

WANDERERS IN TIME, BOOK TWO

Prophets & Liars



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CHAPTER ONE

Ben Matthews ran after his sister through the streets of London — not modern day London, but the city from long ago. He tried to keep his mind from the one fact he didn't want to face, but he couldn't banish it. Over and over the thought crept in: They weren't home yet.

He ran a little more, keeping the black smudge of Amy's dress in view at all times.

Stuck in the past. Not home yet.

He clung to the word "yet" because it meant there was still hope. Hope was good. Hope could give him a reason to keep running, keep chasing after what he wanted most.

A few minutes before, they had stumbled into the shadows of a small arched alcove, tucked alongside a wooden building. They had appeared out of nowhere. Anyone watching would have seen them pop into existence and bump up against the nearby walls. Anyone

watching them would have run away screaming at that point.

Ben shook his hand out of Amy's grip. "Where are we? Is this still London?"

Amy's face turned to stone. "I don't know."

The two teens had just seen their parents through the Egyptian arch, the doorway part of the apparatus. After spending a week in the Victorian era, Ben had thought they were going home. The equipment had roared to life, the gears and electricity had churned faster and faster, and the arch had opened a black rectangle into another time. But the apparatus had dumped them here. Not home yet.

"Where are Mom and Dad?" Someone had to ask the obvious question. Their parents had been there on the other side of the arch, and yet when Ben and Amy went through, they never touched. Ghosts passing in the night.

"They were right here, weren't they?" Amy stepped out of the alcove onto the cobblestones of the street. The rays from the low sun flashed on her face. "They should be here. They were right..." She shaded her eyes. "Look over there!"

Ben couldn't see what she was looking at, but she suddenly charged down the lane and he had no choice but to give chase. After all, she was the older and more responsible one. Had she really seen their parents? Had she caught a glimpse of them down at the end of the street?

Clinging to the hope of being reunited with Mom and Dad, Ben ran. To either side, rows of wooden buildings leaned against each other, like best friends who'd had too much fun and were about to collapse to the ground with laughter. Maybe this was a poorer section of London. The uneven stone paving made running tricky, and Ben struggled to keep his footing.

"Hey!" he called out. "Where did you see them?"

Amy stopped at a corner. "They were just here. Standing here, wearing fancy clothes like we saw before. And then they walked away."

Before them, people spread out across the street, like paint spilled out of a dozen bottles. Their clothes were colorful and old-fashioned — straight out of a renaissance fair their parents once took them to, where everyone dressed up as knights and squires, nobles and peasants. Here, the women wore layered dresses, with puffy sleeves and tight waists, and they had wide hats decorated with feathers and other ornaments. The men dressed in short pants and wide hats and sported even puffier sleeves. And they all wore stockings. Out in public.

Ben whistled low. Would they even recognize their parents here? "I don't see them. Are you sure? Did you see their faces?"

In this area, the lower floors of the buildings looked to be shops, selling things like plates and metal cups, belts and boots, bread and biscuits. The windows had no glass. Instead, shutters folded out to the side, one panel

propped up to form a roof, and one down to make a narrow display table for the goods. Most of these counters had someone behind them, now and then calling out what was for sale and trying to attract the attention of the people walking by. In the distance, tall spires marked spots where the churches sat.

His sister chewed her lip some more and stared at the crowd. "What do you remember?"

Ben wondered if she was losing it. Weren't they chasing after Mom and Dad? Where was this going? "Remember? About what?"

"What you saw, in the arch, before we went through."

"Well... Mom and Dad..."

"Yes, and what else?"

"I don't know. What else was there? They were dressed odd, like these people. They were also —" He swallowed hard. "They were calling to us, but I couldn't hear them."

She turned and grabbed his arms. "Anything else? Anything they were holding? Anything in the background?"

"I said I don't know!" He shrugged her off. "But maybe... I thought I saw a ship."

"A ship, that's what it was." Amy stepped back again. "Then they definitely were not in the lab. Not in our London."

They had begun their journey in modern-day London. It was supposed to be a fun trip. Ben and Amy would be exploring the new city with a chaperone, while

their parents were working with the physicists to figure out what was wrong with the “apparatus” the Brits had built. The Brits never said what the apparatus was for, or what it was supposed to do, but it wasn’t working right. As an applied physicist, it was Dad’s job to figure out why, while Mom would help with any of the math — her specialty. And then they would go home to California. A few weeks in England, do what they came to do, and leave. No problem.

But then there was an accident. Their parents disappeared. While they were working on the apparatus, it malfunctioned and whisked them away. Just like that. When Ben and Amy heard the news, they rushed to the lab, hoping to find out what happened and if they could help. The scientists wouldn’t tell them much, and it seemed hopeless. But Ben and Amy snuck into the apparatus room, pushed a few buttons, and stepped through the arch to another time.

“Is this really London?” Ben was almost afraid of the answer. None of their adventure so far made a lot of sense. “And what does the ship mean? Does that mean Mom and Dad are near the sea, or still in town?”

“Are we near any water?” Amy continued scanning the crowd. A few people were staring back, but Amy didn’t seem to notice. “Wait —! Over there!” She dashed into the street, weaving through the groups of people. Ben shook his head and chased after her. What was she seeing that gave her such hope? A familiar hat? A color that matched the dress that Mom was wearing? Why

hadn't *he* seen anything? He wished he could catch a glimpse of them as well.

"Down this way." Amy charged into a narrow opening.

It was hardly a proper street. Scrambling across the rough cobbles, Ben felt like he was trapped in a narrow, meandering canyon, with the walls closing in on him. The farther up he looked, the closer the buildings crowded toward each other. Each floor juttied out a good foot or two over the one beneath, until the topmost stories nearly touched and blocked the sky. Not even the worst areas in Victorian London were this cramped. Where were they?

Meanwhile, Amy had reached the end of the alley and waved to Ben to catch up. When he stood next to her, he saw a larger and busier street at the intersection. People filled the road — walking, riding horses, sitting in carriages. The slanted sun shone brightly here, beating down with warmth that he hadn't felt in weeks.

He hunched over and tried to catch his breath. "Do you still see them?"

"No. But I'm sure they were here. I thought I saw ..." Amy drifted away into her own thoughts again.

Ben let her be and took a closer look at their surroundings. Men and women hustled in all directions, about their own business; others staked out corners, selling stuff from freestanding carts or boxes hung around their necks. Merchants called out their wares, carriage drivers yelled to other drivers or the occasional horseman, and

one lone man was singing at the top of his lungs. None of it was understandable. It was all noise, like a foreign language.

“It could still be London.” He sniffed. “The smell is about the same. Although, there isn’t as much smoke in the air. Do you think we’re in a different part of the city, but still in the Victorian times?”

Amy shook her head. “No gaslights.” She pointed down the street. “No omnibuses, no hansom cabs, no brick houses, no plate glass windows...”

Ben slumped against the wall and sank to the ground. What were they going to do now? They had gone through so much already. In the Victorian era, shortly after they arrived, circumstances had separated them. Amy found work as a maid in the house of a baronet, and Ben survived by running around with a pair of street lads. They both searched for their parents, and Ben finally found a warehouse where Mom and Dad had somehow — against all odds — built a primitive replica of the apparatus around the same Egyptian arch from the modern lab. Their parents had used the equipment and left the Victorian era. But the apparatus would not work for Ben and Amy.

During that time, they met a villainous character: Tristan, who called himself Lord Prospero. The young man befriended them, but ultimately betrayed them and tried to kill them. He succeeded in murdering the one person who showed up to help them, a boy named Ethan, who claimed to be a prophet. After they scared Prospero off — literally driving him mad — Ben and Amy fired up

the apparatus. They fully expected to enter the arch and be transported back to the lab.

And now they had fewer answers than when they started. Why didn't the arch take them back home? Where were they now? What were they going to do? Ben stared up at the blue sky, which he could see in a broad stripe between the tops of the buildings, and he waited for an answer.

"Where did they go? They were standing right here. Why do they keep walking away?" Amy paced a few steps back and forth, as if clipped to a short leash, but her focus was still on the intersection. She stopped talking for a minute to worry her nails. Interesting — she'd never done that before. She looked about ready to explode, and Ben hoped she wouldn't do anything rash. That was usually his job, not hers.

His sister suddenly stopped and reached into a pocket on the black dress she wore. It had been the outfit she wore as a maid every afternoon, minus the white apron. With that dress, she could almost blend into any place and any time. On the other hand, Ben looked more like a beggar, dressed in mismatched rags over his modern-day clothes. At least he still had his nice flat cap.

Amy pulled out a book; the well-used Bible Ethan had given her. "He was always telling me to seek out wisdom. Let's see what his Bible says."

Ben sighed and stood up. "Amy, it's not some magic charm or genie's lamp. You can't just pull it out and ask it what to do whenever you feel like it."

“Why not?”

“Because —”

“Wait! Did you see that? Over there!” Amy turned her head toward the street.

Here we go again. “Amy ...”

Once more, she dashed out onto the cobbled street, through the swirling dust, and cut across the traffic. Had she spotted something? A familiar landmark? A face she recognized? Whatever it was had her whole attention, because she didn’t notice where her path would take her. She was headed right toward a charging carriage.

It happened so quick.

Ben’s world tilted and he felt a flash of heat. He stumbled out after her. He couldn’t get his body moving fast enough — his arms and legs wobbled as if made out of rubber.

The driver of the carriage, in a long brown coat and squat top hat, sat right behind his team of horses and clutched the leather reins. When he saw Amy, he pulled wildly on the reins and the hand brake. He wouldn’t be able to stop in time.

Ben was nearly there. Up close, the horses were immense, towers of muscle and bone. Their sheer mass, plus the tremendous weight of the carriage, would crush Amy to bits. No question about it.

Ben sprang the last few feet and gripped her arm. With a quick jerk backward, the two of them crashed down to the hard cobbles. The driver of the carriage wrestled with his team and finally got his whip loose. With two snaps,

he had enough of the horses' attention to slow them down, and then stop alongside. He turned his scruffy face toward Ben and Amy, who were still stunned, lying on the ground.

“Wotta ya too? Doft er sumfing? Geet aloon oot uf ear! Oof wif ta boof uf yews! Ya ayamin ta keel me orshes, und rooing me leeving?” The man waved his whip, as though he were going to hit them. Ben tugged Amy further back, out of the roadway, and stared in fascination as the man continued to rage at them. After several minutes, another carriage pulled up behind the first. Seeing that the way was blocked, the driver of the second one began to scream and yell at the first, cracking his whip for emphasis. A third one joined them in the shouting match, and Ben climbed to his feet, pulling Amy up after him.

“What were you doing?” He kept his voice to a fierce whisper, despite the noise in the street. He still felt the blood pounding in his ears. “You almost got yourself killed!”

Her face, frozen in shock for a long moment, finally burst like a thundercloud. “I got into such...trouble last time.” Tears spilled down her face. “Waiting and not...doing a thing. Getting comfortable...and forgetting we wanted to...go home. Ethan said...he said...” She hiccupped. “Well, I decided I wasn't going to...to wait around for things to happen. I was going to make them happen...and Mom and Dad...I thought...” She wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

“What about Mom and Dad? Did you see them? Was it them or not?”

“It might have been them. Or it might have been me ... wanting it to be them.” More tears. “I don’t know anymore.”

Just great. They had gone charging off through these streets, chasing phantoms. If they weren’t already lost before, they certainly would be now.

Ben leaned back against the nearby wall and lifted his eyes to the scrap of sky again. He knew the cost of impulsiveness and had been down that road many times. He was working on it, but now it seemed Amy needed to learn the same lessons. There was a time for impulsiveness, and a time for caution. He hoped she wouldn’t kill herself trying to figure out the difference.

Amy continued to cry quiet tears. Ben was ready to move on, plus people were staring. “Hey, come on. Don’t worry about it.” He patted her back, feeling awkward. “I thought I was supposed to make stuff happen.” He glanced toward the street again. The drivers and their carriages were still there, barricading the way. “What’s with those drivers anyway?”

Amy took a deep breath and stood up. He hoped that meant she was okay. “I don’t know. I couldn’t understand them. Could you? I’m not sure they were speaking English.” She frowned.

A covered sedan chair stopped in front of them. It was the kind of chair you saw kings or princesses riding around in, but this one was plain and undecorated. Two

burly men held the poles that supported the chair, and they scowled at anyone nearby. They wore coarse jackets and high boots coated with dust, but they didn't seem troubled by their burden. Panels and thick curtains sealed off the single passenger from the world, and only a small window allowed air and light into the space. From this dark window, a high and clear voice emerged.

"Are you well, miss? Are you injured?"

Ben could just understand the words. He was sure it was English, but it was like listening to a warped recording. The words made sense, but catching the meaning took a little more to puzzle out. Even more than deciphering the usual British accent.

The voice continued. "A beggar stopped me and pointed right to you. Then I saw you run across the way and your near tragedy with that carriage and those dreadful horses! I felt compelled to come and ask after you."

He stood and waited to see how Amy would respond to the question. She blinked, wiped away her remaining tears, and approached the chair. "We're fine. Just some bruises. But we could use your help, if you *can* help us."

The curtain parted, and a girl inched her head out from the darkness. She was about the same age as Amy, fifteen or sixteen. Her hair was a pale blonde color and her skin very fair, almost white. Ben wondered if this girl had ever seen the sun. Her face was thin, accenting her long, prominent nose, on which he saw a few freckles. From the looks of it, a good stiff wind would blow her away.

“Marry!” Her voice wasn’t nearly as frail, but had an edge to it, as if she were used to being obeyed. “You must be foreigners. Come closer. Are you visiting London? Where are you from? And why did you dash onto the street in that manner?”

Amy glanced at Ben, then down at her own dress, and finally at the girl in the chair. She gave a little nod. “Yes, ma’am, we’re not from here. I am Isabella, and this is my servant Diego. We’re from Spain.”

Ben’s jaw dropped. Isabella? Diego? What was this? His sister must have hit her head when he pulled her down. Or maybe she’d finally lost it and gone mad. And what made her think she could call *him* her servant?

CHAPTER TWO

Isabella?” the girl in the sedan chair asked, her eyes wide.

Amy wondered if she had gone too far. At her side, Ben also looked shocked. The girl knew they were foreigners — she had even said as much. But did they not look Spanish enough? Amy had picked Spain only because she had taken a year of the language in school, and if she had to fake being from another country, she figured she could handle being Spanish. She felt a stab of fear. What if this girl was fluent in the language? That could be a problem.

Amy glanced down at her dress and smoothed the front of it. Compared to what the others were wearing, her black dress seemed plain and stark. But wasn't that the Spanish style? She once read a book about a fine Spanish lady who only wore black (although she couldn't remember why), and fiction being nearly the same as fact,

she took it as gospel truth. Well, there was nothing to do but forge ahead. She finally nodded.

The girl gave her a broad smile. “Isabella! Why, such a strange happenstance! My name is Elizabeth, which is near the same in each of our lands.” She straightened in her chair. “Forgive my manners. I am Elizabeth Fitzroy, Lord Chetton’s daughter.” The words were garbled, but understandable. The last word sounded almost like ‘dofter’ to Amy’s ears. The girl continued. “He is Baron of the land near Chetton, and he also owns a house over by Westminster, where we stay now. By what means did you get here?”

Her brain now in high gear, Amy wondered how to continue this charade about being Spanish. How did they get here? She couldn’t tell Elizabeth about the apparatus, or the arch, or trying to find her parents. None of that would make any sense to this girl. But how else did people get to England?

“We ... uh, my family and I... we were on a ship ...” A ship, of course. Ben shook his head a tiny bit. She ignored him. “Heading to ...” Where? Should she say America? Had the Americas been discovered yet? She didn’t know, so she played it safe. “Heading to another land. Then a storm come up and pushed us against some rocks. The ship was sinking fast, and then another boat — I mean, ship — came along and rescued us. An English ship. So ... here we are!”

Ben stared off into the distance, probably wishing he were anywhere else but here. Elizabeth, on the contrary,

leaned her head fully out of the little window. Her eyes sparkled.

“Oh my! How fascinating! And your family? Are they here as well? Have you booked passage back to Spain?”

“No, my parents are missing. They may have made it back home, but I don’t know. We’ve been wandering around, trying to find out if they are here.” And because Elizabeth had introduced her family, Amy decided to embellish the truth a little more. “My father is, uh ... Señor de Marcos.”

“Señor? Oh, is he a Spanish Lord? Do you own a lot of land too?”

“Uh ... yes.” Amy felt a sharp kick to her ankle, but she ignored it. In for a penny, in for a pound, as the English say.

“Fascinating! That would make you Señorita Isabella, yes? What will you do now, Señorita?”

Amy took a breath and let it out slowly. Here she was, at the end of her story and at the end of her wits. She simply shook her head. “I don’t know.”

Elizabeth reached one hand out of the sedan chair and waited for Amy to take it. “But I do. You must come and sup with me. Verily, as I sit before you, my parents will welcome you, as fellow nobles who have been *ignobly* washed up on our English shores. After that, we will see about returning you home.” She let go of Amy’s hand. “Your servant may come as well, but I pray he speaks our language as well as you, else the other servants may tease him.”

“Thank you,” Amy said. “I’m sure he’ll manage.”

Elizabeth called to the two men patiently waiting by the poles of the sedan chair. “Take me home, sirs.” She beckoned Amy to follow. “I am sorry I only have the chair. I cannot ride in carriages, not anymore, not since ... well, not for a while, anyway. You must tread alongside me. But no worry — these men are decent about avoiding the worse of the filth on the streets. You will not want for patens. And if your dress becomes too sullied, well then, we shall outfit you with some of my other garments. You likely have not changed out of those clothes since your shipwreck! Marry!”

A steady stream of comments like this floated out of the chair, leading them like bread crumbs through a forest, along the streets of what may or may not have been London. Amy tried to keep up with the open window, but soon fell behind and found herself in step with Ben.

He glanced at her sideways. “So now I’m a servant? And ... Diego? What kind of name is that?”

Amy kept her voice down, in case the men bearing the chair were listening. “Sorry. It was the first thing that popped into my head. But look, now we’re going to be fed. Right? What have you done lately?”

“Saved your life, in case you forgot. But if they start asking questions again, what will you tell them? More tall tales?”

Amy felt a stab of guilt, but shook it off. “We’re trying to find Mom and Dad, in case *you* forgot. And we need to survive, don’t we? This is helping us do both, at least for

now.” She lifted her chin. “All you need to do is act like a suitable servant, and perhaps I’ll let you stay with me.”

Ben slowed down, muttering about how ridiculous it was to be a *Spanish* noble. Amy ignored him and ran to catch up with Elizabeth’s chair, where the baron’s daughter prattled on about friends she had visited, various items at the dress shop, and the recent gossip she had heard from the girls who happened to be at the shop. That must have been where she was coming from.

“It is not now as it once was.” Elizabeth confided. “There were more people in town and the city more active, the year before last.”

Amy couldn’t imagine the streets more hectic than they were now. She felt nearly claustrophobic as they squeezed through the traffic, which was crammed between the looming buildings on either side. There were people brushing past her left and right, and they were near enough where she could smell their breath and body odor.

Maybe this crowd was normal for London, though. During the Victorian era, she had spent most of her time indoors, working until her hands and feet were numb and sore. She glanced at her fingers. With any luck, she wouldn’t have to work that hard ever again.

“Much has changed for us over the last year, not just in the city. My brother James...” The baron’s daughter wound down for a moment, and Amy leaned in close to hear her better. “We still miss him. He was such fun and a boon companion. He never belittled my meager pursuits,

my pastimes, even though he was fitted as the next baron. He studied so hard for his schooling... and now ...”

Amy waited a moment, letting the facts sink in. “Is he ... dead?”

The silence following her question dragged out, and Amy wondered if she had made a mistake in asking such a thing. Finally, Elizabeth’s quiet voice came back to her. “I moved into his room. ‘Tis larger and has a better view. Mother would not let me keep anything of his in there, though — no memento of him. I would have you see my room, and the whole house, if you like.”

“Oh, I would.” She didn’t have to fake anything in her response.

Their walk took nearly twenty minutes of winding through busy and narrow streets, waiting and then squeezing through a tunnel in a long wall, and finally strolling down wider and better kept lanes. The whole time, Amy glanced back to make sure Ben was still there. As usual, he was gawking at everything, fascinated by the colorful people, the rickety buildings, and the activity all around him. He was like a kid in a toy shop — his eyes darted from one thing to another, never resting.

She called back to him at one point. “Come on, or I’ll leave you behind for good.” Her words didn’t faze him, though. She knew she’d have to go back and drag him along if he didn’t keep up. Annoying as he could be, she couldn’t leave him.

They stopped in front of a large structure, separated from the nearby buildings by small alleyways on either

side. The neighborhood was almost completely different from the one where they started. Amy could see the sky clearly, for one thing, and the avenues were much wider, if not downright palatial. The buildings were cleaner and newer, and even the cobbles in the road looked scrubbed.

Elizabeth disembarked from the sedan chair and stepped up to the massive door before them. This must be her house. From the front, Amy could see the home was built largely from brick and stone. The central part sat six feet back from the two sides, making this face look like a castle, with towers on either end. The house was four stories high. Large wood beams stuck out between plastered walls on the upper floors, reminding Amy of a fair-tale cottage. There were windows, but they were small, and each had hundreds of diamond shaped pieces of glass set in the openings.

The front door was a thick wood plank, and the baron's daughter stood patiently by it, while one of the bearers rapped on the door. When it opened, he stepped back and bowed, and Elizabeth swept into the house.

“Come along!”

Amy and Ben trailed behind her, having to feel their way into the dim interior. At the door stood a nondescript man in a dark coat and breeches. Amy assumed he must be the butler — she barely noticed him.

Elizabeth, however, turned to the man and nodded. “Rene, would you be so kind as to pay the men outside.

Have them put the chair in the barn, as I will not be needing it again today.”

“Miss Elizabeth.” The man nodded. He then looked to Amy and Ben, his eyes fixed on Ben’s horrendous set of clothes. They hadn’t had an opportunity to make him more presentable.

The baron’s daughter must have read the man’s look. “These are guests of mine, for the moment. I would like to entertain them for supper.”

“I shall inform your father.”

Amy noticed a bit of an accent in the man’s words. Another foreigner? She hoped he wasn’t Spanish.

Elizabeth led them into a large central hall and shed her outer cloak, gloves, and miniature hat. “That was Rene, the steward of the house and a good man. Father is lucky to still have him.”

Underneath her cloak, Elizabeth wore a pale dress, with lots of fabric in the skirt and lots of puff in the sleeve. The middle was cinched tight and the neckline scooped down, but not low enough to be immodest. It certainly looked old-fashioned, but nice. Her hair was piled up behind her head, and two locks slipped down on either side of her face.

“Many of our servants are new, and Rene is still teaching them how to run the house. Most of the time, confusion reigns, and it drives Father to distraction. Only Rene and Stupid William came with us from the country.”

Amy laughed. “Stupid William?”

“The boy of some distant relation. We would have left him behind with the others, but Mother insisted we keep him with us, if only to polish the boots.”

A girl in a plain brown dress, with no puffs in her sleeves, entered the room and stood by Elizabeth. The baron’s daughter dumped all her outerwear into the girl’s arms. “This is Jane. Perhaps she can help you with your toiletries or with dressing. If you are allowed to stay, that is.” She beckoned. “But come — let me show you the house. Your boy can follow as well.”

The room they were in was the great hall, which had an assortment of large and heavy furniture. A tightly woven oriental rug lay on the floor, covering most of the cold stone beneath. A fireplace large enough to walk into took most of the space along the back wall. Tapestries covered the walls, showing vague shapes doing things that Amy couldn’t quite make out, but almost certainly involved people killing or hunting large, lumbering beasts, or perhaps beasts hunting large and lumbering people.

“The Great Room is here. We soon hope to outfit it in the more current fashion, following the example of the royal court. This house was built more than a hundred years ago, so it is difficult to keep stylish. It is not as colorful as it could be. The dining room, however ...”

She led them to the left, into a bright room, with wood paneling and some sort of gold paper covering the walls. It looked very opulent, very rich. Some candles were lit here, and the flickering light made the gold sparkle. The table was large and could seat as many as sixteen without

adding more chairs or leaves. It, too, was covered with a shiny cloth. Everything was gaudy. A king could dine here and feel right at home.

“And the study, of course, off here.” A quick glimpse at a dimmed room, lined with comfortable chairs and dark paneling, smelling of smoke and alcohol.

Elizabeth breezed back through the dining room and took them across the great hall, into a smaller room on the other side of the house. In here, there were lots of places to sit, several side tables, a handful of ornaments (including a large globe off to one side), and a long, decorated box on legs. The walls were a shocking, almost electric blue color. If she stared at them long enough, Amy was sure the color would give her a headache. Again, the floor was covered by a tightly-woven rug. Amy guessed it might be a parlor or sitting room, but never confirmed that fact. Their guide opened her mouth to speak, only to be interrupted by another maid.

“Her Ladyship would speak with you.” Amy could barely hear her, between all the muttering and curtsying the poor girl did.

“In a moment,” was Elizabeth’s reply. The maid curtsied again and fled from the room. Elizabeth shrugged and beckoned them over to another door, which opened onto a deep hallway. “This is the East Wing, where the family has rooms. The kitchens are down on this floor. And my room is up these stairs.”

If the other side of the house — Amy assumed it would be the West Wing — was like this one, then the

whole house would be in the shape of an “H.” Based on what they had seen so far, Amy guessed the house had nearly twenty rooms, including spaces at the top for servants. She also saw stairs heading down. Were there basement rooms as well? Wine cellar, perhaps?

“Shall we ascend?”

The stairs were constructed from highly polished wood, but were narrow and steep. They emerged onto a landing which led to a long hall in one direction, punctuated by doors, and a large gallery in the other. Elizabeth did not pause here, but continued up the stairs. Before she took another step though, one of the doors flew open and a word stopped her.

“Elizabeth, bide a moment!” The voice was not loud, but still commanding. After a few seconds, a woman emerged from a room and simpered down the hall toward them. She wore an even more puff-sleeved and tight-waisted dress. Her face was ghastly — pale and pasty, with scarlet lips, pink rouge and blue eye-shadow. It looked like a three-year-old had put on the makeup. A three-year-old who only had a vague notion of where makeup was supposed to go. Amy bit her lip to keep from laughing.

“What does this mean? What kept you? And wherefore do you bring these people in this part of the house?” Even with such a soft voice, her tone carried all the weight of motherly authority. Amy noticed she kept her hands folded in front of her and lifted her eyes no higher than Elizabeth’s chin.

Elizabeth bobbed a curtsey. “Your Ladyship, this is Señorita Isabella, recently abandoned on our shores after bravely surviving a shipwreck, where she lost her entire family, who own land in Spain and are of noble birth, and she is in sore need of our help —”

Her Ladyship raised her hand and turned, ever so slightly, in Amy’s direction. She stared at Amy’s shoes, a frown creasing her stony face. “They do not seem of noble character. Her dress and her hair. And this boy, he cannot claim nobility as well. Even the urchins on the street are better dressed than he is.”

Elizabeth sighed. “He is a page boy, Mother. And Isabella has been through a terrible ordeal. What you see here is her sole outfit!”

“It must have been a travelling dress, as drab as it is. Surely you have better at home?”

Amy stared at her, baffled by the woman’s timid manner and unveiled sarcasm. She didn’t answer right away, not until her new friend nudged her. “Um... yes, ma’am.”

“Your Ladyship, if you please.” Her frown deepened. “And no manners as well. You should send for your own attire, and then perhaps go harass some other home.”

Elizabeth clasped her hands against her chest. “Oh, Mother, please? Can I keep her as a waiting woman? You know what society has been like of late. It is severely lacking in town. And you made me leave Oso at the country house.” She put her lip out. “I have no one to keep my company. Even the cats are gone.”

After a moment of contemplation, Her Ladyship softened to Elizabeth's plea. That was a shock. There must be something going on here that Amy didn't understand.

"She may stay, until her situation can be remedied." Still gazing just below her daughter's face, she nodded. "That is, providing your father has no objection to the matter. You know how he can be, sometimes. But she cannot come to supper dressed as she is. Prithee find something more suitable for her to wear. One of your older gowns, mayhap." Her Ladyship sniffed, and then glided off to other, unknown parts of the house.

Given new purpose and now permission by her mother, Elizabeth rushed them through the rest of the tour. Amy and Ben saw numerous bedrooms, most no bigger than closets, servant spaces, a small craft room, the kitchen in the back corner, a cramped and dim chapel in the basement, the gardens in the back, a small barn beyond the gardens, and other rooms Amy couldn't identify.

Finally, Elizabeth deposited them in a room on the west side of the house, on the third floor. It held little more than the four-poster bed, a washstand, and a standing screen. A single window — like the others, divided into a hundred diamond panes — looked out over the garden area below.

"Wait here, and I shall return." She vanished out the door.

Exhausted by the turn of events and foot-sore from chasing after Elizabeth's sedan chair and the whirlwind

tour of the house, Amy collapsed onto the bed. The mattress crunched underneath her, and she leapt back up. She lifted the corner of the mattress and discovered leather straps stretched across the wooden frame. Straw mattress and leather supports. It was no better than her bed as a maid during the Victorian era. So much for the benefits of hooking up with nobility.

Meanwhile, Ben stood gazing out the window, probably daydreaming. Amy lowered herself on the bed and asked him the question running through her mind. “Any ideas about where we are?”

“It sure feels like London. The people still speak English — well, sort of. Walking here, I could see that it’s a big place, and crowded. I’d have to see the river to be sure. But you noticed, didn’t you? There are still no bathrooms in this house, no toilets and such.”

“And the mattresses are no better. But the dresses are fancier, and the men are wearing hose and those short pants — are those called breeches?”

“I wouldn’t know, and you’ll never see me wearing one of those outfits. Never.”

“So if it is London, then the real question is *when* are we?” She sighed. “I wish we had a newspaper or something to look at. That’s how I found the date last time.”

Ben turned in toward the room. “I did see some posters while we were walking here. So I guess they have printing, at least. When was the printing press invented?”

“A long time ago.” Amy stood, walked over to the standing screen and glanced behind it. “Here’s your

toilet. A padded box, with the chamber pot inside, I'm sure." She made a face. "So what did the posters say?"

"Weird stuff. Warnings of some kind, about a 'vivitation' or something like that. It was hard to read quickly, lots of spelling mistakes and words with way too many 'F's in them."

"Well, that doesn't help." Amy trailed her hand along the bed and up one of the four posts. "Do you wish sometimes that we had studied history a little more? I mean, if we knew enough history, we could look around and say, 'It's the year 1492, because of this invention, or this style of house, or this kind of dress ...'"

"Or the smell in the streets, or the air quality."

"Well, maybe. The point is we wouldn't have to wonder. We'd just know."

"So what?" Ben started pacing the room. "That wouldn't help us, would it? If we knew it was 1492, then what? How does that help us find Mom and Dad? How do we even know they are here?"

"They must be. We saw them dressed up, just like those people on the streets. Dad was even wearing hose and breeches —"

Ben stopped. "No he wasn't"

Amy grabbed a pillow and threw it at him. "Yes he was. And Mom was wearing a dress with those hideous puffy sleeves."

"But when we went to the Victorian time, they were already gone. We spent all that time looking for them,

and they weren't even there. What if they've already left *this* place?" He bent and picked up the pillow. "Then what do we do?"

"If they left, then they left through the apparatus and the arch, just like last time. We look for the arch, then we follow them, chase after them, until we get back home or catch up with them."

Ben nodded. "You're right about the arch. If Mom and Dad are here, then they would be looking for it too, wouldn't they? Even Ethan said there was something about that arch."

Amy fell silent at the mention of their lost friend. Poor Ethan. He had sacrificed himself to let them escape from Tristan and his calibans. He had given them the chance they needed to get home. If he knew that they hadn't gotten there yet...

"But even if Mom and Dad found the arch, what about the apparatus?"

"Of what apparatus do you speak?"

Amy snapped her head toward the door. It was open. Elizabeth and one of the maids stood there. How long had they been there, and how much had they heard?

CHAPTER THREE

Elizabeth stayed at the door, arms folded and a frown creasing her face. She waited. Beside her, the maid she had introduced as Jane staggered under the mass of material she carried in her arms, a veritable rainbow of dresses.

Amy once again racked her brain for some excuse, some way of getting them out of more trouble. She tried to evade the issue first:

“Apparatus? Is it an English word?”

“Yes, it is. A machine, or a device.”

So much for evasion. Amy skirted closer to the truth. “My father was working on a device — in fact he brought it with him. I was wondering what happened to it, when the ship sank. If it shows up here in England, then we’ll know that others were rescued, wouldn’t you think?”

The baron’s daughter brightened. “Your tale grows more fascinating all the time! I will get the whole story

from you yet — perhaps you could tell us at dinner. But your father owned a peculiar apparatus, which he brought with him on the ship? What does this famous apparatus do?”

Amy chewed her lip. “I don’t know. But it was important to him, and he would never leave it behind, uh, unless he had to.”

She hoped Elizabeth hadn’t heard any more than what Ben said about the apparatus, but those hopes were dashed when the girl asked: “What does an arch have to do with your father’s apparatus?”

Amy glared at Ben, willing him to speak up and help her. But he shook his head, either because he wouldn’t help, or because he saw how the truth was stretching thinner and thinner.

She moved toward the window, next to Ben. “I think one of the pieces is shaped that way. Diego here would know more. He was... a favorite of my father’s, and apprenticed to... uh, the worker who built the device.” That would serve him right. If Elizabeth asked any more questions about the arch or the apparatus, then Ben could answer her. He shook his head again and went back to staring outside.

Elizabeth seemed satisfied. She pulled Jane into the room and tugged dresses off the stack. “Time to set aside those weeds and clothe yourself as a proper English lady. I do not know what you are accustomed to in your dress, but I have several things to choose from. We will start with what you will wear tonight, and ensure a flattering

fit.” She then lifted a bundle from the stack of dresses. “And I found attire for your page boy as well. Father would never stand for him wearing...ahem...looking like that.”

Amy elbowed her brother and he took the bundle, looking none too happy about it. She nudged him again, and he mumbled, “Thank you, Miss Elizabeth.”

Taking his arm, Amy steered him toward the door. “And I expect to see you wearing it by tonight.” As she pulled the door closed, she whispered to him, “Find someplace to change and see what else you can find out. I think I’ll be stuck in here for a while.” Ben sighed and wandered off.

For the next hour, Amy tried on dress after dress, while Elizabeth gave her a full education on the layers and layers of clothes the English wore. The full ensemble was near suffocating, even without the corset Elizabeth kept insisting she wear.

“The fashionable set insists on corseting to retain the proper shape.” The girl held up a stiff tube of fabric, with what looked like vertical ribs running through it.

“I’m nothing but a stick,” Amy said. “It wouldn’t help.” She hoped that would be the end of the discussion.

The rest of the outfit made her look nice, though. She normally wasn’t one for dressing up, but Elizabeth’s enthusiasm was contagious.

The baron’s daughter took a lock of Amy’s hair in her hand and shook her head. “It is a shame you don’t have more hair. You could be a true beauty.” She quickly

released the lock and pulled her hand away. “Did they cut it off because you were ill?”

“No. It’s fashionable where I come from. All the girls keep their hair short.”

“That must be a trial to keep it cut so neatly. Did your mother cut it, or one of your maids?”

For a moment, Amy felt nervous. Her hair must be quite a sight. Not only short, unlike everyone else here, but also perfectly cut by scissors. Surely they had scissors, didn’t they? She thought about disguising her hair somehow, pulling it back, or up, but it was too late to do anything about it. She hoped Elizabeth would chalk it up to another oddity of the Spanish.

For her dinner outfit, they settled on a deep brown dress that Amy liked and felt comfortable in. It had long sleeves, minimal puffage at the shoulders, and medium scoopage at the neck. The dress opened in front, showing the petticoat underneath, but not the underskirt underneath that. Amy started sweating the moment all the layers were on.

Elizabeth escorted Amy downstairs into the great hall. Several maids were in the dining room, setting out the fancy plates and silver, but no one else was around. Just a few days ago, centuries in the future, Amy had been one of the maids setting out the plates and silver at the Berkham house, preparing for the big dinner party there. Things had certainly changed since then.

After a few minutes of standing, with no one else showing up, Elizabeth pulled Amy into the electric blue

sitting room on the other side of the great hall. Amy meandered over to the globe and took a closer look, while Elizabeth unlocked and opened up the decorated box, and then pulled a bench near.

Amy could make neither heads nor tails of the globe. “Is this the world? Where are the continents?”

Music erupted from the box as Elizabeth played a complex tune. “Do you play the virginal?” She had folded back the top and side to reveal keys to a compact piano. Amy wondered if it were a real one, because it sounded tinny, just like a little toy piano.

“No, not really.” She had taken lessons for a year, but not much had stuck with her, and she didn’t want to embarrass herself by trying to play. She continued to study the globe and finally realized it showed the stars in the sky, not the geography of the earth.

Engrossed in the globe, Amy didn’t know Ben had entered the room until Elizabeth stopped playing and said: “Oh, much better. Now you look the proper page boy.”

Ben squirmed at the door, turning redder by the minute. He was decked out in a light brown coat and breeches, a pale shirt...and dark hose. Amy wanted to laugh, but smothered her reaction with a cough.

Elizabeth’s head snapped toward Amy, concern written on her face.

Amy waved her hand. “I’m fine.” Well, at least Ben fit in better. She hoped he had burned the rags he’d been wearing.

The other girl stood and closed the lid on the virginal. “Now, Señorita Isabella, would you prefer your boy attend you during supper, or would you have him join the servants?”

“Well...he’s more my father’s boy than mine.” She thought she’d make it up to Ben, for having him wear those clothes. “I was thinking — I mean, I was hoping he could eat with us.”

That thought must not have occurred to Elizabeth. She blinked. “I do not believe Father would mind. Just this once. Especially because he is another witness to the shipwreck — remember, you must tell us all about it.”

“Oh, yes. He can add just as much to the story as I could.” Ben gave her a dirty look.

“There is Father now. Let me speak to him about supper.” Elizabeth swished through the door, chasing after a large figure who had just come down the stairs.

Amy sat down, opened the virginal, and played a few experimental notes. Ben loomed over her.

“This is getting out of hand, don’t you think? It’s bad enough you fibbed about our names and where we’re from, but now you’re going to make up an entire story about a shipwreck and rescue. What do you know about ships? Anything?”

“You can always help me.”

“No way. You got yourself into this mess. You figure a way out.”

Amy stood and slammed the lid shut. “What was I supposed to do? Tell her we were going home, but the

stupid apparatus sent us here instead? Tell her we're from the future, and we don't even know what year we're in now? That would be the fastest way to the mental hospital, that's for sure. Or maybe they burned crazy people at the stake, did you ever think about that?"

"Fine. You win. You did the right thing. Happy now? But now we need to find the arch. We need to find out what year it is. We need to stop playing dress-up and get busy."

Her face burned with his accusations, and she snapped back at him: "Watch it, page boy. I'm the nobleman's daughter, remember? I can have you dismissed."

Amy lifted her skirts and bustled out of the room. In the great hall, Elizabeth spotted her and pulled her toward her father.

"Father, this is Señorita Isabella, daughter of Señor de Marcos, a Spanish Lord. Señorita Isabella, this is Humphrey Fitzroy, Lord Chetton."

As she had been taught at the Berkham house, Amy curtsied and bowed her head. "How do you do, m'lord."

He nodded in return. "Señorita Isabella." He was a large, round man, with a watery voice. He wore one of those ridiculous wigs with long and curling locks, and the top poofing up a good four inches. He didn't look happy wearing it — maybe his wife made him put it on — or maybe he always looked perturbed. She could ask Elizabeth about him later.

"I hear my daughter wants to keep you as a waiting

woman. What are your skills?" He stared down his nose at her, as if targeting her forehead.

"Beg your pardon, sir?"

"Your Lordship," Elizabeth whispered.

"Sorry... Your Lordship."

"Skills," he continued. "Accomplishments. How well do you speak English? Do you play an instrument, the harp or virginal? Paint or draw? You must embroider, or some such female craft. Of certain, the Spanish must have occupations for their women folk."

"Um... I speak English..."

Elizabeth smiled at her. "Do you see, My Lord, what she lacks? I must instruct her on the courtly values we English prize and train her up in our ways! Instead of her teaching me, I can be the instructor and she, my task."

Great. Amy was about to become Elizabeth's pet project.

Lord Chetton cleared his throat with a rumble. "Likely you only want a companion for conversation, nothing more."

"Father! I am in earnest..."

"As am I, but prithee — give me a moment to consider the notion."

The steward, Rene, came limping into the great hall. Had he been limping before? Maybe she hadn't noticed, or maybe he just twisted his ankle running up and down those stairs, fetching things for his masters. He announced: "Your Lordship, the supper is prepared."

At the last moment, Lady Chetton slipped into the hall, and they filed toward the dining room. Lord Chetton scowled at Ben as they sat, but didn't say a word. Her Ladyship sat at his right hand and kept her eyes fixed on the floor. Elizabeth sat on his left, Amy next to her, and Ben across the table, next to Lady Chetton. The rest of the long table was barren and unlit.

Amy hadn't eaten all day, and she was looking forward to a big meal. As a servant in the Berkham house, there was never enough food, and she never had time to properly enjoy it. Dining with nobility, she expected to eat a lavish dinner. But she was surprised at what the servants brought out to eat.

There were six or seven different dishes to choose from, but they appeared to be leftovers and were served cold. There was half a rabbit, some sort of soup, another dish that looked like a fish stew, a slab of beef, and a plate of cheeses, nuts and bread. Vegetables peppered each platter, tucked in on the side. By the flickering candles, the meal looked almost dismal.

"Oh, you must try the stewed carp." Elizabeth scooped some onto her own plate. "It was ever so good this afternoon." It wasn't as much a new meal as it was reminiscing about a good one they had enjoyed earlier in the day. Very strange.

But her lofty expectations gave way to her hunger, and she dug in.

Midway through the supper — after each of the dishes had been sampled and parceled out, and after several

attempts to jumpstart conversations — Elizabeth prompted Amy to tell “the story of the shipwreck.”

“Quite so,” Lord Chetton rumbled. “My daughter tells me there is a wild tale of tragedy and rescue connected with this whole business.”

Amy sighed. Now, where should she begin? She cleared her throat and set down her utensils. “We were travelling from Spain.”

“Yes?” Elizabeth smiled in encouragement.

“My father has land in a far off place, I can’t remember exactly where, but you can only get there by boat — I mean, ship. He needed to go there and take care of some things —”

“Is it in the New World?”

Oh good — they had discovered the new world. It wasn’t 1492 after all.

“Yes, somewhere around there,” she continued. “So we left, about two weeks ago, and just started out, when a big storm came up, and knocked the ship back and forth. They couldn’t keep it stable, so the ship drifted in proximity to the shore, and encountered some rocks. Then the ship’s hull was breeched...” She felt like she was narrating a Star Trek episode. “And we had to get in the escape — I mean, lifeboats.”

“Was it stirring? Was it thrilling?” Clearly Elizabeth was waiting for the exciting parts of the story, and it wasn’t happening yet.

“Well, I guess so...” Amy looked over at Ben, silently pleading for help.

Everyone waited. Finally, Ben cleared his throat and nearly shouted:

“It was exhilarating! The waves pounding, pounding, and the wind whipping and thrashing the rigging. The captain had lashed everything down, reefed the sails and battened the hatches, but still the storm pushed our little vessel along, straight into the teeth of the rocky headlands.

“And oh! The noise! Grinding and crashing and smashing! Wood and rope and metal flying all over the place — it was a disaster. Oh, the humanity! Half the crew washed overboard at the first blow, the other half huddled under what was left, praying for a miracle.

“The captain finally loosened the long boats from their hoists, and dropped the boats over the side. Then it was every man for himself, as we thrashed and paddled toward the boats, the water chilling our bones, and the wind making us all old men, blind and deaf. We struggled on board, just my — I mean, my lady and I.

“Other sailors were quick to board, but there was no sign of her parents. Two other long boats floated nearby, but the blackness of the water and sky prevented us from seeing where they were, and the roar of the ocean drowned out the calls we made into that void around us. We got no response — no sign, no sound, no clue if her parents had climbed aboard one of the boats, or had been claimed by the sea.

“By morning, ours was the only boat in sight.”

The others in the room were riveted. Ben popped a piece of cheese in his mouth and sat back.

Amy sighed and relaxed as well. “Two days later, we were picked up by an English ship, heading for London. But we still don’t know if anyone on the other boats survived, or if they were rescued, or if they made it home.”

Elizabeth’s eyes shone in the flickering light. “I *knew* there was a tale in it. How marvelous! You must come and recite this tale to the girls in town, and you must tell my future husband all about it as well, when he arrives. They will be thrilled to hear it. Quite the tragedy.”

“Future husband?” Amy didn’t think Elizabeth was old enough to be married. “You’re engaged?”

“Oh, yes. For ages. He plans on living with us and taking over father’s estate. He has such a head for business and has many plans for the country house. Of course, James would have been —”

“Enough!” Lord Chetton pounded the table. “We will not discuss such matters at this table.”

“But my lord, we were only talking about Lord Blackhall —”

“Yes, my daughter. And you may discuss how handsome he is, or how wealthy, but not any subject regarding the male lineage or inheritance of this household. You are forbidden to speak of it. Do I have your understanding?”

“Yes, my lord.”

The rest of the meal passed in awkward silence, and after a scant ten minutes, both Lord and Lady Chetton

stood and took their leave. Amy and the others stayed at the table, nibbling on what was left of supper in the dim light. Rene came in at one point and stoked the fire, but otherwise the servants left them alone.

Elizabeth turned to Amy. "I have been thinking. If one English ship rescued you, then perhaps another rescued the others from your ship as well. What was the name of your vessel?"

"I think it was ... the *Enterprise*?"

Ben's head dropped to the table with a thunk. Amy wanted to kick him under the table, but she didn't think her leg would reach.

Elizabeth's face paled. "Is your page boy well?"

"He's a little off in the head, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, yes." She visibly relaxed. "He and Stupid William should get along passing fair. I have conceived a plan: your boy can go down to the docks and inquire about survivors or any word on the *Enterprise*. Stupid William can go along as a guide."

"That's an excellent idea." Amy thought Ben could also look for the arch or other clues to their parents' whereabouts. Both of them had seen a ship in the background when they caught sight of their parents through the arch. Perhaps they were somewhere in the area around the docks.

"And while he is gone, you may write home, in hopes that someone may have made it there, and are concerned for you. I can provide stationery and pen for you. I do not

read Spanish, but I would love to hear the whole letter as you pen it. How exciting!”

Amy’s heart sank. First their names, then the whole shipwreck story, and now she had to fabricate — in Spanish — a letter to her fictional family in Spain. And she had to read it to Elizabeth. How much worse could it get? She looked to Ben again, but he simply shrugged. He probably wasn’t going to help her any more, the monster.