruptly. Lacey looked at Cadence, whose eyes were wide open, and Emit, who had his shoulders shrugged; she thought about following her mother but decided to heed her mother's instructions. Besides, Patience would have stopped her anyway.

On the way to the study, Cybil stopped at the clock. She pressed the amber stone and the top cabinet of the clock clicked open. In it was a piece of parchment. On it said, "The council will meet tonight at 11:00pm." She put the note in her pocket and headed to the study.

"Robert," she called.

Robert left the children in the kitchen and appeared in the study a minute later. "What's up honey?" he asked.

"I have to leave for London tonight. They've called an emergency meeting," she said.

Robert nodded his head knowingly and went back to the kitchen. He was worried, but he knew not to ask too many questions. No matter what he said or did not say, Cybil would be leaving that night at 11:00pm on the dot.

CHAPTER 5

The Council and Chaos

When Cybil stepped out of the clock, all she could hear was loud arguing. Councilman Amandi, from Nigeria, was beside himself and Astrid, who was normally unflappable, was agitated. Cybil headed straight to her assigned seat at the six o'clock position at the table and Astrid, noting the time, walked to her position at the twelve o'clock mark and banged her gavel. The members continued talking. She banged it again.

"Order," Astrid said in a raised voice. "I said order. We have much to discuss, and apparently you all have decided to start the conversation without the rest of us."

The members settled down. Astrid, after a measured pause, said, "I am sure you all are aware of the events at the United States Capitol Building today." There were grumblings among the members, but no one interrupted her. "Chaos is indeed at work. This is precisely what Concordia warned us about. However, we must keep our wits about us and tread lightly. I know that between the racial unrest, political division, and the pandemic, things feel out of control."

Councilman Amandi, who had been trying desperately to contain himself, could no longer hold his tongue. "Feel out of control. That is laughable. With all due respect, we have watched all of this happening around the world, and we have stood by and tried to band-aid these situations. We have 'tread lightly' and made absolutely no progress. We must do more. Chaos is not treading lightly."

"I 100% agree with Amandi on this. We cannot sit around and wait for the right time to fix this. The right time is now. Chaos will be expecting us to wait as we always do," said Councilman Alvarez.

“I understand your frustration, but we are bound by a code that says we are not to change the timeline too drastically—,” started Astrid.

“Please stop. Now is no time for your conformity. Concordia shares information about Chaos’ plans so that we may act, not sit still,” said Amandi. Several of the council members, including Alvarez and Samay were nodding and cheering in agreement.

Astrid struck the sound block with the gavel and yelled “Order!” After the members settled a bit, she said, “Please conduct yourselves in a manner befitting this council. Yes. Things are out of control. However, hasty action will not necessarily render the desired results. We lost one of our own trying to...”

“Horatio was a hero. He understood the need to try harder and take risks. Inaction will get us nowhere,” insisted Amandi.

Cybil cleared her throat and said, “If I may say something. We are doing something. My father always warned me about the dangers of overstepping boundaries. Perhaps we just need to weigh our options again.”

Amandi settled his anger, looked at Cybil sympathetically, and said, “Twelve years ago, your father risked his life trying to affect real change. None of us should have let him go it alone. We do your father’s memory a disservice by continuing to remain passive.”

Cybil held back tears as Amandi continued. “It is time to act and if the council wishes to stand by and do nothing, I may have to remove myself from the council and find another way.”

With these words, the chamber erupted in noise that was a mixture of applause and chatter. Astrid struck the gavel, calling for order. “I fear emotions are too high to decide anything right now. Let us do as Cybil suggested and weigh our options. Nothing is off the table. We will meet tomorrow night. Come prepared to share your ideas.” With that, she adjourned the meeting.

Cybil, still upset about the mention of her father's disappearance, walked to the clock. When the door opened, the bright light shone on the single tear she was hurrying to wipe from her cheek. She entered the clock to head home.

CHAPTER 6

A Secret Revealed

The rules were clear in the Latish house. Lights out meant lights out, and Lacey knew the rules well. However, on that night, she could not sleep. She could not stop thinking about what she saw on the news earlier. And, as was her normal habit, she kept checking her phone for updates on the situation long after the rest of her siblings had seemed to lose interest. She needed to settle down, so she decided to break the rules and head downstairs to the kitchen to make herself a cup of chamomile tea.

But when Lacey was halfway down the stairs, she stopped in her tracks. She saw a bright light pouring from the clock. Then, the door opened, and Cybil stepped out of the clock. Lacey gasped. She then quickly, and as quietly as possible, tiptoed up the stairs and back into her room. Cadence stirred slightly as Lacey's mattress creaked, but she did not wake.

Downstairs Cybil thought she heard something. She closed the door of the clock to ensure no one could see the light. She then peered into the kitchen before walking toward the stairs. "Hello, is anyone there?" she said in a quiet voice. She received no response. There was no sign of movement upstairs and no light except for the one in the hall, which the family left on every night. Cybil dismissed the noise and headed to bed.

* * * * *

The next morning before breakfast, Lacey knocked on Emit's door. He opened it and the scent of boy hit her dead in the nose. "Emit, when is the last time you did your laundry?" said Lacey while holding her nose.

"I am sorry. Did you need something other than to offer your insults?" said Emit.

Lacey smirked but did not let go of her nose. “I wanted to tell you about what I saw last night.”

“Great, but I will not talk to you unless you let go of your nose,” said Emit.

Lacey dropped her hands. “Fine,” she said. Then she blurted out, “I saw Mama come out of the clock.”

“What?”

“I said I saw Mama come out of the clock. It’s magical.”

“I heard what you said, but what do you mean?”, asked Emit.

“I couldn’t sleep last night, so I went downstairs to get some tea.”

“Why are you always breaking the rules?”

Lacey rolled her eyes and said, “Hello-o-o-o-o. You’re missing the point. I saw a bright light coming from the clock, and Mama walked out of it.”

“Not possible. You had to be dreaming. And if this really happened, what did Mama say?”

“First of all, it did happen. I was not dreaming. Second of all, are you crazy? You think I stuck around to talk to her? She would’ve killed me. I was supposed to be in bed.”

Emit imitated Lacey’s eye roll and said, “Hello-o-o-o-o. You are missing the point. Don’t you think it is worth getting into trouble to solve a mystery like this? I am sure there was a perfectly good explanation. Did you at least check the clock?”

Just then, Cybil called from downstairs. “Lacey. Emit. Breakfast is at 8am as always. Are you planning to join us?”

“If you make me late with your crazy stories...”

“Let’s go Emit!”

When they got downstairs, everyone was seated at the table. Patience was looking at Emit and Lacey disapprovingly. Robert and Cadence were already in prayer position and ready to eat. Cybil who raised her eyebrow slightly, locked eyes with Lacey and said, “Why don’t you say grace.”

* * * * *

After breakfast, Cybil asked Robert to come into the study. “Robert, did you hear anything last night?”

“What do you mean? What time?”

“It was right when I got home. I heard a noise, but there was no one around. I was just wondering if you heard anything. I have a sneaking suspicion I know who it was.”

Robert raised an eyebrow and jokingly said, “Let me guess. Patience?”

“You are so silly, Robert. I love how you know just how to make me laugh. You and I both know we only have one little troublemaker in the house. Lacey may have seen something. Do you think perhaps it is time to tell the children?”

“Honey, with the pandemic and all of the other craziness going on in the world, adding a bombshell like this might be too much.”

“You may be right,” said Cybil.

“Let’s wait just a bit longer. When the time is right, we can just tell them that their mother is one of the most powerful people on the planet and see what happens,” Robert said with a loving grin.

“Tonight’s meeting will be difficult. I really think things might just boil over.”

Playing with a loose curl of Cybil’s hair, Robert lifted her chin with his other hand and said, “Everything will be fine.”

Just down the hall, while everyone else was busy, Lacey took the opportunity to take a closer look at the clock. She walked around it and knocked on its side. She opened the front door of the lower cabinet but saw nothing. She noticed some witness marks where people had repaired the clock over the years but nothing else stood out. Most people would not have known what witness marks were, but Lacey had read about them in an old magazine she found about the art of making clocks and watches—horology.

She got down on her knees and felt underneath the clock to see if anything would happen, but nothing did. She stood on the table next to the clock and tried to see if there was anything on the top of the clock, but there was nothing there either. She started to think Emit was right. Maybe she had just been dreaming.

She turned to walk upstairs and almost bumped into Patience.

“What were you doing, Lacey? Were you looking for something?”

“No. I just have never taken the time to really look at this clock. It is so beautiful. Isn’t it Patience? I mean look at the craftsmanship,” Lacey said as she pretended to marvel at the clock and do her best model in a showroom impression.

“Whatever, Lacey. You’re up to something, but I am not sure what,” said Patience.

“When you figure it out, let me know,” said Lacey as she walked away. However, Lacey only thought about Patience for a millisecond more. The run-in with her sister was just what she needed to refocus her. She had not dreamt the whole thing. She knew what she had seen, and she had to figure out what was going on with the clock. She decided she would do a little snooping later.

That night, after everyone was in bed, Lacey grabbed her phone, one of the face masks in her vast COVID collection to protect her from dust, and her grandfather’s journal and headed

downstairs. It was 10:30pm. She did not know if her mother would go anywhere near the clock that night, but she thought she would take a chance. She just had a feeling. She knew if she was going to catch her mother, she would have to be out of sight. She had the perfect hiding place in mind. There was a small storage space underneath the stairs that would give her a direct line of sight to the clock. It had been one of her favorite hiding places when she was little. Because of the lighting, a person would have to be looking for someone to see them there. Lacey was sure it would be dusty under the stairs, but, if she was lucky, there would only be dust and no icky bugs.

She settled into the space, turned the flashlight on her phone on, and cracked her grandfather's journal open. Most of the things in the journal were just her grandfather's chicken scratch. She could barely make out some of the fantastical stories he had written in the journal. There was one crazy story about an amber stone that glowed and transported people to other places. It was nonsense to Lacey. He also had several quotes and poems in the journal. Lacey did not know how to interpret most of them. They were like pieces of a puzzle for which she had no key to unlock or decipher. She struggled to understand one poem that read:

Beyond the doorway of the dangling doubloons

Past the entrance of the painted peacock

There lies the gateway to the Great In-Between

Where there is never the need for a clock

Lacey thought her grandfather was just a scribbler. In addition to the poems, there was a drawing of a clock in the margin. The front cabinet of the clock was open, and Lacey saw what appeared to be doors inside the clock. As she flipped through more of the journal, she noticed a page with a piece torn off. It was a drawing of a clock and some letters, but some of them were missing. Lacey could only read the first seven letters, which read "P-U-S-H-A-M-B." She tried

pronouncing it in her head over and over again. She even reversed the letters, hoping they would make sense. But the missing letters must have been important because she could not figure out what the word could possibly mean. Frustrated, Lacey just continued to flip through the journal.

Lacey started to doze off a few minutes before 11pm. However, at 10:58pm, she heard someone coming down the stairs. The footsteps were too heavy to be any of Lacey's siblings but not nearly heavy enough to be her father. It had to be Lacey's mother. She quickly shut off her light and set the journal down beside her. When the person got to the end of the stairs, they paused for a moment. Lacey thought for sure they stopped because of her. She stopped breathing to make sure they could not hear her. When the person came around the corner, it was exactly who Lacey expected—her mother. Cybil had on an amber bracelet—one Lacey had not seen on her mother before, but it was just like the one she found in the attic and had on her wrist. As her mother moved closer to the clock, the amber stone in her mother's bracelet and the amber stone on the clock's mood dial both started to glow. Cybil stood in front of the clock, blocking Lacey's view. She could not see her mother press the amber stone on the moon dial, but she heard the clock's bottom cabinet pop open. The light that poured out of the clock was almost blinding at first, but it was so beautiful. There were rays of purple, blue, white, and gold streaming out of the clock. It was a wave of floating glitter. Lacey thought she saw doors beyond the light like the ones in Grampa's drawing, but her view was still blocked by her mother's frame. She couldn't be sure. And, as quickly as it had opened, the door closed. Her mother was gone.

CHAPTER 7

The Split

When Cybil walked through the clock into the council's inner chamber, it was as if she had never gone home the night before. She saw several other members arrive out of the clocks behind their respective positions. The shocked and confused looks on their faces were exactly how Cybil felt. But it wasn't what she saw that caused her alarm, it was what she heard. Several of the members were in the middle of a shouting match. Councilman Amandi was standing with four other members behind him—council members Alvarez, Relagio, Deng, and Samay. They all stood in solidarity with Councilman Amandi as he glared at Astrid. Cybil walked toward Astrid to see what was going on. She noticed Councilwoman Ji Woo from Korea standing midway between Amandi and Astrid, who were about 10 feet apart. Cybil also noted that Astrid was flanked by the council members Klocken, Bundt, Gregory, and Koro. Just as she noted the fact that the sides were equal, she heard Amandi clear his throat and speak to Councilwoman Ji Woo directly.

“Ji Woo, we need you to join us. If we have both you and Cybil on our side, Concordia will surely grant us control of the council,” Amandi said in a forceful yet pleading voice.

“What is going on here?” said Cybil.

“Amandi is trying to start his own council,” said Councilman Koro of Japan. “He is convinced we are not doing enough to protect the timeline. He is being completely unreasonable. He has no honor.”

“Now, I don't know about no honor, but I agree he is being unreasonable. We should definitely think on this more,” said Councilman Bunda.

“No honor? Unreasonable?” Amandi said angrily with his fists balled up at his sides. “You would ask that I sit back and watch Chaos sow his madness in the world? Is that what you call honor?”

Astrid began to walk toward Amandi, but his look let her know she should keep her distance. Amandi would not be soothed with a pat on the shoulder today. “Amandi, the sole purpose of tonight’s meeting was to come together to discuss the situation and hear each other’s plans. Why are you veering from the plan?” Astrid implored.

Cybil had never made it all the way to Astrid, so she stood beside Councilwoman Ji Woo and waited for a response.

Amandi shook his head in resignation and said, “If you must ask that question, then you will never understand. It is time we go our separate ways. I will seek to get a blessing from Concordia and start my own council—the Council of Kairos.” With that, Amandi turned his attention to Ji Woo and Cybil and said, “Are you with us?”

Ji Woo looked nervously between her fellow council members on both sides. She put her head down and shook it as she began a shameful walk toward Amandi. However, when she raised her head, there was a look of resolve in her eyes. Cybil was now standing in the middle of both groups. She looked back and forth between them. She thought of everything going on in the world. There was a part of her that agreed with Amandi, more had to be done to suppress Chaos. But Cybil knew that the Council of Chronos had been in existence for centuries. She could not bring herself to depart from the way of the council. So, with one final glance, she looked at Amandi sornily and walked toward Astrid. The council was now split right down the middle. Little did they all know that this one act would give Chaos a unique opportunity.

With Cybil's rejection, Amandi and the council members with him turned their backs on the others and headed toward the clock behind Amandi's chair. They walked through without looking back.

Cybil was the first to speak. "What does this mean, Astrid? What will happen now?"

However, it was not Astrid who responded. It was only a voice—one Cybil had never heard before. It was the voice of Concordia herself, and the remaining members, including Astrid, were all speechless. Her voice sounded like music, like a well-organized symphony. But as beautiful as her voice sounded, her words were ominous. She said, "Chaos has infiltrated the council. You all must reunite before it is too late. I will not strip any of you of your powers for I know, though in different ways, you will use them for the good of all. But if Chaos succeeds in keeping you divided, there may be no way to truly balance time again." With the tinkling of chimes, Concordia's voice went silent.

Astrid was the first to speak. "We must fix this. We must find a way to work together," she said. "Tessa, get a message to Amandi. Tell him I need to speak with him immediately. This meeting is adjourned. We will reconvene when I get Amandi and the others to agree to a meeting."

There was no further discussion and each of the members returned home through their clocks, including Cybil. But someone had other plans for Cybil, and on this trip through the clock, she was forced to take a detour.

Cybil never made it home.

CHAPTER 8

A Motherless Home

When Lacey awoke, it was already two o'clock in the morning. She saw no sign of anything. She walked over to the clock to get a closer look. As she stood in front of it, the amber stone on her bracelet began to glow. The moon dial on the clock glowed as well. Frightened, Lacey ran upstairs and hopped into her bed.

* * * * *

After adjourning the meeting, Astrid left the inner chamber of the council and headed to the archives. There she met the council's historian, Tessa. Astrid was always calm and collected, but she knew Cybil had not made it home. She was bordering on frantic. Concordia required that a member of the Stewart family always serve on the council. They needed to find Cybil, but they would need members of the Stewart family to help. Astrid knew exactly what she needed to do, but placing this much responsibility on an 11-year old was not something she wanted to do.

"We have to find a way to get word to Lacey," said Astrid.

"Astrid, we cannot simply place a call to her and let her know what she has to do. It breaks every rule we have. We can't be sure we will get her."

"There has to be a way. What if we use the clock?"

"She has no idea what the glowing amber stones mean. We have to find a better way."

Astrid walked over to the clock in the archives and then over to the desk. "We have to use the clock. If we cannot get her here, I fear her mother will be lost forever."

"What if we just send her a note?", asked Tessa.

"How on Earth will she find the note?"

“She will find it,” said Tessa. “She has been checking the clock every day. I have been keeping an eye on her. There is only one place she has not looked. We can place it there.”

“But, if it does not work, we may never be able to restore balance again. Literally, the fate of the world as we know it rests in the hands of a little girl.”

“A little Stewart girl. Lacey is not unlike her grandfather and her mother. She will find her way to us,” said Tessa. She walked over to the desk and grabbed a piece of note paper and a pen. Tessa jotted down a quick note to Lacey and unlatched the little compartment by the moon dial. She placed the note inside and looked at Astrid before closing the compartment door and fastening the latch.

* * * * *

Lacey was not the last person to the breakfast table the next morning. Only Robert was seated at the table. Lacey had not been able to sleep, so she stayed awake reading Grampa Horatio’s journal and thinking about what questions she would ask and how she would ask them. Patience and Cadence came to the table together. Two minutes before the Westminster chimes rang out, Emit had a seat at the table as well. However, Cybil was nowhere in sight.

“Where’s Mama?” Lacey asked.

Her father’s eyes shifted from side to side before he said, “She’ll be home soon.” He offered no additional explanation, and Cybil’s seat remained empty as the Latishes finished their breakfast.

Patience immediately chimed in and said, “Well, until Mama gets home, I will make sure everything gets done. Dad, you can start your workday. We’ll take care of everything down here.”

“It’s really not necessary, but I do appreciate it.”

Lacey looked at her father suspiciously. She knew something was wrong. She watched as her father got up and headed to her mother's study. She started to follow him, but Patience started barking orders at them. "Emit, clear the table. Cadence, load the dishwasher."

Lacey thought she was off the hook, so as Emit and Cadence started their assignments, she started to head to the study.

"Where do you think you're going? You have to wipe down the table," said Patience.

Lacey clenched her jaw and grabbed the sponge and spray bottle to wipe down the table.

* * * * *

Robert shut the door to the study and sat down at Cybil's desk. He ran his finger across the silver-framed picture of the family in the right-hand corner of the desk. He took a few deep breaths and steadied himself before making a call he really didn't want to make. After a few seconds, he placed a video call to his mother-in-law Ezinne. She picked up right away.

"Ezinne, Cybil did not come home last night. Have you heard anything from the council?"

"This cannot happen to me again, Robert. I cannot lose her too," she said in her thick Nigerian accent that was heavy with sadness.

Robert tried to think of words that would comfort her, but none came. "We just have to wait to hear from the council. There is nothing else we can do." He watched as Ezinne's eyes filled with tears, and he could not stop the same from happening to him. "I promise I will call as soon as I hear anything."

"Thank you, dear Robert. I will do the same."

Robert ended the call and stayed in the study just long enough to compose himself before heading up to his bedroom.

* * * * *

Lacey waited until everyone was upstairs before heading over to the clock.

“C’mon you stupid clock. Where is my mother? I have literally checked every inch of you.”

Her bracelet was glowing just as it had done before. When she looked closely at the amber stone on the clock, she noticed a small latch by the moon dial. She pulled on it and a small compartment popped open. When she opened it, she saw a folded piece of paper inside. Lacey noticed a symbol on the stationary. It was a crest with a clock and the word ‘*Chronos*’ on it. Lacey read the note.

Enter the clock at 11pm. – Tessa

“How am I supposed to go into the clock? Some extra instructions would have been nice,” Lacey mumbled under her breath. “I don’t know a Tessa, but I have definitely seen this symbol before. It was in the box, and it’s in Grampa Horatio’s journal.” With that revelation, Lacey headed straight for the attic.

Everyone’s doors were open upstairs, so Lacey went back through the kitchen and took the back staircase to get to the attic. Thankfully she had the journal with her. It wasn’t that it was a secret. She just didn’t think her brother and sisters would believe her. She also didn’t want to be asked a boatload of questions. She climbed the stairs and went straight to the box in which she had found the journal.

She pushed papers from one side to the other. “I know I saw that stupid symbol in here somewhere. Yes. Here it is.”

Lacey pulled out several folders. Each one had the symbol on it, but none of the items in the first few folders she looked through made any sense at all. She continued to work through each folder.

“What the heck is the Council of Chronos? What did Grampa Horatio have to do with them? What does Mama have to do with them?”

Lacey stopped when she got to a series of pictures. On the back of one of the pictures, it read *Council of Chronos 1975*. In the picture, Grampa Horatio was seated with eleven other people dressed in navy blue robes with the clock crest embroidered in gold on the left breast.

In a second picture, Lacey saw some really famous faces: her mom, Grandma Ezinne, and Grampa Horatio. In the picture, the three were standing outside of large wooden doors. A stone carving above the doors read “Council of Chronos.”

“What is this ‘Council of Chronos’?”

Lacey opened her grandfather’s journal and searched for where she had seen the symbol. There were quotes scribbled everywhere. She read through some of the cryptic notes jotted down in the margin. Then, on the very back page of the journal, she saw the symbol. Underneath it, she saw a faded word. She could not quite make it out. The lettering was light, and the attic was dark. Lacey pulled out her phone and activated the flashlight. The letters spelled out the word “PUSHAMBER.”

“That doesn’t make any sense at all. Maybe it is someone’s name.” When she said it out loud, she remembered the piece of ripped paper in the journal she had found while under the steps. Unlike this one, the other word had been incomplete. Lacey started trying to say the word out loud until it made sense. She thought it might be a name.

“P. U. Shamber”

“Pus Hamber”

“Pusham Ber”

“Push Amber”

Lacey immediately stopped and ran down the back staircase. She was careful to be as quiet as possible. She still didn't need anyone asking her a bunch of questions. When she got to the clock, she put her arm close to the clock. The amber stone on her bracelet glowed brilliantly as did the one on the moon dial.

“I know what I have to do now.”

CHAPTER 9

The Journey Begins

While Cadence was in the bathroom brushing her teeth and getting ready for bed, Lacey was packing a small sack. She included a flashlight, the pictures from the attic, her cell phone, and her grandfather's journal. When Cadence came out of the bathroom, Lacey was lying in bed with the covers nestled around her neck. She waited for Cadence to go to sleep before heading downstairs.

At 11:00pm, Lacey stepped up to the clock and watched as the stones lit up.

"Alright, Lacey. It is time to go," she said.

She looked around the room one last time and then pushed the amber stone on the moon dial. She heard a click and quickly glanced at the stairs to make sure no one else heard it. With hesitancy, she opened the cabinet door. The glowing, prismatic light was so bright she had to shield her eyes as she stepped into the clock and shut the door behind her.

Once inside the clock, Lacey saw swirling lights all around her and corridor full of doors. The amber light continued to get brighter as she walked down the hall. As she passed each door, she could hear something different. She heard gunfire behind one door and then the sounds of a siren. She heard laughter behind another door. She also heard crying and screaming behind a couple of the other doors. She clutched her backpack tighter for some comfort.

When she arrived at the fifth door on her left, the amber stone on her bracelet started to pulsate. She saw a familiar symbol on the door, but instead of it being on a crest, it was engraved into what looked like the cover of a book. When she reached for the doorknob, all of the other doors in the corridor disappeared. Lacey let go of the knob and the doors reappeared. The amber

stone began to pulsate even more insistently. So, Lacey placed her hand on the knob again and, after taking a deep breath, she opened the door.

When she stepped through the door, she was surrounded by old books and stacks and stacks of papers with dust all over them. The walls around her were stone. The space was dimly lit except for the pendant lights hanging above each section of the bookshelves and the lamp on the solitary desk. Lacey spun around when she heard a voice.

“Hello, Lacey. I knew you would get our message,” said Tessa.

“Tessa?”

“The one and only. Well, the one and only here at this very moment.”

Lacey began to spew questions at Tessa. “Who are you? Where am I? Where is my mother?”

“Lacey, slow down with the questions. I promise I will answer every question you have and more. First, it is a great pleasure to meet you. You are in the archives of the Council of Chronos.”

Lacey looked around impatiently and shrugged. “And where exactly is that?”

“Why London, of course,” Tessa responded.

“As in London, England? But I was just in Phoenix. How did I get here?”

“Through the clock. Concordia gives all guardians of time, and those in their direct bloodline, the ability to travel through space and time.”

“My bloodline?”

“Yes, Lacey. The Stewart bloodline was the first to serve on the council and the only one to always have had a member of the family on it. Your grandfather was the head of the council

until his disappearance. Your mother took his place until her disappearance. And now, Lacey, there is you.”

Lacey tried to process everything Tessa said. It was too much. She had so many questions.

“Where is my mother? Is she here? What happened to my grandfather? Why me?” There were still so many questions to ask, but Lacey needed the answers to these.

“Again with the questions. Your mother always talked about how inquisitive you are,” said Tessa.

“My mother talked about me?”

“Well of course she did and with great joy. Now come with me. I have book to share with you. I think it will help to answer several of your questions.”

Tessa walked Lacey over to a small circular table with a single book on it. The book had the clock crest on it, but underneath it read “The Stewarts.”

“This is your family’s book. Every member to have served on the council is recorded in it.”

Lacey ran her hand over the crest and her family name. “Can I look through it?”

Tessa placed her hand on Lacey’s shoulder and said, “Of course you can. It is yours. But just know that this is no ordinary book, Lacey. I will leave you to it.”

“You’re leaving me alone.”

Tessa turned around and smiled at Lacey. “Trust me dear. There is no place safer in the world than right here. I will be within an earshot. I think you need some time to digest what is in that book. Just call for me when you are ready. I will answer any and all of your questions.”

As Tessa started to walk out of the room, Lacey ran her hand over the cover of the book again. She was hesitant to open it, and she jumped slightly when she heard Tessa say, “But Lacey, although I am not rushing you, remember that time is ticking.”

Lacey gulped loudly as she sat alone at the desk. When she tried to open the book, it wouldn't open. She lifted the heavy book from the table to see if she could figure out how to open it.

“Why didn't she tell me how to open it?”

Just then, Lacey saw a glint of light coming from the golden gilded pages of the book. As she ran her finger over the place where she saw the light, something sharp sliced her finger. “Ouch!” But as the bead of blood that had formed on her finger touched the page, the book began to open to the first page. As it did, Lacey saw that what was on the page was also projected on the wall in front of her.

“On the fifth day of June in the year of the Lord 1215, after the signing of the Magna Carta, the Council of Chronos was formed and empowered by Concordia with the ability to travel through time and space, making changes as necessary to ensure balance in the world.”

Thinking of the urgency of Tessa's words, Lacey skipped forward several pages and a picture of an older handsome man in a suit of armor. “As the first chair of the newly formed council, Concordia appointed Sir Alfric Horatio Stewart,” Lacey read aloud.

She examined the picture more closely and noticed that it was an actual picture and not a drawing like she had typically seen for medieval times. “How is this even possible? Who is this Concordia?”

Tessa poked her head in. “Keep reading dear. But with over 800 years of history, you may want to fast forward a bit.” Tessa checked the clock before retreating.

As Lacey flipped through the pages, picture after picture appeared on the wall before her. Another man in a suit of armor appeared in front of her. “Sir William Marshall Stewart, 1625-1647.” The man looked older than 22 years old, so Lacey read under the dates and figured out that the dates represented the years he had served on the council. Next, she saw a young woman with long light brown hair and green eyes dressed in a colonial style gown. “Charlotte Evermore Smith nee Stewart, 1776-1791.” A man with a blue waistcoat with tails and a mischievous grin appeared. “Allister Evan Stewart, 1791-1825.”

Lacey did not recognize any of these names, yet they all felt familiar to her. She flipped forward several more pages and saw a name she recognized. “Andrew Landon Stewart, 1912-1935. I think this is my great-great-grandfather. I’ve never seen him before.” Then she saw a beautiful young woman appear. “Amelia Poppy Thomas nee Stewart, 1935-1952. This is my great-grandmother.” She could feel herself getting a little excited because, if she was right, the next picture should have been her grandfather.

Lacey flipped the page and saw the same picture that sat on her mantle at home. “Horatio Oliver Stewart, 1974-2009. Grampa Horatio. Oh, how I wish I could’ve met you.” She sat looking at the picture for several minutes. She began to turn the page slowly because she knew what she would find next. She was surprised when two pictures appeared on the wall before her. One was of her beautiful mother, and the other was the most familiar face she knew—her own.

“Cybil Ava Latish nee Stewart, 2009-2021. Lacuna Poppy Stewart, 2021-present. Tessa!”

“I know all of this is overwhelming.”

“I don’t even know where to start. I don’t really know what any of this means. I could literally ask you a thousand questions right now, but I just, I just want to know where my mom is. Where is she Tessa?”

Tessa walked over and placed her hand her hands on Lacey's shoulders. She glanced at the nearby clock—the same one Lacey entered through—before looking Lacey directly in the eyes.

“This will be hard for you to understand. We know where Cybil, I mean your mother, is.”

“Well, then what are you waiting for? Go get her.”

“I am afraid it is not quite so simple. Concordia has informed is that Chaos has captured your mother, which means...”

Lacey cut Tessa off before she could complete her sentence. “Wait! What? Who is Chaos? You haven't even mentioned that name before.”

Tessa looks at the clock. “Lacey, I know I said I would answer all of your questions, and that certainly is a big one. However, I fear we are running out of time. The short version is that when your mother was headed home through the clock, she was kidnapped and taken to Chaos's lair.”

“I don't understand. You still haven't explained who Chaos is. And what does he want with my mother?”

Tessa looked nervously at the clock and bit her thumbnail. She straightened her vest. She knew she did not have a lot of time, but Lacey needed to know at least the beginning of the story. Tessa knew Lacey would never be able to complete the task she was about to give her without at least a basic understanding.

“Alright, I am going to start from the beginning or as close to the beginning as we have time for. It will help if I show you,” Tessa said before walking over to a lone bookshelf on the back wall. She removed a large leather-bound book.

Lacey could hear Tessa's low heels clicking against the cobblestone floor as she walked back to the desk. She watched as Tessa sat the book down in front of her. The book was engraved. There was a tree above the ground and the mirror image of it below the ground where the roots would be. Tessa opened the book, but the page was blank. As Tessa began to speak, pictures and words appeared on the wall in front of Lacey, just as they had when she read her family's history.

“Since the beginning of time, Chaos and Concordia have been on opposite sides of the spectrum of time. They are beings, some even refer to them as gods. Chaos rules over disorder; he creates mischief and discord throughout the universe. But, without him, nothing new would be created.”

Tessa flipped the page and, as she spoke, more pictures appear. “Concordia is Chaos's opposite. She rules over order and harmony. The two must coexist. Neither can be allowed to control the other, but a balance must be kept between the two. Chaos must be managed but not destroyed. Humans cannot exist in the face of unbridled Chaos.”

Tessa turned to face Lacey. “Most of the time, Chaos works through others. However, there have been moments when Chaos steps directly into the human world. It is during those times that Concordia calls the Council of Chronos to action. Now is one of those times.”

Lacey shook her head in disbelief. “This still doesn't explain why Chaos would take my mom.”

“Because of all of the other discord Chaos has been sowing in the world—the pandemic, the racial unrest, the political division—for the first time in its over 800-year history, there is a split in the council. Your mother was taken to create even more imbalance. Without her, the

council is unstable. The Stewart line has always been the voice of reason. The divide cannot be mended without a Stewart.”

Tessa squeezed Lacey’s shoulders and looked at the clock. It was almost midnight.

“Lacey, I could answer every questions you have, but we have run out of time. You are the only one who can save your mother. She has appointed you as her successor. No one thought it would be this soon, but it has to be you.”

“That’s impossible! Why can’t the other council members do it?”

“They are a fractured group at this point. If you are successful in rescuing your mother, you can restore balance to the council, to time, and to the world.”

“How can you expect me to do this alone? I’m just a kid.”

Tessa took Lacey’s arm and helped her out of the chair. She led her to the clock. The amber bracelet on Lacey’s wrist started to glow, and Lacey cupped her hand over it.

“You are capable of so much more than you know. It is why your mother chose you. But, on this journey, you will not be alone, Lacey. You must take your brother and sisters with you. There will be a task for each one of you to complete. And before you ask, you have each been gifted with the ability to complete these tasks.”

“So, I have to convince my siblings to come on a journey to save our mother even though they don’t know about any of this? Are you serious? They’ll think I’m nuts. Can we at least take my dad?”

Tessa pressed the amber stone on the moon dial and opened the bottom cabinet of the clock. She lightly nudged Lacey to go toward the opening. Lacey shielded her eyes against the bright light from the clock.

“No, Lacey. Your dad cannot come with you. Only those with Stewart blood can enter the clock. And one more thing, in order for you to have any chance of saving your mother, you and your siblings will have to first travel into the Great-in-Between to find your grandfather first.”

Lacey turned around to face Tessa with a wide-open mouth and even wider eyes.

“Grampa Horatio is alive?”

Tessa smiled but quickly turned Lacey back around to face the clock. The Westminster chimes of Big Ben and every other clock started to ring out. Lacey could barely hear Tessa as she said, “Be here tomorrow night at 11pm with your siblings. Bring your grandfather’s journal. I will give you everything else you need.”

Lacey walked into the clock and heard the latch click behind her.

CHAPTER 10

Dolos “The Trickster”

When Tessa closed the clock’s cabinet, she walked back into her personal chambers, which was just outside of the archives. As she closed her door, she jumped at the sound of a strange voice. When she turned around, she saw Dolos lounging on her chaise.

“What are you doing here? How did you even get in here?”

“Calm down, darling Tessa. I did not come to hurt you. But I do need something from you.”

“What could you possibly think I would help you with?”

“Now, now. Notice I did not say I needed to ask you for your help. I didn’t assume you would help me willingly.” Dolos raised his pocket watch and pressed the crown located just under where the chain attached to the bow. Tessa froze in place. She could not move, nor could she speak.

Dolos was Chaos’s right-hand man. He had been human at one time, but his years of trickery and evildoing had hardened his heart. He was no more human than the statues that stood around the chambers. Unlike Chaos, Dolos’s actions were solely for his own benefit.

“Oh, Tessa. I am so sorry I had to do that to you. However, I need to borrow your identity for just a little but while I get rid of the last of the Stewart line. Now, where can I put you.”

At the foot of Tessa’s bed, there was a huge blanket chest. Dolos removed a few of the blankets and placed them in the closet a few steps away. He walked back over to Tessa, picked her up, and placed her into the chest.

“Here is where you will stay, suspended in time, until I release you. Oh sweet, gullible Tessa, it will not be easy duplicating your goodness. But alas, I shall have to do my best.”

Dolos placed a blanket he had set aside on top of the chest and walked over to the mirror. As he moved closer to the mirror, his features changed. His pitch-black ponytail transformed to a golden blond loose bun on the crown of his head. He shrunk at least six inches. His leather outfit changed as well. He now had on brown button-up vest and women's trousers. Glasses now framed his beautiful ice blue eyes. He was Tessa. He looked at himself in the mirror admiringly.

“My plan is working perfectly. We already have Horatio and Cybil. If I can trap Lacey and her siblings in the Great-in-Between, I will have removed every living Stewart from the equation. Chaos will be so pleased with me. He will be able to do as he pleases with no interference and will grant me the favor I desire. And, if I can get my hand son Horatio's journal, I will be able to trap them all in time forever.”

Dolos walked over to the blanket chest and sat on it. He began talking to Tessa.

“Don't worry, Tessa. In less than 24 hours, you and this wretched council you serve will be obsolete. I will let you out in time to see Chaos run wild, and I will be right by his side.”

Dolos started laughing maniacally as if he could not help himself. He stood up and looked himself over again.

“I am so good. They will never know. Soon I will have everything I have always wanted.”

CHAPTER 11

Lacey Returns Home

Lacey exited the clock quietly. She was careful to close the cabinet door gently and listen for the light click to ensure it was closed. She ran her hand over the seam. When she turned around, she had to hold in a scream.

“What’re you doing up, Cadence?”

“I tossed and turned most of the night. When I woke up the last time, I noticed you weren’t in bed, so here I am, checking on you.”

“And what did you see?”

“You are such a weirdo. What do you mean what did I see? I saw you messing with the clock.”

“Yep, you found me. Now, can we head back to bed? I couldn’t sleep either. I’m beat. I just think my brain was full of too many thoughts and emotions. Or maybe it was that last episode of that show we love that messed me up. Or maybe it was dad’s cooking.”

“What’s going on, Lacey? You are rambling for a reason. Something’s up.”

“Nope. Nothing to see here sister girl.” Lacey fakes a yawn. “I am just so tired. Can we talk more in the morning?”

“Something doesn’t feel right with Dad’s story about Mama. She has never not come home, and she didn’t even call. Do you know something you aren’t telling me?”

“Ugh! You’re right. Something isn’t right. You just used a double negative. Don’t let Patience hear that.”

“Lacey.”

“I know... something does feel off, but let’s sleep on it and work it out tomorrow. Deal?”

“I guess so.”

“We’re gonna get to the bottom of this. I promise. We’ll do it together.”

Cadence looked at Lacey suspiciously but followed her upstairs to bed.

* * * * *

Just like every other morning, the Westminster chimes rang out seven times; it was seven o’clock. Lacey met her siblings at the kitchen table.

Lacey looked around the kitchen. “Where’s dad?”

Patience gladly fielded the question. “He said he wasn’t feeling well. I’m just about to make him some tea.”

Patience stood up from the table and walked over to the electric kettle. Lacey, Emit, and Cadence exchanged a concerned glance.

Cadence made eye contact with Lacey. “Okay Lacey. When I saw you at the clock last night, you said we would figure it out in the morning. It is morning. What’s up? First, mom goes missing. Now, dad is sick. What do you know?”

Patience chimed in, only focusing on the first part of Cadence’s words. “Lacey, you seem to be spending an awful lot of time at the clock.”

“Wait!” Emit seemed to playback all of Cadence’s words. “Why were you both up last night?”

“Umm,” Lacey looked at her siblings trying desperately to weigh her options. She did not know where to begin. She did not know if they would believe her. She did not know if she was ready to share anything.

“Yep. Just as I thought, something is not right,” said Cadence. “You know something. Don’t you Lacey?”

Lacey swallowed hard and gave each of her siblings a quick look before clearing her throat.

“You all are right. Something’s not right. In fact, something is really wrong, but I’m not sure you all will believe anything I’m about to say.”

“If this is about mom, you need to spill it right now, Lace,” said Emit.

“Okay. Here it goes. Emit, remember when I told you I saw Mama coming out of the clock? The bright light, me breaking the rules, do you remember?”

“I remember you thinking you saw something.”

“I don’t think I saw something. I know I saw something. And, umm, I have been inside the clock.”

Cadence eyed Lacey suspiciously. “What exactly do you mean by ‘inside the clock’?”

“The clock is a portal...”

“Just once...” Patience threw her hands up in the air. “Just once I thought you were going to be serious. We are talking about our mother. When are you going to grow up?”

Lacey stood up and backed up toward the clock.

“Listen to me please!” Lacey said exasperatedly. “Gosh, I knew this would be impossible.” Lacey tried to compose herself before continuing. “Listen, this clock is a portal through space and time. I went to Big Ben last night, to the archives of the Council of Chronos.”

Lacey moved closer to the clock. Her siblings followed her.

“Lace...,” said Emit.

Lacey cut him off before he could continue. “Emit! Just listen. You all need to hear this. Mama is gone. The only way we can get her back is for the four of us to go through that clock, get Grampa Horatio, and rescue our mother from Chaos.”

The children just stood frozen trying to digest what Lacey had just said. They were stunned and confused. When they heard a sound behind them, in perfect synchrony, they spun around. It was their father.

“Lacey is telling the truth. Your mom is gone, and that clock is not what you think it is.”

CHAPTER 12

The Council of Kairos

As the six members who had left the Council of Chronos walked out of the clock, they found themselves in the Cairo Citadel Clock Tower. It was significantly smaller than what they were all used to. Instead of the stone walls they were accustomed to, there were metal walls with inscriptions in Arabic. One thing was certain, the decision to come to this tower was not spontaneous. Someone had been planning it for a long time.

Councilwoman Ji Woo saw a spiral, metal staircase at the far side of the room. She walked over to it and walked halfway down only to see a space full of color. The sun was streaming through the stained-glass pieces set in the metalwork. She walked back upstairs to join the group.

In the middle of the room, there was a round table that was remarkably like the one in Big Ben. However, this one was made of ebony wood. It had a black marble top, and everything had gold accents, including the numbers engraved into the round marble top; it featured the face of a clock. The members each sat in the space they had become accustomed to.

“As you can tell, I have been planning this for a while. I had hoped we would never have cause to use this place. I also didn’t know just how many people would decide to join us. I am pleased you all decided to come, but I honestly wish there were more of us,” said Amandi.

“We all knew this would come one day. I only hope they will see that our methods will be more effective than what has been done in the past,” said Councilwoman Relagio.

A quiet voice from the seven o’clock mark on the table spoke out. It was Councilwoman Ji Woo. “What methods are you referring to?”

“It is time for real change. These small changes in the timeline have not proven successful. It is like we keep going around in circles. Chaos does what he does. We watch and try to band-aid things here and there. We have all watched as our own countryman have continued to suffer. If we can do something more, we should be doing it,” said Councilman Alvarez.

“Although I agree, I do think we need to proceed with caution. Big changes in the timeline could cause further imbalance. People could suffer even more than they are suffering now,” Councilman Deng said, trying to be the voice of reason.

“The real work for us begins today. I was hoping that Cybil would come with us. I know her father would have,” said Councilwoman Samay.

Councilman Deng interjected. “I am not so sure we would have gotten to this point if Horatio were still with us.”

“That is neither here nor there. If there is one thing we do know is that bringing Horatio back is impossible. We must do what needs to be done now to fix things. Chaos cannot be allowed to run rampant,” Amandi said.

“How do we stop him?” Ji Woo asked.

“That is what we are here to figure out. It will be our first act as the Council of Kairos, and it is one that must be blessed by Concordia. So, let us get started,” said Amandi.

CHAPTER 13

No More Secrets

The children stood in front of the clock. Lacey was on the verge of tears. She was so happy she had support, but she was sad to hear someone else say those words aloud and devastated to see the tears in her father's eyes. Emit and Cadence walked over to the clock to examine it. Patience looked at her father and Lacey defiantly.

“What? This is crazy. There is no such thing.”

Robert placed his hand on Patience's cheek. “Honey, I know it is hard to believe, but it is the truth.” He turned to look at Lacey before looking back at his other children. “Your mother told me about this when I asked her to marry me. She wanted me to know what I was getting into. But she couldn't tell me everything. I imagine Lacey knows a lot more than I do at this point. Just promise me you all will hear her out.”

Cadence knocked on the side of the clock. “I still don't believe it.

“Go ahead and show them Lacey,” Robert said as he motioned to the clock.

Lacey reached into her pocket and took out her bracelet. She placed it on her wrist. As she walked closer to the clock, the amber stone started to glow. The children were so transfixed that it took them a minute to realize that the stone on the moon dial was glowing as well. Lacey reached her finger out toward the moon dial and took a deep breath.

“Here goes nothing,” she said before pressing the amber stone.

The bottom cabinet on the clock clicked. Lacey opened it. A bright prismatic light poured out of the clock. Emit, Cadence, and Patience all stood silent and stared in disbelief.

Emit was the first to speak. “This is impossible.”

“I felt the same way when your mother first showed me,” said Robert as he pat Emit on the back.

Emit shielded his eyes as he tried to see beyond the brilliant light. “Lace, when did you find out? How?”

“Guys, I know this seems crazy. I need to talk to dad really quick but meet me upstairs. I promise to start from the beginning.”

Patience refused to move until Cadence pulled her by the elbow. “Come on guys. I am sure Lacey will fill us in in a minute.”

Emit stared back at the open cabinet door to get one more look before he headed upstairs.

Lacey closed the door on the clock and walked with her dad back to her mom’s study.

* * * * *

Robert sat down at his wife’s desk and took a slow sip of his tea. His hands shook and the teacup clanged against the saucer as he put the cup down. Lacey stood in front of the desk with her head tilted to the side. Even though her father knew more than her siblings had, she was just as unsure of how much to share with him. He had said it himself. Even her mother had not told him everything.

The silence was broken with a plea. “Just tell me she’s alive. It’s taking everything in me to hold it together.”

Lacey grabbed her father’s hand. “She’s alive. But...but she’s been kidnapped.”

“By who? Why? You know what, I don’t want to know. I feel so powerless. I know there’s nothing I can do. How does the council plan to get her back?”

“Well, that’s the thing. The council can’t get her back, but we may be able to.”

“We?”

“Tessa said it would take all four of us to get it done.”

“Lacey, are you telling me that all four of my children have to risk their lives to get your mother back?”

“It’s the only way dad. We are the only chance she has.”

Robert stood up from behind the desk. He held back the tears that were welling in his eyes and cupped Lacey’s chin in his hand.

“I know the rules, Lacey. Your mom told me several times before. I always wanted to go with her to protect her. I only wish there was a way for me to come with you. I can’t lose you all.”

“Dad, Tessa told me why you can’t go. There’s no other way. We are the only ones who can get mom back.”

Robert looked at his daughter with complete resignation. “I guess I knew what I was getting into. When do you leave?”

“Tonight. That is, if I can convince Patience to come along. We can’t do it without her.”

Robert gave Lacey a sad smile. “I’m not sure what I will... Just get safely and bring her home to me.”

“I will, Daddy.”

“Lacey, I don’t know if you have any idea how hard it will be for me to watch you all go. But...”

“I know, Daddy. We’ll come back.”

Lacey walked out of the study but ran back to kiss Robert on the forehead before heading upstairs.

CHAPTER 14

What's the Plan?

Lacey walked into her room to find all three of her siblings in a flurry of chatter.

Emit acknowledged Lacey first. "Lace, I'm so sorry I didn't believe you."

"I wouldn't have believed me either."

Cadence nudged Lacey's arm. "Okay, Lacey. I have been waiting patiently since last night. Spill it and don't leave anything out."

"Yeah, spill it, oh great and powerful one," Patience said mockingly.

"Patience, quit it!" Cadence, glared at her older sister.

"I just don't understand why whoever is in control left Lacey in charge."

Emit looked at his sister in disbelief. "That's what you're worried about, not being left in charge. That's exactly why you weren't left in charge."

"Guys, stop. I know this a lot. Patience, we have to save mom. There is a part for each of us to play in it, but you have got to trust me."

Patience turned away from Lacey and shrugged her shoulders. There was a hint of resignation in her eyes, but she was obviously not happy about the situation.

"I don't know where to begin."

"Just start at the beginning, Lace," Emit said encouragingly. "I promise we'll believe every word."

Lacey recounted the story starting from the point when she saw her mother come out of the clock. She told them about the fact that she had spied on their mother and how she did not come back after going into the clock the last time. She talked about their grandfather's journal

and everything she found it. She went through the entire story, sparing no details. When she finished, she spent a few seconds staring into each of her siblings' eyes one by one.

“There are three things you really need to take away from all of this. One, Mama has been kidnapped. Two, our Grampa Horatio is alive. Three, we have to save them both. Oh yeah, there's a four. We leave tonight, and we have a lot to do to get ready.”

* * * * *

“Everything is coming together, Cybil. Soon your children will be back to see me. Unfortunately, I have no intentions of letting them find you. So, you'll never see them again,” said Dolos.

“Leave my children alone,” said a voice from a darkened cell a few feet from Dolos; it was Cybil Latish.

“I am sorry I can't do that. You see, you all are the keys to all of this. Chaos will be so pleased with me when your bloodline is completely gone. There will be no way to stop him.”

Cybil walked up to the rusted bars of her cell and repeated her previous warning. “Leave my children alone. It sounds like your plan has less to do with Chaos and more to do with you. Never would Chaos do anything like this. He respects the balance of time.”

“You stupid woman. You think you know my master. He has the power to ruin this world...to ruin every one of you. Your father disappeared because he understood this fact and knew he had to stop it. Well, we couldn't allow that, so we trapped him in the Great In-Between.”

Cybil reached between the bars to try to grab Dolos, but he was just out of her reach.

“Tsk, tsk, Cybil. I am disappointed in you. I have always thought of you as so level-headed and so smart. Just accept the fact that there is nothing you can do. Your fate has been

sealed. You see the day I stopped you from getting home, I devised a two-fold plan: 1) I created an imbalance in the Council of Chronos. Now that band of turncoats and their harebrained schemes will help Chaos thrive, and 2) I get to lure your children into a trap and put an end to the Stewart line for good. You have been so useful.”

“You will never succeed. It takes far more than one power hungry man to ruin the world.”

Dolos laughed. “Thanks to you, there is no way I will fail. Now go back into your corner and wait. I will be sure to tell you when your children have been disposed of.”

Cybil banged on the bars and winced as the bone hit the metal and the rust scraped her. She knew she had to remain hopeful, but she could feel the despair setting in.

* * * * *

The children sat in Lacey and Cadence’s room. Cadence was tapping out a beat with her pencils. She had one earbud in her ear. She was anxious and wanted to hear the next part of the plan. Lacey and Emit were still thumbing through Grampa Horatio’s journal. They had yet to find anything they thought would help.

“What are we doing?” Patience said as she sat restlessly in the window seat.

Emit answered immediately and impatiently. “What do you mean what are we doing? We are trying to get ready for the mission?”

“The mission? Really? Okay Spy Kids. Call it what you want, but you all seem to be doing all the getting ready while Cadence and I just sit here and wait,” Patience said before getting up and walking to the door.

“Patience, it’s only 9pm. We can’t leave until 11pm. I don’t know what to have you do until then. Tessa said you were an important part of this, but she didn’t say how. We are all doing the best we can,” said Lacey.

Patience rested her forehead on the doorframe. “Well, I am going to take my ‘important’ self downstairs and make us some sandwiches for the trip.”

“Thank you, Patience,” said Cadence as she watched her sister leave. Then she looked back at Lacey and Emit and shrugged her shoulders. Neither of them were paying attention.

“I think we need to go upstairs and check the attic again,” said Lacey.

“Why, what’s up?” Emit asked.

“I can’t shake the feeling we are missing something. From everything we’ve read in the journal, it seems like Grampa knows a lot more about what we’ll need to do than Tessa. We have a couple of hours to waste. I think we should see if there is anything else we can find in Grampa Horatio’s stuff upstairs.”

Emit shook his head in agreement. “You head upstairs and check the boxes. I will keep working through these puzzles in Grampa’s journal.” He watched out of the corner of his eye as Lacey got up to head out the door. “Oh, and Lacey, please take Cadence with you. Her constant tapping is driving me nuts. I can’t concentrate.”

Cadence picked up her pencils. “What do you expect me to do? Making music is the only thing that comes me down.”

“Just head upstairs with Lace please.”

Lacey and Cadence walked down the hall and up the attic stairs. Lacey hesitated a bit. She thought she heard someone crying. She put her ear to her parents’ bedroom door and could

hear her dad's muffled sobs. "Cadence, we have to find mom and make it back to dad. I can't bear to think of him being like this for much longer."

"I know. None of us can."

The girls climbed the attic stairs. Lacey walked over to a stack of boxes to her right while Cadence decided to check the boxes on the left.

"I'm not sure what we're looking for Cadence. This feeling that there's something else, something we haven't found yet, won't go away."

"Let's see what we can find," said Cadence.

Lacey looked in the first box and moved papers aside. She blew the dust off a few old photos. Most of the faces were foreign to her, but she thought she might be able to find something in the backgrounds.

Cadence saw several medium sized boxes, but it was the few rectangular boxes that were leaning against the wall that caught her eye. She pulled one out and examined it. "What do you think this is Lacey?"

"It looks like blueprints, but I'm not sure of what. Pull out another one."

Cadence pulled out another scroll. It had a seal on it. It was a picture of two trees. "Hey Lacey, didn't you tell us about a picture you saw on a book with two trees? Did they look like this?"

Lacey closed the distance between her and Cadence to examine the seal. She ran her finger over the black and white wax seal. "This is the exact same picture that was on the book. A white tree above the horizon and its mirror image in black underneath the horizon. Let's open it!"

Cadence used the pencil behind her ear to break the seal. They unrolled the seal together. Lacey read the wording at the top of the scroll. “Concordia’s Haven? It looks beautiful, but I’m not sure how that would be useful.”

The amber stone on Lacey’s bracelet started to flash. It glowed dimly in an intermittent pattern.

“What the heck does that mean?” Cadence asked.

“I have no idea. It’s never done that before.”

The stone repeated the pattern two more times.

“Wait,” Cadence said. “Is that morse code? We actually studied it in Girl Scouts and in my percussion class when we talked about how rhythmic patterns have been used to communicate in history.”

“I don’t know morse code. Do you know what it’s saying?” Lacey asked.

“Oh, that’s right. You didn’t make it past Daisies in Girl Scouts. Let’s see if it does it again. I may be able to figure it out.”

The stone repeated the pattern as Cadence watched intently. “T-A-K-E-I-T. Take it! Lacey, do you think it means the scroll?”

“I don’t know. The bracelet stopped blinking.”

“Put it down again and see what happens,” said Cadence.

Lacey put the scroll down and took three steps back. She looked at her bracelet and, sure enough, the bracelet started blinking again. The girls shared a look of revelation and raced back toward their room. They ran into Emit in the hall, and they all fell to the floor.

Patience ran upstairs when she heard the commotion. “What’s going on?”

Out of breath, Cadence started, “We…”

Emit cut her off and said, "I found something."

"So did we," said Lacey.

"What did you all find Lacey?" Patience asked.

"We found blueprints to Concordia's Haven, and Lacey's bracelet told us to take it," said Cadence.

"That's ridiculous," scoffed Patience.

"Maybe not. I think the riddle I read in Grampa's journal might have something to with it. It was like the book just popped opened to the page." Emit opened the journal and read the riddle.

Find just where Concordia rests

Then flip the scene before you

There you'll see the dark domain

The maze of Chaos you will go through

"We got it," exclaimed Lacey.

"What, we got what?" Patience asked.

"We have one more piece we will need to find mom. Grampa will be able to help us with the other pieces. Now all we have to do is find him," Emit said.

CHAPTER 15

Away They Go

Just before 11pm, the children gathered in front of their grandfather clock. Their father met them there to say goodbye. He looked exhausted and defeated. However, he wore a warm and loving smile on his face as he looked at each of his children.

“Please be careful. I honestly don’t know what I would do if anything happened to you all. It was hard enough losing your mother. Remember that no matter where you go, I will be with you.”

“We’ll be careful, Dad. When we get back, we plan to have Mama with us,” said Emit.

It was time to go. The amber stone on Lacey’s bracelet had already been glowing, but the light seemed to intensify the longer they stood by the clock. The children each gave their father a hug. The Westminster chimes began to ring. Lacey turned to the clock and pressed the amber stone on the moon dial. The bottom cabinet clicked and opened slowly. The light poured from the clock.

“Come on guys, we have to go. Tessa said we had to be in the archives by 11pm,” Lacey said. She checked her bag to make sure she had everything. She had brought the scroll and the journal, as well as a couple of pictures she thought might prove useful.

Cadence half-whispered to Emit. “What do we do now?”

Emit shrugged his shoulders and said, “Step into the light I guess.”

Patience stepped in front of both of them and walked right in. “I’ll go first.”

The clock chimed for the tenth time. One by one, the children walked into the clock. Lacey walked in last and gave her father one last look before disappearing into the clock and shutting the door behind her.

The light inside the clock was bright and prismatic. It took a few second for the children to get used to the light. It was disorienting, which made it hard for them to see anything inside.

There were several doors lining the purple-hued hall.

“Lace, where do those doors go?” Emit asked.

“No idea. I just know that the one we need to enter is right over there,” said Lacey.

Lacey pointed to a door with the symbol of the Council of Chronos—the clock crest—over it. When she turned around to see if her siblings were ready to walk through it, she noticed that Patience, who had gone into the clock first, was standing in front of another door, and Cadence was in front of a different one examining the symbol.

“Come on guys, we have to get going,” said Lacey.

Cadence ran her hand over the symbol. It was a faceless clock. The hour markings were there but there were no hands on it. “Lacey, have you ever seen this symbol before?”

Lacey walked back to look at it. Emit followed. “I have never seen that before,” said Lacey.

“Wait a minute. I saw that symbol in Grampa’s journal. It was drawn in the margin of the story where he talked about the Great In-Between. I wonder if that is how we get to it,” said Emit.

Just then, the children heard the distinctive click of a door latch. They looked over to see Patience opening another one of the doors. Lacey ran over to Patience and quickly pulled the door shut. “What are you doing, Patience?” Lacey asked.

“What? Am I not allowed to look around?”

Collectively, the children shouted “No!”

“We have no idea what is behind any of those other doors. Can you at least wait for Tessa to shed some more light on the situation for us?” Emit scolded.

“Have patience, Patience! We have a couple of very specific jobs to do. Find Grampa and rescue Mama. Can we try to do those without getting killed in the process?” Cadence asked.

“Oh, okay. I get it. You all will follow Lacey blindly, but if I take the lead, I am somehow wrong?”

“Come on, Patience. It’s not like that. I just happen to have a little more information than everyone else. Let’s just see what Tessa has to say,” Lacey said, trying to reason with her older sister.

The children walked back to the door with the council’s symbol. Lacey let Patience open the door. The children stepped directly into the archives of the Council of Chronos.

Emit immediately took off down one of the aisles of books. From everything Lacey had said, this was a safe space, and he wanted to explore it.

“Whoa!” Cadence said, as she stood in awe of number of books she could see. There were rows and rows of them in the dimly lit space. She wondered how far the rows went.

Patience ran her hands along the walls. They were cold and a little damp. However, the space felt warm. “Okay, so where is this Tessa?”

Lacey walked toward the table she had sat at the night before. Their family’s book was still on the table. She heard Emit ask a question in the distance.

“Where exactly are we, Lace?”

“We are in Big Ben in London, England. And you are now in the archives of the Council of Chronos,” she answered.

Emit had stopped in front of a row of large, green, leather-bound books. He read his hands over their spines while walking backward. He backed directly into Tessa.

“You must be Emit. It is a pleasure to meet you,” said Tessa. She and Emit walked side by side back to where the other children stood. “In fact, it is a pleasure to meet all of you.”

“Hi, Tessa!” Lacey said.

“Well, hello there, Lacey. I feel like we just saw one another. I see you were able to convince your siblings. It wasn’t so hard, was it?” Tessa asked.

“I had a little help from my dad,” said Lacey.

Tessa twitched a little at the mention of someone else being involved. “Ah, how nice! Did you bring your grandfather’s journal?”

“Of course, but you have to tell us what we’ll need to do to find Grampa Horatio. We have already found several clues in the journal, but there are several we don’t what to make of,” said Lacey.

Tessa twitched more violently than before and walked closer to Lacey. Dolos was struggling to maintain Tessa’s form. He was anxious to get his hands on the journal. However, he composed himself and settled back into character. “My apologies, children. I am obviously getting a little ahead of myself.”

Patience approached Tessa. “Lacey told us you said there would be something each of us needed to do to find our grandfather in the Great In-Between. What do we need to do?”

Tessa turned her attention from Lacey and the journal. She looked over the children and settled her gaze on Patience to answer her question. “You each have been gifted with certain abilities, strengths, or talents that you will need to use at precisely the right time. Before you ask, you will know when.”

Dolos had not wanted to play the long game; he wanted to just snatch the journal. However, playing Tessa would get the children to trust him. He would be able to get the journal and manipulate them into entering the Great In-Between without it. They would be lost forever like their grandfather. Tessa looked at Cadence. As Tessa, Dolos said, “Cadence, you will be tested first. You will need to use your musical abilities to help you with the task. When you go back into the clock, you will need to enter the door for the Great In-Between. Then, you will need to find the door with the musical notes around the trim.”

“What will I need to do?” Cadence asked.

Tessa walked over to a cabinet and pulled out a Melodica. “To open the second door, you will need to play the notes as they appear from right to left and in perfect time.”

“I can’t. What if I mess up?” Cadence asked.

“If you mess up, you can just start again,” said Dolos as Tessa.

Cadence looked at her siblings. They all gave her reassuring looks.

“You are a musical prodigy. You’ll be fine. Tessa, what happens next? When do I get to go?” Patience asked.

“Ah, Patience! It might do you good to heed your name. However, you would in fact be next,” Dolos said as he straightened Tessa’s vest.

The children watched as Tessa started to move toward a pile of books on a small, round table. Lacey, Cadence, and Patience were focused intently on what Tessa was doing. However, Emit was facing in the opposite direction. He was still taking in his surroundings. As the girls watched Tessa at the table, Emit caught a glimpse of Tessa in the mirror. He froze when he saw that Tessa’s reflection was not her own. It was a man. He turned around slowly and then back

around to make sure he had seen what he thought he saw. He calmly turned around and took three steps backward toward Lacey.

Emit tried not to draw attention to himself. He quietly whispered, “Lace, I need to talk to you, like now.”

Before Lacey could respond, Tessa started walking toward them. “Is everything okay, Emit?” Tessa asked.

CHAPTER 16

A Rush to the Clock

Emit didn't know what to say. He tried his best not to look back at the mirror, but he glanced over again and could not hide his reaction. Dolos's head cocked to the side, and he turned to look at Emit in the mirror. He began moving toward Emit, which meant he was walking backward. Lacey, Cadence, and Patience were confused. They had no idea why Tessa was looking at Emit in such a strange way.

"Emit? What's wrong?" Cadence said.

"Umm, nothing. Nothing is wrong," said Emit nervously.

Cadence shrugged her shoulders. She looked back and forth between Lacey and Patience before catching Lacey looking into the mirror as well. She froze.

"What is everyone looking at?" Patience asked.

"Well, I guess since your siblings have nothing to say, I will tell you Patience. They are looking at me," Dolos said proudly. "You all thought I was Tessa, but it seems that young Emit has discovered the truth."

"Where is Tessa?" Lacey demanded.

"Oh dearest Lacey. Tessa is safe and sound for now. But once I am through with all of you, I will make sure I take care of her," said Dolos.

"Finished with us? Just what do you intend to do with us?" Cadence said shakily.

"It wouldn't be fun if I gave it all away now. What I can tell you is that you'll be stuck where you're going."

While Dolos was busy gloating about how his plan had worked. Lacey had turned her back to the clock and started inching her way back to it. Dolos was distracted by Cadence, which

gave Emit and Patience a chance to slowly make their way over to Lacey. Cadence's back was to the table behind her. She had backed straight into it and could feel the wood pressing into the back of her thighs. She held the table's edge with one hand, but she grabbed a book off the table with the other one. She had no idea what she was going to do with it, but she knew she would use it if she had to.

As Lacey got closer to the clock, the amber stones on the moon dial and in her bracelet started to glow. They shone so bright that Dolos noticed the light out of the corner of his eye. He quickly turned to the clock and saw that Lacey was about to open it.

"You all aren't going anywhere until I tell you to. And you definitely aren't taking that journal with you," said Dolos.

Lacey and Cadence made eye contact. Cadence rushed past Dolos and stood with her siblings.

"Get back over here and give me that journal," demanded Dolos.

Cadence tapped a book against her leg. It was the one she had snatched from the table.

"Are you talking about this book?"

She tried to toss the book past Dolos so he would be distracted, and they would have time to get away. However, Dolos caught the book in mid-air.

"You stupid little girl. Did you really think you could get it by me?"

Just as Dolos was lunging toward the siblings, Lacey was opening the clock's cabinet. The light poured out of the clock and temporarily blinded Dolos. Patience and Emit ran into the clock. Lacey grabbed Cadence's hand and tried to pull her into the clock, but Dolos grabbed her other hand. In one fluid movement, Cadence shook her hand free from Lacey, took one of the

pencils she used as a drumstick from behind her ear, and shoved it into Dolos's eye. He howled in pain and took a few steps back. It was just the space they needed to get away.

CHAPTER 17

Cadence Misses a Beat

With the cabinet door closed securely behind them, the siblings took a few minutes to catch their breath. Cadence could not stop shaking, and Lacey could swear she still heard Dolos's screams from outside the clock.

"How could this happen?" Lacey asked. "I wonder how long Dolos has been impersonating Tessa. Was it Dolos the first time I came through the clock?"

"It doesn't matter Lacey. The only thing we can do now is continue the journey. We have to find Grampa. We have to move on," said Emit.

"Move on! We need to get back home. Which one of these doors will take us back to dad?" Patience asked.

Cadence stood slumped against a wall. She was still visibly shaken.

"Are you okay, Cadence?" Lacey asked.

Cadence did not say anything.

"Cadence, are you okay?" Lacey asked.

"She is obviously not alright. We need to get her back home," Patience said.

"If we go back home now, it means we will never find Grampa Horatio, which means we will never find Mama. Is that what you want Patience?" Emit asked.

"Of course not. But look at Cadence. We have no idea what would have happened to us if she hadn't used that pencil. And to add to that, she is the one who has to complete the first task. That is if we can even trust what Dolos said," Patience spouted.

"You're right Patience. But we have no choice. We have to keep going, and we have to use our best judgment," said Lacey.

“I can do it,” said Cadence in a small voice. “I can complete the task.”

“Are you sure, sis?” Patience asked.

“Yes. You all just need to remind me of what I need to do.”

Lacey placed her hand on Cadence’s shoulder. “The first thing we need to do is find the right door.”

“Remember when we entered the clock? There was a door on the left that had a faceless clock. Do you all remember that? Do you remember where it was?” Emit asked.

“I remember. It was right over there,” Cadence said as she pointed to a door that stood just seven feet from them. “What do I do now?”

“We do what Dolos told us to do,” Emit said. “We go in.”

“But Dolos said I would need an instrument, and he never gave it to me. What will I use?” Cadence asked. Then she thought about the app on her watch. She could use the piano function on it. “What exactly did Dolos say?”

“He said that in order to open the second door, you have to play the notes as they appear from right to left and in perfect time,” Emit said.

“How do I know it’s not a trick? How do I know I won’t mess up? How do I know I can do this?” Cadence asked.

“Dolos wanted us to get into the Great In-Between. Remember he said that he wanted us to get someplace where we would be stuck. If he was tricking us, it would not benefit him to keep us from reaching it,” said Lacey.

“I guess that is true,” said Patience. “Go ahead Cadence, open the door.”

Once again, Cadence ran her hand over the faceless clock. She moved her hand down to the tarnished silver doorknob and twisted it slowly. The door opened revealing an all white room

with no embellishments. On the other side of the room, there was a door cast in bronze and an organ with huge copper pipes.

“Why would Dolos think I would need an instrument if one is already here?” Cadence asked.

Lacey walked over to the organ and then looked at the door.

“Either this organ wasn’t here before or Dolos has never been in this room,” said Lacey.

“Then how would he know about what Cadence would have to do?” Patience asked.

Emit pulled Grampa Horatio’s journal out of his waistband. He started to skim through it. He came upon a drawing he thought he had seen before. On one page, it showed a crude map of the doorway inside the clock. Then, there was a list.

1. *Find the door to the Great In-Between and enter*
2. *Play your way through door number two*
3. *Navigate the labyrinth alone*
4. *Wait and grab the master key*
5. *Don’t be afraid to take the stage*

“I don’t think we needed Dolos at all. Grampa left us most of what we needed. Cadence, go ahead and sit at the organ,” said Emit.

“Wait. Let me check the door again. I need to memorize the notes,” said Cadence. “There are four measures, and the music is in 4/4 time. I just have to remember to reverse the order of the notes.”

Cadence went over the notes several times before walking back to the organ bench and sitting down. Emit had been reading through the pages before and after the list in Grampa

Horatio's journal. He was looking for any other clues. When Cadence started to play the first note, Emit stopped her.

"Wait!" Emit yelled. "I don't mean to make you any more nervous than you already are, but you have to know what's at stake. It is not as simple as Dolos said."

"What does it say, Emit?" Lacey asked.

"It says that if Cadence misses more than three notes or beats, the door to the Great In-Between will be sealed for the next 12 years."

The siblings exchanged worried glances. Patience walked over to Cadence.

"You got this," she said.

Cadence gulped before setting her fingers on the keys. She started by tapping her foot to count out a rhythm. She counted in her head. She played the first six notes perfectly, making not one mistake. But she hesitated on the seventh note and fell out of time. The door they had walked through to get into the room disappeared.

"What just happened?" Emit said.

He ran over to where the door was and felt around, but all he could feel was a smooth white wall.

"The journal didn't say anything about the other door disappearing," said Patience.

"Okay, Cadence. Take a deep breath and start again. Like Patience said, you totally have this," said Lacey.

Cadence took a deep breath and then another. She placed her hands on the keyboard and began tapping out the rhythm again. This time she hummed the tune in her head before playing it. Key by key and note by note, she made her way through the measures. When she stopped, the siblings heard a distinct click. The second door had opened.

“You did it, Cadence. You got us through to the next step,” said Emit excitedly.

However, Emit’s joy turned to concern when he looked upon what appeared to be an endless maze on the other side of the door. According to his grandfather’s journal, it was now his turn to complete a task.

Annotated Bibliography

Baum, Frank L. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. SDE Classics, 2019.

In this classic, Baum crafts a tale of young girl swept into a fantasy world by way of a cyclone. When she gets there, she finds she has killed an evil and powerful witch, tries to find her way back home, encounters three traveling partners with stories of their own, faces challenges around each bend, and learns that sometimes there is a purpose for strife that lies beyond oneself.

Baum, Frank L. *Introduction. The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, by Frank L. Baum, SDE Classics, 2019.

In this short introduction, the author expresses his reasons for writing the book. He shares that he only meant to entertain children and wanted to leave out the nightmares and heartaches present in the work of his predecessors. However, his story includes themes that are not common in a feelgood tale simply meant to please. The book was released in 1900, and the author addressed the themes of oppression, death, moral depravity in addition to love, hope, and empathy.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. Vintage Books, 2010.

Bettelheim explores the role of fairy tales using a lens of child psychology. He explores several stories and highlights how the contents help children process the world in which they live. He also examines the role of adults in allowing children to make sense of the stories on their own. Bettelheim points to both Freudian and Jungian concepts in beloved tales. In addition, he expresses the unique ability of fairy tales to address difficulties in life and still produce a happy ending.

Carroll, Lewis, and John Tenniel. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Wisehouse Classics, 2016.

Carroll's classic, illustrated by Tenniel, follows a little girl named Alice down a rabbit hole and into a world where very little makes sense. Alice must learn to navigate the world by seeking to understand, adapting along the way, and finding a means to achieve balance while getting comfortable in her own skin. In the middle of the chaos, Alice finds her understanding is broadened.

Conkan, Marius. "On the Nature of Portals in Fantasy Literature." *Caietele Echinox*, vol. 26, June 2014, pp. 105–13. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=96886098&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Conkan addresses the purpose and nature of portals. He discusses their function from a physical and a psychological perspective. He also provides insight into their general use in literature and specifically how they have been used in mythology and fantasy.

Galli, Mark and Craig Brian Larson. *Preaching That Connects*. Zondervan. 1994.

In this work, the authors discuss the necessary elements one needs to consider when they try to reach an audience from the pulpit. They highlight the traditional means of connecting with a congregation and provide new insights into elements that can be added.

Gotschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal*, First Mariner Books, 2012.

Gotschall explores the art and power of crafting stories. He demonstrates the commonalities between the stories people have come to know and love. While Gotschall reviews generalities, he also looks at details such as the way the human brain works and how humans have evolved. The author examines how stories help people use stories to work through difficulties in their lives.

Granger, John. *Looking for God in Harry Potter*, Tyndall House, 2004.

In his novel, Granger seeks to dismiss the critics and prove to himself there is value in the Harry Potter books. He makes comparisons and test them against scripture. Granger's approach to the book is one that challenges people to look at the series differently but also demonstrates that whether the books directly align with the Bible or not, they can still prove useful in reaching young readers where they are.

Hollindale, Peter. "Ideology and the Children's Book." *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism*, edited by Peter Hunt, Routledge, London, 2004, pp. 30–49.

Hollindale explores the role of children's books in expressing cultural ideologies. He highlights the importance of not generalizing what works of literature children will come to value. He expresses the fact that there is a contentious relationship between how adults evaluate children's stories and how children see them.

Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Crossway Bibles, 2001.

Holy Bible: New International Version. Zondervan, 2017.

Jones, Gerard. *Killing Monsters*, Basic Books, 2002.

In this work, the author addresses the need for children to learn to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Jones highlights the dangers of not allowing children to truly live in the fantasy world. By telling them that pretending to play with guns or swords are bad because they can hurt people, parents are confusing the line between fantasy and reality, which hinders a child's ability to discern.

Jones Voiklis, Charlotte. *Afterword. A Wrinkle in Time*, Archival Edition, by Madeline L'Engle.

Narrated by Madeleine L'Engle et al., Listening Library, 2018. Audiobook.

Jones Voiklis provides insight into her grandmother's life and her work. She addresses the rejection her grandmother faced as she attempted to get the published. In addition, she discusses the criticism L'Engle received from the Christian and secular communities.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time, Archival Edition*, by Madeline L'Engle. Narrated by Madeleine L'Engle et al., Listening Library, 2018. Audiobook.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *Introduction. A Wrinkle in Time, Archival Edition*, by Madeline L'Engle. Narrated by Madeleine L'Engle et al., Listening Library, 2018. Audiobook.

In this introduction, L'Engle provides her opinions on why adults did not respond well to the book. She also discusses the inability of many adults to think outside of the box.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*. Square Fish, 2007.

In this book the author presents a portal which helps a young girl travel through space and time to find her father. The author introduces characters the protagonist, Meg, encounters to help her navigate the other realms she enters. She presents a being whose sense of order creates internal chaos for those who must live under its reign.

Lewis, C S, and Pauline Baynes. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. New York, Harper Trophy, 2007.

In this novel, the author uses a portal as means of transporting the four protagonists from a world at war into the land of Narnia where they learn who they are and the power they have. During their journey, they face questions of morality and must use discernment. They also encounter a lion who is revered by most and feared by others. Through their time in Narnia, they are forced to fight a different kind of war.

Mendlesohn, Farah. *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Wesleyan University Press. 2008.

In her novel, Mendlesohn addresses the common tools used in fantasy literature. She makes the direct connection between the genre and the language used within it. She says the author creates the fantasy by carefully building worlds word by word. Mendlesohn also provides extensive information on the use of portals.

Quindlen, Anna. *An Appreciation. A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle, Square Fish, 2007, pp. 1-5.

Quindlen provides insight into why she loves the novel and how it affected her as a young child. She sheds light on L'Engle's use of Meg Murry as a relatable protagonist. She also points to the way the author uses symbolism throughout the book to represent some of the situations that people would have been processing at the time.

Rowling, J. K., and Mary GrandPré. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Harry Potter, Book 7*. A.A. Levine Books, 2007.

In this final installation of the series, Rowling sets up the final battle between Harry and Voldemort. The book focuses on the destruction of the horcruxes (pieces of Lord Voldemort's soul), Harry's sacrifice, and Voldemort's defeat. The novel also includes the death of several well-loved characters.

Rowling, J. K., and Mary GrandPré. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince: Harry Potter, Book 6*. A.A. Levine Books, 2005.

In the sixth book in the series, readers witness the death of Harry's beloved mentor, Albus Dumbledore. In the events that led up to it, Harry receives information about how he will be able to defeat Voldemort. The book represents an obvious move to a darker tone and elements that require a greater level of maturity to process.

Rowling, J. K., and Mary GrandPré. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*: Harry Potter, Book 3. A.A. Levine Books, 1999.

In the third installment in the series, Harry is once again forced to deal with the death of a loved one. As Harry moves through the book, the author hints at Harry's prophecy. Children get to read of more magical creatures and learn that things are not always as they seem.

Rowling, J. K., and Mary GrandPré. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*: Harry Potter, Book 1. A.A. Levine Books, 1998.

In this first installment of the series, the author introduces the young protagonist, Harry, to the Wizarding World. Readers are also introduced to the portals through which people travel from the normal world into a land of fantasy. The book highlights the differences between Harry's life at home and his life at school in the Wizarding World.

Stephens, John, and Robyn McCallum. *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*. Garland, 1998.

Stephens and McCallum examine the underlying narrative in children's stories. They theorize that authors do not have to intentionally place their values into stories; they will be present by default. Their essay highlights the fact that there can be no narrative that is void of inherent ideology.

Tatar, Maria. "Inventing Portal Fantasies: E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Nutcracker and the Mouse*

King" *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2020, pp. 24-37. ProQuest,

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Tatar writes about the use of portals in the fantasy realm. However, the author's focus was less about what occurs in the fantasy world and more about what it allows people to do. The author highlights the fact that fantasy is not an escapist act; it is an act that allows people to actively engage in the world they are in and, therefore, be able to process their world differently. Tatar gives examples from other works of literature to show how they used portals in their stories.

Tumminio, Danielle Elizabeth. *God and Harry Potter at Yale: Teaching Faith and Fantasy Fiction in an Ivy League Classroom*. Unlocking Press, 2010.

In this book, the author discusses her creation of a course at Yale during her days there as a theology student. She addresses her parallels between the Bible and Harry Potter. She also provides details about the initial response to her idea for a course and her process of narrowing down the participants after the higher than expected enrollment in her course.

Tunnell, Michael O., and James S. Jacobs. "The Origins and History of American Children's Literature." *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2013, pp. 80-86.

Tunnell and Jacobs trace the history of American children's literature. They go back to the European roots and discuss the changes in approach from a preaching method to a teaching method, as well as the change from force feeding to self-exploration.

Westman, Karin E. "Beyond Periodization: Children's Literature, Genre, and Remediating Literary History." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2013, pp. 464-469. *ProQuest*,

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