



THE
Other
SIDE
of THE
Hollow Oak

By Anna C.

The Other Side of the Hollow Oak

By Clara C.

Prologue

The tree was about eighty feet tall. Its trunk was a dark chestnut brown. It was thick and as sturdy as a steel pole, or sturdier. It had a crack running vertically up the tree into the sky. There were markings along the side that made it look like the tree had been pulled apart. Or tried to anyway. Its limbs reached high into the sky, and the leaves trembled during storms. It was a mighty and majestic tree. Extraordinary, but put in an ordinary place and meant to stay that way. The mystery was extreme to the one that put it there. All he knew, was that it had to be planted in a safe place away from all magic. Somewhere no one would know what it was or what it would become. But none of the Secret Keepers could prevent the future or change the past no matter how they tried. The connection was made and it was all the Secret Keepers could do to keep it hidden.

Title

Misty and her little sister played on the tire swing that hung from a sturdy branch of the ancient oak in their backyard. It was Misty's favorite tree. She loved all trees, but this one had a mysterious something about the way one of its branches curved into a question mark and how the knots on the heavy trunk made it look like a smiling face, but the most intriguing thing of all was the long crack it had. Vertically running along about four feet and had little markings on the sides like the rungs of a ladder. The crack used to scare Misty when she was little but now she was older and she enjoyed running her finger over the bumps the small ladder-like markings

made. Once she had dreamed that she had climbed the tree all the way to the top but when she got there, there was forest everywhere she looked and her house was gone.

Misty's little sister Lola was yelling at her to push her on the tire swing.

Misty sighed, "Okay, I'll push you."

"NOT HIGH!" Lola shrieked.

"Oh yes." Her sister replied with a playfully malicious smile. She started to underdog the swing into the air.

Lola squealed and kicked her feet back and forth. Then she started to bawl. "STOP IT!" wailed Lola.

The girl's mother came outside when she heard the ruckus. Misty caught Lola in mid-swing. Lola jumped off and rushed to her mother's side.

"Misty," she said, "What happened?"

Misty hesitated. "I pushed Lola on the swing too high."

Her mother sighed, "You know she doesn't like that."

Misty nodded and stared at her feet. "She's such a scaredy-cat!" She retorted.

"You were too when you were six" Lola sniffed.

Misty rolled her eyes at her little sister.

"Now go play," their mother said gently.

Lola scowled at Misty and Misty gave her a hug and tickled her in the ribs.

"Do you want me to tell you a story?" Misty asked enthusiastically.

Lola shouted her approval and the two sat down next to the old oak tree.

Misty started, "Once upon a time, there was an old oak tree just like this one. There was a tire swing tied to a big branch and there was a nest high up nestled in a wiry limb. Can you guess how many eggs were in it?"

"Three!" Lola guessed.

"Nope," Misty continued, "There were five."

Lola squirmed, enthralled.

"And there was a proud mama bird. She was so excited for her eggs to hatch. She waited, and waited, and waited for them to pop their heads out of the shells. Finally the day came. She

heard a tiny scratching noise. And suddenly five little dragons poked through the eggs and flew away.”

Lola opened her mouth and was just about to say something, when an ear piercing CRACK! rang through the air. No one else seemed to notice. The girls were frozen to their seats. A few minutes went by before Misty broke the silence.

“What was that!?” she asked, frightened and stunned.

Lola put her head on Misty’s lap and sniffled. Misty felt sympathy for her. She was afraid of the tree when she was younger too, and whatever that was, it definitely came from the old oak.

“You stay right here, okay?” Misty said to Lola, her voice shaking. She walked around the tree twice before something caught her eye. The split in the elderly tree had a small amount of light seeping through from the other side. Wherever *that* was. Then another loud splitting noise came and the crack was open wide. Lola came running to her sister who tried to comfort her but each was just as scared as the other. Misty took a peek into the gap in the tree. The light almost blinded her and she couldn’t see much. She backed up and blinked.

Even Lola was squinting. “It’s bright in there.” She observed.

“Yeah, it is.” Her sister agreed. They both stared at the unearthly tear in the trunk of the tree for another while.

This time Lola broke the silence. “Can we go in?”

Misty was a little surprised to hear this because her sister was usually frightened of the mysterious mark. “NO!” Misty yelled. “And besides, I’m not small enough to go through.” Misty wouldn’t admit it, but she was a little jealous of her sister’s size.

Lola gave Misty puppy dog eyes, and Misty scowled at her. At this the gap glowed brighter and another loud snap came from the tree. The crack was now large enough for the two of them to fit through at the same time. Misty shuddered. It was as if the tree was urging them to walk into it. All of a sudden, Misty felt a feeling wash over her like water. She was instantly very drowsy. She heard continuous popping noises, but they were drowned out by a ringing in her ears. She felt small hands around her waist trying to pull her backward but she didn’t care. She walked toward the tree and the hands fell from her waist. She climbed up the tree to the largest part in the crack. She put her fingers around it and pulled herself through. Suddenly everything was black. Misty felt like she was riding a horse. She was bumping up and down and yet, it felt like a particularly smooth ride. She rolled over and started falling. She hit the ground hard and her eyes opened. She gasped. The sight almost literally took her breath away. All around, there were slabs of rough stones sticking out of the huge mouth of a deep vertical tunnel. She had fallen a good ways before she rolled off a more menacing drop and woke up. She realized that the bumping she felt was her falling further down the seemingly endless pit.

Then her brain realized exactly what was happening. *Where am I? Where is Lola?* She thought. *Why did I climb through? WHERE IS LOLA?!* Panicked, she scrambled up the staircase of rock ledges onto a wide ledge overlooking the tunnel.

“Lola!” she called and continued to climb upward. She was gasping for breath when she finally reached the top. There she saw Lola mumbling in a state between unconsciousness and consciousness. Several large rocks were piled behind her. Lola said something slightly recognizable but still unintelligible. Then she sat up. Misty saw her eyes expand to almost double their sizes. Her mouth was an O shape. She started to stand up but tripped and fell back down. *She must be very dizzy* Misty thought, but something made her think that wasn’t the case.

She shook off the feeling and said to her sister, “Are you okay?”

“Uh huh.” She said and tried to get up again but couldn’t.

Misty scowled in concentration. She walked behind Lola and found that a considerably small rock was pinning her skirt down.

“That’s odd,” Misty said to herself. The rock shouldn’t have been holding Lola’s skirt to the floor with such heaviness. She tried lifting it. It didn’t budge. Misty growled, frustrated with the rock. She gave it a kick. She tried to kick it again but accidentally kicked her sister in the side.

“Ow!” Lola cried.

“Sorry!” Misty said rudely.

“Umm... can I tr-” Lola started to ask but Misty interrupted.

“NO!” Misty yelled at her timid looking sister. “I don’t want you messing anything up.”

Misty tugged and pulled. With a final grunt she gave the rock a yank. When the rock didn’t give in, she gave up and sat on the ground. She was almost in tears with frustration. She heard Lola trying to lift the rock and snarled at her, “It isn’t going to work.” Then she heard a scrape and whirled around, her mouth open and eyes wide. “You did it.” She said softly.

Lola grinned, but that didn’t make Misty any less annoyed with her. She grabbed her sister’s hand and stormed down.

“Where are we going?” Lola asked.

“Where do you *THINK?*” Misty snapped. Lola shrugged innocently and Misty’s irritation grew.

“We,” she replied her voice rising with every word, “Are going to go down this cave here and **FIND A WAY BACK!**” her voice echoed around the cave. Then rocks started to tumble

and the stone the girls were standing on gave a tremendous lurch. They started to slide. Lola and Misty lost their balance and sat down hard still speeding downward at the fastest rate Misty could ever imagine. The rocks around them started to slow as the light grew dimmer. Within a few minutes, Misty and Lola couldn't see a thing. They weren't coming to a stop anytime soon but they were sliding noticeably slower.

Misty was starting to feel sick due to her nervousness and because of the bumps they were going over. Lola was clinging to her like a barnacle while Misty held a hand over the side of the rock trying to slow it down. Then out of the blue, Misty realized the obvious. She seized Lola and yanked the two of them off of the rock sled, and left it still heading downward. Misty lay on her back and caught her breath. "Are you okay?" she called to Lola, and she made a small noise to tell Misty that she was okay and to give her a picture of where she was. At that moment Misty realized how cold the air was. Then she felt the dirt. It felt familiar yet completely foreign. Misty could not put her finger on where she had felt this before. The dirt felt extremely soft, slimy even. Lola coughed behind her. Misty looked over. There was a small amount of light now where before there wasn't any. She could see the palm of her hand in front of her face and a silhouette of her little sister if she looked closely. The light grew. Misty looked around. She saw that Lola was only a few feet away. Then she saw the dirt. There was moss everywhere. The moss was murky green and super spongy. She poked it and heard a small squelch. Then she stood up. And looked around the light still increasing its brightness all the time. It was bright enough now to see trees all around and huge brightly colored birds with curled feathers on their tails in a dark blue sky. There were no clouds but a sun was high in the air not seeming to give off any light or heat. Lola walked up behind Misty.

"Come on," Misty said.

"Where?"

"I'm not sure."

Misty started walking holding her sister's hand and trailing her along. Misty had no idea what they were going to do. The urge to explore was huge but Misty knew they had to get home soon. They walked around, Misty thinking hard but Lola was practically dragging her sister backward amazed at the sights. Misty then noticed that it was getting dark again. She stopped in her tracks.

"Lola, we have to stop. It's getting dark and cold, and we won't be able to walk at night." Misty said. She looked around and found a big tree. She sat down, leaning against the trunk. Lola sat down next to her sister and cuddled on her lap. She fell asleep almost instantly, but Misty had a harder time. She was thinking so hard. She had just climbed through a tree, survived a rock slide, and was now sitting under a tree in a magical world with no visible way of getting back home. But she was exhausted. She felt her eyes getting heavy and fell asleep.

When she woke up there was the strange cold sun in the deep blue blanket-like sky. It was still barely light enough to see and slightly hazy. She sat up. The air was warmer than yesterday. Some clouds were in the sky. Their wispy green tint made Misty think of poison. A swift breeze ran through Misty's copper brown hair and she sighed. The breeze was relaxing.

Then she heard a squeak and a scratching noise. She whirled around, startled and searching for the source of the sound but she couldn't see anything besides her that could have possibly made the noise. But then she heard it again. The same small squeak. Then a thud. She looked at the ground straining her eyes to see anything moving. She hesitantly lowered herself closer to a small pile of spiny, thin leaves and crouched there. At that moment, a tiny gray creature that could fit in the palm of Misty's hand, scrambled from the pile.

She fell backward and landed on her hands. The creature scrambled up her leg and stared her in the face. Misty stared back with open eyes and mouth. The little mouse creature lifted its long foot and scratched behind his small leaf shaped ear with long clawed toes. The little thing was fuzzy with pinkish skin showing underneath. It had a small snout with a tiny nose that looked extremely soft. The creature had huge green eyes that were mostly pupil. Misty was immediately in love with the adorable magical mouse. She gingerly picked him up and stroked his small back. His fuzz was the softest thing Misty had ever experienced. She was almost entranced by the animal.

She was sidetracked by her sister yawning. Misty set the small creature back on the ground gently, but quickly, and rushed to her sister and shook her until she was fully awake.

"Wake up Lola!" Misty whispered. "I have to show you something amazing!"

Lola sat up groggily, "What?" she asked.

Misty grabbed her hand and pulled her up.

Lola blinked and looked around. Misty dragged her sister over to where she set her new friend. Misty picked him up and let Lola get a good look at the thing on her palm. Her eyes got enormous and she made to grab the creature from her sister's palm but Misty protected the creature from Lola.

"Don't! You have to be gentle with him." Misty shouted.

"Well, can I hold him?" Lola asked.

"If you're gentle."

"Okay."

Misty set the small animal in the palm of her sister's hand.

"What do you think we should name him?" Lola asked. Misty hadn't thought about this yet.

"Maybe bunny," Lola suggested.

"No..." Misty replied.

"Fuzzy?"

"No..."

"Jumpy!"

"No! That's a ridiculous name," Misty and Lola argued over the name for a few minutes before they saw that the little creature had jumped out of Lola's hand and was writing a word in the dirt. Written in miniscule spidery letters was the word;

Tiyielunderither

Lola made a confused face and tried to read the word. "Tie Lundy writer?" she sounded out. She was only six and still had some trouble with words but Misty didn't blame her for not being able to read this one.

"It's Tie I Looned writher." She read for Lola, "I guess we'll call him Tiyie."

"Ok" Lola agreed. The two of them stood up.

"So now what?" Misty wondered aloud. "How are we going to get home?"

Suddenly, Tiyie pointed eastward and started to scamper in the direction that he pointed in. The girls looked at each other and took off following Tiyie through the elderly trees. They had been running for about ten minutes and Misty thought her lungs were going to burst. She wanted to stop but she didn't want to lose their little friend. She kept going but she knew that she would have to stop soon and that Lola would too. Luckily they saw Tiyie stop ahead of them. Lola caught up and Misty got there a few seconds later.

As the two sisters caught their breath, they started to take in their surroundings. The air was more humid than where they had slept and the forest was denser. There were gray stones all around and a square one in the center of a small clearing almost completely shaded by a canopy of thick oily leaves that reminded Misty of two dimensional green bananas. There were also several circles of coral colored mushrooms. They seemed to be pulsing with light and the air was wet around them. Misty actually saw dewdrops on her skin which made her cold. She and her sister had only worn short-sleeved shirts because it was Summer back home. Tiyie was stopped on top of the square-shaped rock and was fingering it and poking it with his long delicate feet here and there. As he did this Misty thought she could see the leaves pulling together and making the area darker. It was also getting quieter. Misty could tell because she could now hear Tiyie's delicate claws on the stone tapping away. KLUNK. Misty turned to see that the stone was sinking further into the dirt and started to glow exactly the shade of the mushrooms. Misty then realized that this place seemed to be familiar. The way the leaves

shook in the wind and the ferns and trees and how the limbs were placed all looked exactly the same as somewhere else.

As if she could read Misty's mind, Lola said, "Have we been here Misty?"

Misty looked sideways at her sister, "I feel like that too. Like in a dream or something." Then it hit her.

Her dream! Of course! The dream she had where she climbed to the top of the giant oak tree and had suddenly been in a forest and she couldn't see her house. Then Misty thought, *Was I telling the future or something? Why did Lola have the same dream as me? Why did the tree open after all these years? How did the tree get in our back yard? Does anyone else know about it?* The questions were racing through Misty's head and by Lola's scowl Misty could tell that the same swirl was upon her sister.

"Why did you take us here?" Misty asked. "What does a glowing stone have to do with us getting home?" Inside her head Misty knew that it could have everything to do with them getting home. Anything was possible.

Tiyie pointed to the bright stone. It now looked like there was pink fire burning under it. The light was getting brighter. Misty walked over to get a closer look and dragged her sister behind her. The stone disappeared completely and Misty could see a blurry picture of her back yard. She missed it terribly. All of a sudden the stone was back with no light pouring through and everything went pitch black. Night had fallen while they were in the clearing. Misty's eyes adjusted and she found her sister with her hands on the stone willing it to glow and show them their home again.

"I want to go home Misty." she muttered.

"I know."

"Can Tiyie get us back?"

"I hope." Misty took her sister's hand and made her sit down.

"What should we do?"

"I'm not sure."

Misty and Lola sat thinking for a while. Misty was starting to have high hopes. She knew that the rock could bring them back and it had to, but her spirits dampened when she remembered how quickly it closed.

Misty's thoughts were interrupted when Tiyie hopped onto her lap and fell asleep. It must have taken a lot of energy to make the stone come up and show them into their world. Misty was tired too. She laid down and drifted off to sleep.

Misty was up when it was just barely light outside. Even though this new world got barely any light at all. And Misty hadn't seen any inhabitants besides Tiyie and the trees. She saw Tiyie and Lola were already awake. Tiyie was drawing something in the dirt. She went over to them and crouched to see what Tiyie was sketching. He had drawn four pieces of paper with writing on them and showed the rock they had seen the night before. He was in the process of drawing a model of the entire world they were on. It had lots of sections and didn't look like there were any oceans. The pieces of paper were randomly scattered around and a small key was placed in another area. Misty studied it and tried to figure out what Tiyie was trying to tell them.

"He wants us to find these pieces of paper and put them together to open the rock, but we have to have the key to be able to go through. Otherwise it's only a window with a cover to keep us out." Lola said.

"How do you know that?" Misty asked glaring at her sister.

"Tiyie told me." Lola replied.

"Don't be ridiculous. He can't talk."

"He talked to me"

"No, he didn't Lola. You're just being silly."

"Yes he did. And if you argue with me then he can't talk and he won't be able to help us."

"How do you know that?"

"He just told me. Didn't you hear him?"

Misty was getting frustrated. "No, I didn't! Why do you always make things up! No one ever knows what you're talking about and TIYIE CAN'T TALK!"

"Stop it Misty, I AM telling the truth!" Lola was close to tears.

Misty looked at Tiyie and he nodded at her. The wind blew hard and their plans were blown away. Misty looked at her sister. She had her back turned to Misty.

"Fine." Misty said, "Maybe Tiyie *can* talk but our plans are blown away and I don't know them and they're our only chance of getting home."

Lola still didn't say anything. Misty turned and scooped up Tiyie in her palm. "Can you redraw the plans?"

Tiyie shook his head. Misty grumbled and set him back down on the ground.

“I guess I’ll just go look for the paper myself and the key and I have no idea where to look for them,” Misty said louder than necessary.

She peered over her shoulder to see if Lola was going to come with her. Lola turned around with her mouth open and moved it silently. No words came out but Lola kept her mouth open.

I can’t talk she mouthed.

Misty was shocked. *This can’t be happening.* She thought. *But we have to find a way home, mom will be so worried.* Misty acted fast. She scooped up Tiyie again and grabbed Lola by the hand.

Once out of the humid clearing, she told Lola, “You and Tiyie are going to point me where to go. Tiyie is going to tell you and you are going to try to tell me.”

Lola nodded. She looked at Tiyie for the first directions and he pointed at the sky. Misty looked up and so did Lola. The sun was sinking. They had to hurry.

They were headed south. The cold sun was just above the horizon ahead of them. Lola pointed again, this time west and Misty and the others headed that way. Misty was beyond belief. Lola was completely silent and had been since they woke up. She wasn’t just joking around. Misty could tell. Her mouth was still slightly open from the shock. She had been mouthing to herself during the group’s trek through the mystic land.

The light was growing dimmer, and they had only about a half an hour before they had to settle down. Misty knew the days were shorter here and probably only a day had passed at home but she was still worried about her mother. She had probably called the police and had them searching for her. She missed sleeping in her own bed and she missed her backyard and school, and she even missed doing chores. She also missed the old oak tree but only for a second because then she remembered that she was *IN* it.

She felt Lola tap her on the shoulder and was jerked from her thoughts. She saw her walk toward a small tree and sat down beside it. Misty sat down next to her. The breeze began to blow. It made Misty’s hair flutter. It started to get harder. Harder and harder it blew on and on. It was almost dark, there was only a sliver of the gray-yellow sun was visible above the horizon and there were things being swept through the air by the wind. There were tree branches and leaves. Little mushrooms were scattered around the ground and were rolling rapidly across the dirt. Something cream-colored caught Misty’s eye. The thin paper was easily lifted off the ground. Misty ran and jumped trying to catch the paper while her curiosity got the better of her. With a gigantic leap she snatched the paper out of thin air just as the sun sank fully and there was blackness all around.

When Misty awoke, she found that Lola and Tiyie were huddled together and examining the aging parchment. She stood up. Tiyie looked at her and beckoned for her to come and see it. She hurried next to Lola and looked at the object she was holding. Her eyes widened in utter amazement. It was a piece of the map! It was old and covered in inky writing in symbols and other markings. It was amazing. But they still had a lot more to find.

“Let’s go. We only have one and we need all of them.” Misty declared
“Come on Tiyie!” Lola called.

Misty jumped. She hadn’t heard Lola speak since yesterday. She was amazed and relieved and her spirits were high as they started to hike through the woods. Unfortunately, they had traveled in the wrong direction for the paper they had just found and had to backtrack quite a ways as Lola explained to Misty after Tiyie explained it to her. They started off walking east. They kept going in the same direction for an hour as Tiyie kept an eye on the surroundings. As they walked, Misty was lost in thought. She started to wonder how Tiyie knew all of this and why he had ever bothered to memorize the map. But, Misty figured that since there weren’t any other animals in this world, he must do it to entertain himself. They were still traveling turning in random directions every so often. Then Lola threw out her arm and stopped Misty dead in her tracks. Misty glanced over at Tiyie and he looked at Lola.

“Are we there?” Misty asked.

“I’m not sure...” Lola replied uneasily. “Tiyie hasn’t said anything and I think something is wrong...”

Tiyie did seem a bit nervous and jumped at the rustling leaves. Misty’s skin was crawling. The air was damp. Every second got colder.

“Come on Misty.” Lola said, “Tiyie says to go the other...” but she didn’t get to finish. Misty heard an ear-splitting roar. Then a huge animal-If you could call it that- charged toward them, long, pearly white and razor sharp horns pointed forward. Misty jumped back. She was paralyzed with fear. Tiyie stood in his spot but Lola slowly stepped toward the angry beast. She reached out a small hand but jerked it back startled by a big huff from the rhino thing. She started again slowly and cautiously until she touched its wrinkly skin. It grunted and Lola jumped but held her hand to the creature’s nose. It sneezed. It was definitely an unmistakable sneeze. It was kind of cute, Misty thought. It nuzzled Lola’s hand and she grinned.

Misty was so excited. She wanted to run up to Lola and try it for herself but she stopped herself and move forward slowly. A little less timid than Lola now that she knew it was safe. The beast was now laying on the ground and rolling around in the dirt getting all muddy. It was adorable.

Misty wanted to play with him too but Lola mouthed to her, *Go while he’s distracted. He guards the second piece of the map.*

So Misty sneaked around the two and went ahead to search for the map. She came to a structure that looked man-made but was like nothing Misty had ever seen before. There was wood poles going up three feet and a pointed roof that was caved in at many places. The wood was old and crumbling and the floor was showing dirt and rot in many places. And in the center, was the next piece of map. She picked it up and studied it for a moment. It was much different than the other one and had small pictures of animals and plants from earth. It made a small amount of sense but the whole thing was still a big mystery to Misty. She hurried out and past Lola and the strange rhino and handed the slip of old yellow paper to Tiyie. Lola looked over to Misty and said goodbye to the beast. Lola looked like she had been stuck in a mudslide. She was covered in dirt from head to toe.

“Luckily, Tiyie knows about a stream somewhere and I can rinse off and maybe you could too.”

It was true. Misty was covered in dirt too. Not as bad as Lola but she had still been walking for several days, even if they were short days. She was also very tired too. She wasn’t used to the short days and nights and could use some water to refresh her.

They hurried along, and stopped by the stream on the way to the next piece.

They walked off refreshed and clean. Tiyie had washed his fuzz and droplets of water clung to his fur. Misty and Lola were in high spirits. They already had two pieces of the map and only had three to go. They would be home in no time.

They walked and walked.

The sun was high in the sky now but it wouldn’t stay that way for long. Lola told Misty that the days were getting longer. Misty nodded and was glad. She wasn’t used to the short nights and days and the time change was making her tired.

Misty realized that they were changing their direction more than usual and the forest seemed different in a very subtle way.

“Where are we?” Misty asked.

“Well... Tiyie doesn’t know *exactly* where we are. We’re in a part of the forest where you can’t tell where you are as much” Lola’s voice trailed off.

“Like the Bermuda Triangle?” Misty asked.

“What’s that?” Lola asked.

“Never mind.” Misty said. “So, we’re lost?”

“N- well... kind of...” Lola said.

Misty immediately began to sweat, "We can NOT get lost in another world. We were SO close to getting home.

"Relax." Lola said. "Tiyie can get us out."

"Don't you tell ME to relax. Why do *you* keep so cool every time something bad happens? HUH!?" Misty retorted. "Do you even KNOW how serious our situation is?"

"Well, it *is* kind of the only way to get home so we should probably trust Tiyie." Lola said.

Misty scowled, "Okay. Fine." But she was nervous anyway.

They kept walking for a long time. At least it felt like it. Each minute felt like an hour to Misty. Several times Misty asked, "Are we any closer to the next peice?"

Every time Lola answered, "We're getting there."

They wandered for hours. The sun didn't go down and every tree looked the same. They had no way to tell where they were or if they were going in circles. They walked and walked and walked. Misty getting more nervous every second and Lola got more tired.

All of a sudden Lola yelled out, "LOOK OVER THERE!" Misty and Tiyie both looked to where she was pointing. Tiyie's already huge green eyes got even bigger. Misty squinted trying to see it better. Floating toward them was a yellow dot of light. It looked like a dandelion fuzz but glowing yellow. It got a foot from Misty's face and transformed into a tiny glowing human with droopy wings and sky blue hair that floated above her head. She wore a tiny green dress that twisted when she twirled. She had pink slippers on with purple flowers that were only a half an inch long. She looked like a rainbow Tinkerbelle.

"Hello" said the fairy in a dazed voice, "Hello again to the other two." Then she frowned, "Who are you and what are you doing here. Not that I mind," and then she grinned.

Lola and Misty looked at each other confused.

Tiyie looked annoyed and rested his chin on his frail paw.

"Doozy of a forest, I can't seem to find my way around here. Can you?"

The two girls looked at Tiyie.

"Umm... Do you know her..." Misty asked Tiyie. He nodded regretfully and Misty nodded back.

"Sooo.... why are you here...?" The fairy asked and blinked twice.

"Well we kind of came by mistake from our home in-" Misty said but hesitated about whether to say where they were from. "On Earth." She finished.

“Giansce! I knew the rumors were true.” The fairy murmured to herself.

“What rumors?” Misty asked.

“What’s a rumor?” Lola wondered.

“Uh... I’ll explain later.” Misty told her.

The fairy was still muttering. “The humans. They are here. The Secret Keepers said they wouldn’t come but I knew. I knew.” Then she got a concerned look on her face. “I am taking you to the Secret Keepers right now.” she said.

“Wait.” Misty said, “We won’t go until you tell us what this is all about.”

The fairy sighed, “The Secret Keepers are a group that keep the secret.”

“What secret?” Misty asked.

“The link between the worlds.” The fairy said in a hushed voice, “How you got here.”

Finally *something* made at least a little bit of sense. The “link” was probably the oak and there was a group of people or something else was watching it and trying to keep people out of it. But why? And how did the link get there? Why did it open for Lola and Misty? Or at that day of all the times it could have decided to open the gap? There were still so many questions running through Misty’s mind but the fairy halted them.

“Anyway,” she said, “I have to go. Pleasure to meet you all.”

She started to flutter away carelessly but Misty grabbed her foot. Her slipper almost fell off.

“OW!” she cried.

“You’re not going anywhere without helping us.” Misty growled at the fairy. “I know that you know where that map is and we’re lost.”

“PLEASE!” The fairy screamed, “LET ME GO!”

“I’ll let you go.” Misty said, “But not before you guide us to where this map is that can open the link and get us home.”

The fairy folded her arms and swung upside down from Misty’s fingers. “Fine.” she said, “First you go that way.” she pointed in the direction of a tree that looked just like all the others.

Misty took her that way and the others followed.

After a few minutes, the fairy cried, “STOP!” in the screechiest voice Misty had ever heard (Even more irritating than her piano teacher Mrs. Darwin) and then pointed in another direction and Misty walked that way. She sighed. This was going to be a LONG evening.

The fairy led them a long way. It seemed that she was having some trouble navigating. Also, Tiyie was disgruntled the whole way apparently embarrassed to be steered by a nutty fairy. Misty was trying not to think about what the fairy had told them because it made her head spin.

The journey with the fairy was much noisier than most of them. The fairy was very chatty and told Tiyie, Misty and Lola all about her life in the complicatedly simple woods she lived in. Sometimes she got carried away and forgot to tell them where to turn so they ended up walking most of the way twice. Their hike ended when the fairy yelled stop in the most annoying voice possible and said no more.

“Are we there?” Misty asked.

“We are close, I think.” The fairy answered.

“You think?”

“No, I feel.” The fairy said in an overly dramatic voice but with a completely serious look on her face. “The map has an effect on fairies. I have felt it before but I never remembered what it could be. It gets me lost a lot.”

“Okay...” Misty said. The fairy got more intriguing and strange every minute.

“Now let me go and follow me.” She said.

“NO! I don’t trust you. I said that I wouldn’t let you free until you found us what we are looking for.” Misty said sternly.

“But I- I-I can’t! I don’t know where it is I know it’s here and I know it’s close but I can’t get close to it. It jumbles my brain and I won’t know where I am for hours!” The fairy wailed.

Misty felt bad for her. *I can find my way from here.* She thought. She dropped the fairy who fell a foot and then spread her wings that looked just like leaves.

“What’s your name by the way” Misty asked

“Fairy.” she said. “My generation was called Fairy.”

Misty shrugged and Fairy left. She then told Lola and Tiyie who was more cheerful now that Fairy had left her plan to go in and find the map. Tiyie violently shook his head and scrambled up onto Misty’s shoulder.

“I’ll stay here” Lola said and sat down for a break.

Misty took a guess of what way to travel and walked that way.

Misty did feel oddly confused while she was wandering around. She figured that she would find where she felt the most confused and find it there. She was walking and walking her

mind not growing any more muddled. She looked at the tree beside her. She walked away from it and turned. She turned again. She turned again and placed her hand on the trunk of a tree next to her. Then she blinked twice. The tree was familiar. Then she realized where she was and almost laughed out loud. She had been walking around the same tree the whole time. She looked it up and down. There at the root of the trunk was the piece of paper they had gone through so much trouble to get. She walked back to Lola with no trouble at all. She guessed that someone had cast a spell on the map so no one could find it and open the portal again. When Misty got back Lola was on the ground poking at some leaves that looked just like all the others.

Lola looked up when she heard Misty coming, "Yay!" she said, "I am so bored. Did you get it?"

Misty held up the map for Lola to see. "Whoa." she said. "That is the weirdest piece of paper I've ever seen.

Misty turned it around and examined herself. Like the other two, this one was completely unique with splotches of ink everywhere that seemed to fly off of the paper. The whole thing was sparkling and the wind blew it easily.

"Well, let's get going so we can get out of this forest." Tiyie signaled that they should head toward a gray rock in the distance and the girls did so. When they reached it they could tell that they were definitely out of *that* neck of the woods because the trees were now gnarled and twisted unlike the trees that pointed up forever and all looked the same.

"We only have to find the key and one more piece of map." Lola said.

Misty was glad. She was tired of walking and missing home more than ever. But she was also dreading reopening the portal because she had gotten her hopes up too high. At first she knew that it would work but the more she thought about it the more doubts she had that it would really work.

Night was about to fall they found out once they were out of the confusing area. They found a place to stop just before the day was over. Misty was just about to fall asleep when she heard rustling behind them. It was up in a tree and whispers could be heard also. Misty told herself it was just the wind but didn't convince herself and got up to take a look. Lola and Tiyie were both already asleep. Misty didn't know how they did it. *That must be how they get up so early.* Misty thought and pressed on through the darkness.

The whispers were growing louder. Soon, Misty ran into a tree and whoever it was stopped whispering, afraid they would get caught. Misty looked up into the tree and squinted but she couldn't see anything. Then she opened her eyes really wide and saw the tree but whoever was in it was hidden by leaves. Misty didn't know what to do now. She couldn't climb the tree. She couldn't call out either. All she could think to do was to go back to Lola and Tiyie and tell them about it in the morning but she couldn't just let them get away. She got the

feeling they were there for a reason and a sinister one at that. She eventually decided that she would stay at the bottom of the tree so they couldn't climb down. She stood by the tree very alert.

The whispers started again and Misty strained her ears to try and catch some of what they were saying. She could hear two different voices. One was a very raspy one and the other sounded very much like the fairy that had helped them find the map when they were lost. One sounded frightened and the other sounded mean. She tried to listen to them but they started to be much quieter and Misty couldn't hear them at all. She felt very awake but that didn't last long. After an hour her eyelids started getting heavy. She sat down but quickly stood back up knowing that if she sat and rested her legs she would surely fall asleep. She kept pinching herself to stay awake but it hurt so she stopped doing that. After a while, Misty was so tired she had to sit down. Immediately her head drooped and she fell asleep.

In the morning Misty scrambled to her feet and looked up in the tree. She didn't see anything. She ran to the others to tell them the news. They were still asleep. Misty checked her pockets just to make sure the two hiding in the tree hadn't stolen anything of hers. The nickel was still there and so was her math homework she had forgotten to do before she went outside to play but the most important thing was gone. The map.

Misty throttled Lola until she got up and said, "What?"

"The map pieces are gone!"

"What?! Oh no. How?"

"It's a LONG story. In the shortest way possible, I heard creatures in that tree." Misty said and pointed to the tree she had sat by all night long. "And they were whispering so I guarded the tree but I fell asleep and now they and the map pieces are gone."

Lola picked up Tiyie and blew in his huge ear. He jumped into her strawberry blonde hair, rolled down her small nose with freckles and off of her head with a tiny thump. Then he woke up.

Lola told him that their map was gone. He nodded his head as if he understood. Misty and Lola glanced at each other. Then Lola started to nod her head too. Misty waited for Tiyie to be done explaining to Lola why someone had stolen from them.

"So," Lola said, "There are some people or, uh, creatures that don't want us going back home and spreading the news about this place. They stole our map so we couldn't go back."

"This is NOT good." Misty said.

"No it isn't." Lola agreed.

"Well, what do we do?" Misty asked.

“We have to find them.” Lola said and then exclaimed, “OH!”

“What?” Misty asked.

“Let’s follow them.” Lola answered.

“How!? We have no idea where they are and have no idea of how to find out.”

“Well-” Lola started to say but Misty interrupted her.

“You don’t know either!”

“Tiyie does” Lola said.

Misty rolled her eyes at her sister. “What can he do? Smell them?”

“Well actually-”

“Actually what?”

“That’s what I was just about to say.”

Misty sighed and gave up, “Fine. What were you about to say?”

“I was going to say-” Lola started to say but she stopped in mid-sentence again. The ground had started to shake. Then the earth sunk underneath them and Misty was stuck in the dirt waist deep. Lola was quite a bit shorter than Misty so she was up to her armpits in dirt. Tiyie was nowhere to be found. Misty had quite a struggle climbing out of the dirt but she eventually did it. Lola had a harder time.

“Just wiggle your legs to loosen the dirt and then try pushing them out.” Misty told her and then went to go look for Tiyie. He was in a tree trembling. When Misty turned around, Lola was almost out, Misty walked over and helped her up. The two walked to Tiyie and picked him up. Lola told Misty that she saw some footsteps. They went to see them. Misty looked at them but she only saw one pair.

“But there were two people- or something else in the tree.” Misty said.

“Oh.” Lola said, “Maybe one was flying. You never know.”

“Or being carried.” Misty suggested

“Yeah.” Lola said.

“Well let’s go!” Misty said. They walked alongside the prints for a day. They camped out right next to them and started before the sun went up the next morning. They were so busy staring at the footprints that they didn’t notice where they were. Luckily they had Tiyie ride on Misty’s back to be a lookout. Misty only stood up once the prints stopped and Tiyie slid off her frail back and landed on the ground near her feet.

“Now what?” Misty wondered aloud. She looked ahead of her and saw lots of ferns growing right up against the trail of footsteps. She took a step in gesturing to Lola to follow her. Tiyie jumped on Lola’s shoulder from a low tree limb. They walked through the leaves and ended up in what seemed like a different world. There was yellow lights and festive garlands. There were bowls of green glowing mushrooms and orange ones too. The ground was carpeted with moss of all different shades of green. There was a giant gray boulder with a mixture of different types of designs that looked similar to the ones on the map. Misty and Lola were skinny figures and slipped past the boulder with ease. Misty was desperately hoping that they would find their map beyond the rock. Once they were past it they heard quiet whispering voices. One was louder and the same frightened squeak that Misty had heard two short nights ago. They hid behind a swishy patch of grass listening in on anything the people were saying. Misty’s ears could only hear the distressed voice she had heard that night. Eventually, the voices stopped and they heard footsteps. The footsteps grew louder and soon creatures of all kinds were walking past their hiding spot. There were a few fairies. They were very royal looking. Then a tiny squat man that wore a dirty red shirt walked past. He was holding a rainbow fairy, a pick ax and several pieces of paper.

Misty and snuck out of the grasses and quietly followed the little man when the rest had left. She followed him out of the ferns that had hid them while they eavesdropped, around the rock and finally exited from the festive room through the bushes with Tiyie and Lola trailing behind her. They followed the little man through a meadow with grass that grew to about seven feet tall. They came to a very secretive cottage with the doors and windows boarded shut. Misty didn’t understand why everything was so hidden when the tons of forest didn’t seem to be home to anything dangerous.

The little man set the valuables and a sleeping fairy on a crumbling rock with a broken mirror on it. Then he went out of the room. Misty went over and picked them up. She hesitated taking the fairy with them but she looked very peaceful and content so she left her. She carried the torn up map back to Tiyie and Lola. Then they snuck out. The sun was rising again and the air was warm. Misty tucked the pieces of old paper in her pocket and they set themselves up for another day of trekking through the never-ending forest. They wandered for three days before Misty started to get discouraged.

“When are we going to be there?” she asked impatiently and nervously. Lola just waved for her to follow her.

“Tiyie said we just go through these bushes.” she said. Misty followed her into a clearing. Right in the middle was a worn square-shaped stone, and on top of it was the last torn piece and the key they needed. They were too different from the rest of the segments of the old paper. The key was tiny and old fashioned, with a symmetrical design at the top and a pattern of random rectangles. Other than the small designs at the top, it was very simple. Something that would be easy to hide. Misty found herself growing nervous. She wasn’t sure if what she was about to do would work and she also wasn’t sure she really wanted to go home. She would miss Tiyie and the confused fairy and the giant forests of ancient trees but she really

wanted to go home. She called her sister over and they hurriedly put the map together. Each piece fused in place as if by magic. Well, it was magic, Misty decided. The rock began to glow for the second time.

“Lola,” Misty said, “Grab the key and we’ll put it in together.” Misty and Lola picked it up at the same time. Tiye came over and jumped on Lola’s head.

“Goodbye Tiye.” Lola said. Tiye jumped over to Misty’s head and dug his claws into her hair.

“Goodbye Tiye.” Misty said.

“Tiye says goodbye to you Misty,” Lola said. Misty and Lola stuck the key through and felt themselves being sucked in. Misty could still feel the key in her hand.

Their feet hit the ground of their backyard at home and they ran to the back door. Their mother came running over to her looking tired and very worried.

“Where have you been?” She scolded but she was smiling.

“It’s a LONG story.” the girls said in unison.

They explained a lot to their mother including why they had to keep the secret about the tree. She took the tale surprisingly well but she was still amazed and shocked by the story of the girls’ adventure. Misty had more homework than usual to catch up from being in another world. Of course, they didn’t tell Misty’s teacher the truth. They made up that she had been sick with a bad flu. One afternoon, Lola heard a scratch from outside. They went to their backyard to see what was going on. Misty had been jumpy the last few days thinking that at any moment the tree might start acting up again but she went outside with her sister anyway, her curiosity getting the best of her. The second she was outside she saw a fuzzy thing shoot across the lawn like a bullet. It stopped a centimeter away from the toe of her shoe. She recognized it instantly. It was Tiye!

Misty looked over at Lola. She still looked confused but glad anyway. They did miss the furry creature. Right away, Lola took him inside and made him a little bed out of cotton balls and a washcloth. She didn’t know what he liked to eat, so she fed him samples of everything they had in the refrigerator. He loved everything. They never did tell their mom about the animal living in their room and she was always confused about where the leftovers went. One thing Misty always kept in mind, little sisters are sometimes the best answers.

THE END