

THE BOOKS OF
ELSEWHERE

volume three

THE SECOND SPY

by Jacqueline West

illustrated by Poly Bernatene



DIAL BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS
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Summary: After plummeting through a hole in her backyard and finding herself once again in the room of mysterious jars, eleven-year-old Olive unwittingly releases two of Elsewhere's biggest, most cunning, most dangerous forces.

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*For Ryan,
who makes everything better*

—JW



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About the author

IF YOU BELIEVE that death is about to spring upon you at any moment, you won't spend much time watching television. You won't devote a lot of thought to bathing or tooth-brushing, either. Even things you once enjoyed, like reading, doodling, or daydreaming, will slide right off of your daily to-do list.

If you believe that death is coming for you, you'll do a lot of jumping around corners. You'll turn on all the lights in every room you enter, even on bright August afternoons. You will get surprisingly good at walking backward up staircases. You will never forget—not even for a minute—that doom could be waiting just through any doorway.

Your life will revolve between two things: spending as much time as possible with those you care about, and *hiding*.

Fortunately for Olive Dunwoody, who was whiling away the end of the summer in this particularly uncomfortable situation, she had the perfect way to do both.

Each morning, as soon as her parents were busy with their own work and worries, Olive put on the pair of antique spectacles that hung from a ribbon around her neck. Then she stepped from her bedroom into the hallway of the old stone house on Linden Street and watched the paintings that line its walls ripple into life.

Painted grass waved in an intangible wind. Painted trees twitched. Painted people moved and blinked and stared back at her from the other side of their canvases.

Grabbing the edges of the picture frame that hung just outside her bedroom door, Olive would squish herself through the wavering, jelly-like surface, fall with a flop into the misty field, and bolt up the painted hill to find her friend Morton.

Morton was nine years old. He had been nine years old for a lot longer than eleven-year-old Olive had been eleven. In fact, he'd been nine years old for longer than Olive had been alive.

An old man's lifetime ago, Morton had lived with his family right next door to the old stone house on Linden Street. No one who lived right next door could have helped but notice something odd about the place...and about the McMartin family, who lived in it. Finally, the day had come when Morton's family knew too much.

Aldous McMartin, the painter and patriarch of the McMartin family, got rid of Morton by trapping him inside a painting. Morton's sister, Lucinda Nivens, who had hoped to be accepted into the McMartin family and taught their magical secrets, had eventually been betrayed and killed by the people she served. As for Morton's parents, they had vanished. No one knew where.

Well...not *no one*.

Annabelle McMartin knew.

But she wasn't about to tell.

To begin with, Annabelle McMartin was dead. She'd finally croaked at the age of 104, the last twisted twig on the McMartin family tree. Because she had died without an heir, all of the McMartin family treasures were left to clutter the corners and hang from the walls of their old stone house on Linden Street. The inconvenience of being dead should have kept Annabelle and her ancestors from causing anyone any trouble. But that was not the case. Not in *this* case. For among the many odd, dusty relics the McMartins had left behind were their portraits—magical, living, conniving portraits, painted by Aldous and craftily hidden in the house's depths. These portraits wanted nothing more than to take their house, with all its secrets and powers and history, *back*.

Olive had discovered this in the most unpleasant of ways.

The knowledge that the living painting of her home's former owner was on the loose, intent on revenge, was what had Olive jumping around corners and backing up staircases. Sometimes her eyes played tricks on her, and she would catch the flash of a painted tendril of long brown hair in the gleam of a wooden banister, or the sheen of a string of pearls floating above an empty chair. Annabelle's too-sweet, too-still smile seemed to glitter from the shadows of the house's darkened rooms.

This usually happened when Olive was alone.

Olive tried to be alone as little as possible.

When she was with Morton, she felt a bit less frightened. Her fear seemed to spread out between them, like a dose of awful medicine divided into two spoons. Together, Olive and Morton would slip through the creaking, cluttered rooms, climbing in and out of Elsewhere. They searched painting after painting for some sign of Morton's parents. They questioned every painted person they met. They flipped over every painted rock (the rocks always flipped themselves hurriedly upright again), they peered inside painted windows, and they peeped through the keyholes of painted doors. But when every rock had been flipped and every keyhole had been peeped, they still hadn't found a single new clue.

Fortunately, the search mixed some fun into the frustration. Sometimes Olive and Morton visited the painting of a ruined castle, where a painted porter happily led them on tour after tour. They scattered chubby pigeons on a painted Paris sidewalk. They clambered through the frame of a painted ballroom and danced to the music of the out-of-practice orchestra. If the house's kitchen was deserted they dove into its painting of three stonemasons and played with Baltus, the large, shaggy dog that Olive had rescued from another painting. When they were feeling especially brave, they even went boating on the smooth silver lake where Annabelle had once left Olive to drown.

Often, one of the house's three guardian cats would accompany them. The cats could slip in and out of Elsewhere as easily as they slipped in and out of the house's many rooms. Olive would spot the spark of green eyes in the distance, across the painted waves of a river or between the brush-stroked petals of a blooming garden, and she would feel her fear spread even thinner, knowing that the cats were watching over her.

But nothing could lift the fear away completely.

And as the last days of summer tiptoed past, something else was creeping up on Olive. Something that swelled and darkened like a bruise in the back of her mind. Something even bigger and blacker and chillier than her own untimely and quite-possibly-impending death.

Junior high.

A FAMOUS POET ONCE wrote that April is the cruelest month. Olive knew this because she had come across the poem somewhere in the dusty library of the old stone house on Linden Street. She hadn't understood most of the poem, but she remembered the line about April. She remembered it because it was so obviously untrue. Olive knew—as all kids know—that the cruelest month is September. One morning, you wake up to a sky that still feels like a summer sky, and a breeze that still feels like a summer breeze, and you smile, looking forward to a whole day of freedom—and then your mother shouts up the stairs that you're already running fifteen minutes late, and if you don't get move on, you'll miss the school bus.

This was just what happened to Olive. Except she didn't wake up looking forward to a day of freedom and adventure. She woke up exhausted, with a cramp in her legs from a night of dreams about a furious witch chasing her around and around a giant hamster wheel. As she squeezed Hershel, her worn brown bear, Olive told herself that these had been nothing but nightmares. The problem was, except for the giant hamster wheel bit, Olive's nightmares might come true.

"Olive!" Mrs. Dunwoody called from the foot of the stairs. "You're now seventeen point five minutes late and counting!"

With a sigh, Olive tucked Hershel back under the covers. She stood up in bed, wavering for a moment on the squishy mattress, and then jumped as far away from the bed as she could get without crashing into another piece of furniture. Olive did this every morning, just in case something with long, grabbing, painted arms was waiting underneath the bed. From several feet away, she bent down to check under the dust ruffle. No Annabelle. Olive opened her closet with a practiced yank-and-leap backward maneuver. This way, if Annabelle were indeed waiting inside, Olive would be hidden behind the door. She peeped through the door frame. No Annabelle. Olive tugged on a clean shirt, carefully arranging the spectacles inside the collar, and hustled out into the hallway.

Even on clear September mornings, the upstairs hall of the old stone house remained shadowy and dim. Faint rays of sun glinted on the paintings that lined the walls. Olive's fingers gave a twitch. The temptation to put on the spectacles and dive into Elsewhere tugged at her like a strand of hair caught in a rusty zipper.

"Olive!" called Mrs. Dunwoody. "There are just thirty-four minutes until the school day begins!"

With a last longing glance over her shoulder, Olive headed for the stairs, slipped on the top step, and just managed to catch herself on the banister before toppling rump-over-teakettle down the staircase.

Because it was Olive's very first day of junior high school, Mr. Dunwoody had fixed a special pancake breakfast. Mrs. Dunwoody kissed Olive on the head and told her how grown-up she looked. Then Mr. Dunwoody made her pose for a photograph on the front porch holding her book bag and her fancy graphing calculator, and after that, Mrs. Dunwoody drove her to school because she had already missed the bus and if she walked she *would* have been tardy by more than fifteen minutes. And yet neither of her parents noticed that Olive (whose brain was even more distracted than usual) was still wearing her pink penguin pajama bottoms with ruffles across the seat of the pants.

But the kids at school did.

Everyone in Olive's homeroom laughed so loudly that students walking down the hall stopped to see what was so funny. One boy laughed until his face turned the color of kidney beans, and he had to go to the nurse's office to use his asthma inhaler.

A girl with long, dark hair and a sharp nose—a girl who, Olive noticed, was wearing *eyeliner*—leaned across the aisle to Olive’s desk. “They’re mean, aren’t they?” she asked. “Don’t worry about them,” the girl went on as Olive tried to squeeze out an answer. “I think your pants are *adorable*.” Here the girl raised her voice a little bit, so that everyone around them could hear. “But didn’t you know that the *kindergarten* is in another building?”

All the kids went off on another roar of laughter, and Olive wished she could sink down into the cracks in the floor with the eraser scrapings and pencil dust.

The morning didn’t get any better. During her second class, when the students were supposed to stand up and tell about themselves, Olive mumbled that she was eleven, that her parents were both math professors, that her family had moved to town at the beginning of summer, and—because she couldn’t think of anything else to say—that she had a birthmark shaped very much like a pig right above her belly button, which was true, but which she certainly hadn’t planned to admit to anyone.

During her third class, Olive asked to go to the restroom and got so lost afterward that she wandered around the building for almost an hour and wound up in a storage room behind the gymnasium, where a friendly janitor finally found her.

When lunchtime came, Olive tiptoed into the cafeteria with a fleet of butterflies doing death-spirals in her stomach. The tables were already crowded with students (Olive had gotten lost on the way to the cafeteria too), and everyone was shouting and laughing and stealing food from one another’s trays. She blinked around, wondering how she was ever going to feel brave enough to sit down at one of those tables, and whether it would be dangerously unsanitary for her to take her lunch back to the restroom and eat it there, when, like one stalled car in a sea of roaring traffic, a quiet table surfaced amid the chaos.

The table was empty except for one ruffled boy. A boy with smudgy glasses, and messy brown hair, and a large blue dragon on his shirt.

Large blue dragons had never looked friendlier. Olive made a beeline for the table.



“Hi, Rutherford,” she said, smiling for the first time all day.

Rutherford Dewey glanced up. Before Olive had even had time to plop into a chair, he asked, “Have you heard about the pliosaur skull that was discovered on the Jurassic coast?”

There were several questions Olive could have asked in response to this. (“Where’s the Jurassic coast?” “What’s a pliersaur?” “Is that its name because it looks like a pair of pliers?”) But the only answer she could give was “No.” So she gave it.

“It’s a fascinating find,” Olive’s neighbor went on, in a rapid, slightly nasal voice that was only partially muffled by a mouthful of chicken salad. “The skull itself is nearly eight feet long. The pliosaur’s entire body probably measured around fifty feet, which is more than twice the size of an orca.”

“An orca is a killer whale, right?” asked Olive, unwrapping her sandwich.

“Yes, although the name ‘killer whale’ is a bit unfair. The orca isn’t an especially murderous creature. Besides, all of us are killers of *something*.”

“No we’re—” Olive cut herself off mid-argument, wondering if dissolving something evil that came out of a painting counted as “killing.”

Rutherford watched her take the first bite. “What’s that in your sandwich?” he asked.

“Peanut butter.”

“Then you’re a peanut killer. It’s inevitable. Each of us has to kill to survive.”

Olive squirmed. For the hundredth time that day, she touched the lump of the spectacles underneath her shirt, making sure they were still there.

“Don’t worry,” said Rutherford. “My grandmother will be keeping a very close watch on the neighborhood while we’re at school. She’ll be watching your house especially.”

Olive glanced up into Rutherford’s intent brown eyes. Not for the first time, she had the strange feeling that Rutherford must have been reading her mind. Of course, she reminded herself, it wouldn’t be hard for him to *guess* what she was worrying about.

“Your grandmother hasn’t seen any sign of...of *Annabelle*, has she?” Olive asked, dropping her voice to a whisper.

Rutherford shook his head, looking unconcerned. He looked just as unconcerned a second later, when a wad of plastic wrap sailed through the air and beamed him on the head. “No. No sign of her presence,” he went on as a group of boys at a table nearby slapped each other’s hands and sniggered. “And my grandmother has also placed a protective charm on your house, which prevents anyone who isn’t invited inside from entering the house itself. She uses the same kind of charm on ours. It dates back to the middle ages, when it was placed on the walls of castles and fortresses, and thus it doesn’t protect outdoor spaces; however, it is still quite effective.” Noticing that Olive’s eyes were beginning to glaze, Rutherford changed the subject. “Have you heard about Mrs. Nivens?”

Olive almost inhaled a chunk of sandwich. She looked around, making sure no one else had heard. “What about her?”

“The police have declared her a missing person. They’ve searched her house and everything. Now it’s locked up and they’re keeping it under surveillance.”

Olive put down her sandwich. “I don’t think they’ll figure out what really happened. Do you?”

One of Rutherford’s eyebrows went up. “You mean, that Mrs. Nivens was actually a magical painting trying to serve a family of dead witches, one of whom finally turned on her?” The eyebrow came down again. “I think it’s highly unlikely.”

“Yeah.” Olive paused. “They sure won’t figure it out from looking around her house. Everything is so *normal*.” Olive’s mind darted back to the evening when she, Morton, and the cats had tiptoed through the eerily clean and quiet rooms of Mrs. Nivens’s house—a house that had hidden Mrs. Nivens’s secret for nearly a century.

A not-quite-empty carton of milk hit the center of their table, exploding in a fountain of tepid white droplets. The boys at the nearby table guffawed.

“It’s been my experience that those people who seem the most ‘normal’ are in fact the most dangerous,” said Rutherford, wiping a drip of milk off the end of his nose.

Olive dragged her penguin-dotted legs through the rest of the afternoon. She spent science class staring at the shelves of beakers and test tubes, remembering the chamber full of strange, murky jars that she’d found beneath the basement of the old stone house, and missing half of the instructions for the very first assignment. Next, she spent history class thinking about all the people Aldous McMartin had trapped inside his paintings, becoming so absorbed that she didn’t hear the teacher calling on her until he’d said her name three times. But the minutes ticked by, and the last hour of the day crawled closer, and finally, Olive found herself climbing the stairs to the third floor and trudging along the hallway to the art classroom.

Olive pulled up a metal stool to a high white table as far away from all the other students as she could get. Then she waited.

And waited.

And waited.

“Where do you think the teacher is?” asked one of the noisy girls at the front of the room, after

several minutes had gone by.

~~“Maybe we should call the office and tell them she’s not here,”~~ said the noisiest girl of all, craning around on her stool so that Olive caught a glimpse of eyeliner.

But before Olive could give another thought to makeup or meanness or penguin pajamas, there was a sound outside the art room door. It was a jingling, stomping, crinkling sound, as though a reindeer pulling a sleigh made of candy wrappers was trying very hard to get in. A key rattled in the lock. “Darn it,” said a muffled voice. The doorknob rattled again. In another moment, the door burst open, revealing a woman standing in the hallway.

Her arms were filled with paper and plastic bags, which in turn were filled with other things—pipe cleaners, canisters of salt, and something that appeared to have once been a massive starfish—and her neck was looped with lanyards and whistles and cords and pens and beads and bunches of keys, all clattering together like an office-supply wind chime. Long, kinky tendrils of dark red hair could be seen above the bags, standing out in every direction. With a grunt, the woman dumped the armload of bags on the front table and blinked around at her wide-eyed students.

“Of course, the door wasn’t locked at all,” she said, as though they were already in the middle of a conversation. “You all got in here. And *you* don’t have keys.” She glanced into one of the overstuffed paper bags. “Oh, shoot. I think I cracked my cow’s skull.” Sighing, the woman turned toward the chalkboard. “My name is Ms. Teedlebaum.” She wrote something that looked like “Ms. Tood—” and ended with a squiggle. The noisy girls at the front of the room snorted with giggles.

Ms. Teedlebaum turned back toward the class. “We’re going to begin this unit at the beginning,” she said, putting her hands on her hips. The lanyards and cords and keys swayed and jangled. “And we’ll start with a subject you’re all familiar with. Yourselves.” She turned one of the paper bags upside down, and a flood of pencils and watercolor palettes and oil pastels and chalk bounced out onto the table. Some of the flood bounced all the way to the floor. “You can use whatever medium you like. There are mirrors in that cabinet, and paper is on that shelf. Get started.”

With a swish of her long skirts, Ms. Teedlebaum picked up one of the paper bags and sailed toward her desk. At least, Olive *thought* it was a desk. It looked more like a sandcastle built out of art supplies, but there was probably a desk in it somewhere.

“But what are we supposed to do?” asked the girl with the eyeliner, in a tone that strutted along the line between *not quite polite* and *very rude*.

Ms. Teedlebaum glanced up from behind the sandcastle. “Self-portraits. Didn’t I say that? No? Yes. Self-portraits. Draw, paint, or color yourselves. Whatever feels right to you.”

With more muttering and giggling, the class jostled each other for the best supplies. Olive waited until everyone else was seated again before slinking across the room. The only things left on the front table were two charcoal pencils and a set of mostly broken chalk. She took the pencils back to her seat. Then she stared down at her own reflection in the little round mirror.

Staring back up at her was a girl with stringy brownish hair—a girl with a suspicious lump beneath her shirt that might have been the outline of some very old spectacles. The girl’s eyes met Olive’s. Her eyes were wide and watchful, and more than a little bit afraid.

OLIVE LET HER heavy book bag thud to the floor of the entryway. The thud echoed away through the old stone house, threading like an unanswered voice through the empty rooms. “I’m home,” she called, very softly. The walls seemed to lean in around her. Whether they were welcoming her or watching her, Olive wasn’t quite sure.

On the first floor, everything was as it should have been. The paintings hung in their places and the furnishings stood in their usual spots. No one with strangely streaked, shiny skin waited on the dusty velvet couch in the library. No one sat tapping her chilly fingers on the heavy wooden table in the dining room. No one with painted gold-brown eyes whispered Olive’s name from a darkened doorway.

Olive finished her survey in the kitchen, where a note in her mother’s handwriting hung on the refrigerator door. “We hope you had a wonderful first day at school, dear,” it read. “We’ll be back between 5:34 and 5:39, depending on the usual variables.” Olive scanned the kitchen. There was no sign of Annabelle there, either. In fact, it was hard to imagine Annabelle in a kitchen at all, with her pearls and lace amid the Tupperware and dish soap. But this *had* once been Annabelle’s kitchen. She had probably stood in the very spot where Olive was standing now. She’d sat everywhere that Olive sat, bathed in the tub where Olive bathed. The thought sent a swarm of invisible spiders skittering down Olive’s arms.

Shaking the spiders away, Olive darted for the basement door. An icy waft of air swirled around her ankles as she yanked it open. She had acclimated to almost all the oddities of the old stone house—the creaks and groans it made at night, the cobwebby corners, the low ceiling edges that seemed designed to bash people on the skull—but she hadn’t quite gotten used to the basement. Olive stood in the doorway for a moment, gazing down the rickety wooden stairs into the darkness and pulling her courage tight around her. Then, with a deep breath, she rushed down the steps.

“Leopold?” she called, swatting for the lightbulb chain.

“At your service, miss,” said a gravelly voice.

Olive found the light at last, and a dusty glow flooded the basement. It flickered on swathes of hanging cobwebs, drew shadows between the gravestones in the walls, and glinted in a pair of bright green eyes that looked up at Olive from the darkest corner of all.

Leopold sat at attention in his usual station, his sleek black chest puffed up so high that it nearly eclipsed his chin. Olive dropped to her knees in front of the gigantic cat. Between them, the outline of a trapdoor made a deep slash in the floor.

“How was your first day of school, miss?” Leopold asked.

Olive sighed and rubbed her chilly arms. She glanced around at the crumbling stone walls, skimming the carved names of the McMartin ancestors, and suddenly realized that she would rather be in a cold, dark basement built out of ancient gravestones than in a junior high classroom. “I’m glad to be home,” she answered.

Leopold gave a nod. “They say there’s no place like it.”

“No, there isn’t,” said Olive emphatically. “Did anything happen while I was gone?”

“Negative, miss. Nothing to report.”

“And the tunnel...?” Olive asked, nodding toward the trapdoor.

“Silent.”

“Good. Thank you, Leopold.” Olive stood up, brushing the grit from the seat of her pants and

wondering why her behind felt so *ruffly*. The relief of being home at last had shooed the flock of pink penguins right out of her mind. Now they waddled rapidly back. “I’d better go check the rest of the house,” she mumbled, scurrying sideways toward the basement steps to keep the ruffly area out of Leopold’s sight.

Olive skidded along the hall, zoomed around the newel post, and thundered up the stairs to the second floor. She checked each painting as she ran, but the silvery lake, the moonlit forest, and the painted version of Linden Street looked just as they’d looked a hundred times before.

After changing into a pair of jeans and stuffing the pink penguin pajama bottoms under her bed as far as they would go, Olive searched the upstairs hall. She looked into the empty bathroom, the empty blue bedroom, and the empty lavender bedroom, which felt the emptiest of all. Annabelle’s portrait—without Annabelle in it—still hung there, above the chest of drawers. As Olive stared into the deserted frame, she could almost see Annabelle’s face surfacing within it, with its cold eyes and tiny, unchanging smile...like something long dead rising up from the bottom of a pool of dark water.

Olive ran the rest of the way down the hall.

She rushed past the painting of a bowl of strange fruit, the painting of a church on a high, craggy hill, and—

She stopped abruptly, backing up to stare hard at the hill again.

Olive had never climbed into this particular painting. There were no people to be seen inside of it, and at first glance, there wasn’t much else to see either.

But today, the painting had *moved*. Out of the corner of her eye, she had seen the leafy bracken on the hillside ripple with a gust of wind.

Olive studied the painting. It wasn’t moving anymore.

In any other house, paintings that moved would have seemed surprising, to say the least. But that wasn’t what surprised Olive. It was the fact that the painting had moved when she wasn’t wearing the spectacles.

Keeping two watchful eyes on the canvas, Olive placed the spectacles on her nose. Before she’d even lowered her hand again, a flock of birds surged out of the brush on the painted hillside and rose into the sky, their wings flashing, their hundreds of bodies swooping and swirling like a single living thing. Olive let out a delighted little gasp.

This wasn’t the first time she had seen things move inside of Elsewhere when she wasn’t wearing the spectacles. Morton, Baltus the dog, and the glinting of Annabelle’s locket had all revealed themselves to her without the magic glasses. But these were things that had come from the real world and ended up stuck inside Elsewhere. Did this mean that the *wind* in this painting had come from the real world? How had Aldous McMartin managed *that*?

Olive hesitated, feeling curiosity—and the painting itself—tugging her closer. *Come on in!* the canvas seemed to call. *The bracken’s fine!*

But there was no time for Elsewhere exploration. Not now. And not *alone*. She still had the rest of the house to check, and two cats to find, and letting down her guard, even for this half minute, was probably a bad idea. Olive turned and swept the hallway with a glance. She was still alone. With a deep breath, she headed onward.

The pink bedroom waited at the end of the hall. Afternoon sun fell through its lace curtains, leaving a pattern of fuzzy golden dots on the floor. The scent of mothballs and old potpourri floated in the air. Olive positioned herself in front of the room’s single painting, a picture of an ancient town with an archway guarded by two towering stone soldiers. Even through the spectacles, this painting did not come to life. The painted trees on the distant hills didn’t sway as Olive moved closer to the painting, pressing her nose into the canvas until its surface pooled around her face like a wall made of jelly.

Olive pushed her head through the painting, and then her shoulders, and then her feet, and all at once, she was on the other side. ~~But she wasn't in an ancient town. She was in a small, dark entryway, where a few slips of daylight outlined the shape of a heavy door.~~

Even though she had stood in this spot too many times to count, Olive felt a shiver race over her skin as she groped through the darkness for the doorknob. The door swung open with a low groan, and Olive scurried through it, rushing up the dusty stairs into the attic.

The attic of the old stone house looked like an antiques store that had been picked up, shaken hard, and put back down. Old chairs and cabinets and mirrors, some covered by sheets, some covered by cobwebs, were heaped against its angled walls. Stacks of paintings crowded its corners. Sagging boxes and old leather bags and locked steamer trunks towered almost to the ceiling. Rusty tools and bits of china were scattered across the floor, like dangerous confetti. And there, a little bit apart from everything else, stood Aldous McMartin's easel.

A drop cloth covered it now, but Olive knew that the easel held Aldous's final—unfinished—self-portrait. Bending down, she raised one corner of the cloth, the way you might lift up your shoe after stepping on a particularly large bug, and glanced at the painting beneath. On the dark canvas, Aldous's bodiless hands gave a twitch. One long, bony finger rose, seeming to point directly at her. With a jerk Olive let go of the cloth. She backed hurriedly away from the easel and collided with an ancient love seat, landing on her behind with a dusty *whump*.

On the cushions beside her, a splotchily colored cat bolted upright.

"Zee castle ees undefended!" he cried in a thick French accent, hurrying to put on his coffee can helmet by knocking it upside down and cramming his head into it. "Knights, arm yourselves!"

"It's all right, Harvey—I mean, um... Sir Lancelot," said Olive. "It's only me."

"Ah," said Harvey. He had gotten the helmet on sideways, so that only one green eye peeped through its rectangular slit. "*Bonjour, my lady,*" he added tinnily.

"Hello," said Olive, adjusting the coffee can until both of Harvey's eyes appeared in the eyehole, just above the words *Bold, Hearty Flavor!* "Did you see anything suspicious today?"

"Zuspeecious?" Harvey repeated. "*Non.* All was quiet. Zat ees, but for one intruder 'oo attempted to surmount zee walls of my fortress. 'Ee was defeated." Harvey nodded proudly toward the floor below where a squished spider made an asterisk-shaped blot on the boards.

Olive moved her feet away from the blot. "But no sign of Annabelle?" she asked, watching the spider to make sure it didn't magically regenerate. It didn't.

"I 'ave not zeen her," said Harvey, hopping lightly onto the back of the love seat and promenading back and forth. "She ees likely aware zat zee castle is protected by Lancelot du Lac, zee greatest knight of all!"

"That must be it," said Olive as Harvey lost his footing and slid over the back of the love seat. There was a loud clank from the coffee can.

"Ah-HA!" roared Harvey, leaping back onto the cushions. "Booby traps!? You zink zuch tricks can defeat Lancelot?"

"I've got to see Horatio," said Olive, edging away as Harvey tore into the love seat with all four claws.

Olive hustled out of the attic, back down the upstairs hall, and turned toward her parents' bedroom.

She hardly ever went to this end of the hallway. Her parents' room stood between a small green room that had no paintings in it, and an even smaller white room, which contained only the painting of a cranky-looking bird on a fencepost and dozens of boxes that her parents still hadn't unpacked. After scanning both the green and the white room with the spectacles, Olive opened the door to her parents' bedroom.

It was a large room, and in it was a very large bed. In the center of the bed, a very, very large cat appeared to be fast asleep. A beam of sunlight fell through the window directly onto the cat's orange fur, making him glow like some sort of angelic sea anemone. Olive tiptoed closer. Unable to resist, she reached out and ran her hand over the warm, silky ends of glowing fur.

"Hello, Olive," said Horatio, without opening his eyes.

"How did you know it was me?"

"The smell," said Horatio, eyes still closed. "Peanut butter and sour milk."

Olive folded her arms. "You really shouldn't be sleeping on my parents' bed," she said. "You know my mother is allergic to cats."

Horatio stretched, rearranging himself so that the sunlight covered as much of his body as possible. "Yes, that is unfortunate. But sometimes sacrifices must be made to achieve the happiness of others."

"Hmm," said Olive. She watched Horatio's tail, as bushy as a feather duster, flick back and forth over the sun-warmed blankets. "I can't believe you can sleep in the middle of the day when Annabelle is out there somewhere, trying to get back in *here*."

"Perhaps I wanted you to believe I was asleep. Perhaps I wasn't actually sleeping at all." One of Horatio's eyes opened, revealing a slit of sparkling green. "Annabelle McMartin is not going to charge into this house in broad daylight, Olive, especially not when she knows we're watching for her. She's cleverer than that."

"Then where do you think she is, right now?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Horatio said, "Someplace dark."

An imaginary droplet of cold water ran down the back of Olive's neck. She turned away from Horatio and tried to focus her mind on the two paintings that hung on the bedroom wall. One was of an old wooden sailing ship on a purplish sea. The other was of a white-pillared gazebo standing in a shady garden, half enclosed by towering willow trees. A gangly man in an old-fashioned suit was seated in the gazebo, reading a book. It would be nice to hide in that gazebo with a book of her own, listening to the breeze, smelling the flowers...But Olive had more important, more unpleasant, things to do.

"I'm going to check the yard and make sure everything is safe," she said in a brave voice, looking back at Horatio.

"Good," said the cat. His eyes were already closed.

Olive thumped down through the house and out the back door. The garden sprawled before her in all its thorny, leafy chaos. The ancient trees that surrounded the yard seemed to be trying to cover up the mess with a blanket of shadows. Olive walked around the garden's edge. There were no clues hidden among the strange plants, as far as she could tell. There were no footprints in the dirt near the compost pile, or lost pearls on the moss beneath the trees. Olive was beginning to feel sure that she wouldn't find anything interesting at all, when suddenly half of her body plunged straight through the ground.

Her left leg arched behind her in an awkward ballet position, her arms shot out, grasping uselessly at the air, and her chin landed in the grass between a patch of dandelions and an anthill. Gasping for breath, Olive stared at the bustling ants. They ignored her.

By dragging herself on her elbows, Olive managed to pull her lower half out of the ground and to roll, beetle-like, back around. Her heart thumped as she pawed through the grass. Was there an old well out here, overgrown and forgotten? Had some gigantic animal dug its hole in her backyard? Olive looked warily around, but the largest animal she could see was an obese squirrel grooming itself in a nearby maple tree. She leaned over the gap in the grass.

Here, at the farthest edge of the overgrown garden, well hidden by a mat of twigs and leaves, was a hole—a hole so deep that Olive couldn't see its bottom. Its mouth was between two and three feet

wide. She ran one cautious hand around its edge. The dirt was bare, so the hole couldn't have been here for long, and its sides were flat, like something cut by a shovel. This hole had been dug by a person...and it had been dug recently. Taking a last, sweeping glance at the yard, Olive lowered her head inside and peered down into the darkness far, far below.

OLIVE PREFERRED HER dark places with a little light in them. She was a big fan of light switches and candles and strings of electric Christmas lights, and she wasn't the type to go plunging into a deep, dark cave without a flashlight. So when she fell headfirst through the hole, it was entirely by accident. One moment she was kneeling in the weedy garden, and the next moment, she was making squealing sound (something like "AaaaaOOP!") as she slid down a steep dirt wall into a dark, chilly space far below the ground.

For a moment, all she could do was breathe. Once she was certain that she would go on breathing with or without trying to, Olive took an inventory of her body. Except for her now very dirty shirt, nothing seemed to be damaged, including the spectacles. Shakily, she rearranged herself into a semi-upright position and glanced up at the mouth of the hole, high above.

I've fallen into a trap! said a panicky voice in her brain. *Just like the kind of trap they dig for tigers! Or is it bears?*

No, you're thinking of Winnie-the-Pooh, said another, slightly-less-panicky voice in her brain.

Oh, that's right...The Heffalump trap, said the first voice.

Shut up, brain! Olive yelled at herself.

She took a timid look around. The darkness was as dense as chocolate cake, even with the streaks of faint gray daylight trickling in from above. All she could tell for certain was that she was in some sort of enclosed space, deep beneath the backyard. Horatio's words about Annabelle being *someplace dark* trailed unsettlingly through the chaos in her mind.

"Annabelle?" she whispered. Her heart was thundering in her ribs. It made her voice waver. "Are you here?"

There was no answer.

Tentatively, Olive reached out into the darkness until her fingertips met something solid. But what she felt wasn't dirt.

It was stone.

Olive teetered to her feet. As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, the space seemed to widen around her. Soon she could make out solid stone walls, a packed dirt floor, and something to her left that glinted in the wisps of faint gray light. Olive slunk closer. The glint seemed to split and multiply into rows and rows of glints, sparkling back at her. All at once, Olive knew where she was. She was at the end of the tunnel, beneath the basement, in the room full of jars.

Olive had only recently discovered this room for herself, after forcing Leopold to leave his station by using a spell from the McMartins' spellbook. She *still* couldn't understand why the big black cat was so protective of the place. To Olive, it looked like nothing more than a weird storage pantry for things no one would want to eat anyway.

But whoever had dug the hole had known about this place—had known about it, and had managed to get in. And, as far as Olive could tell, there was only one other person who would have been aware of its existence.

Annabelle McMartin.

Olive scanned the room. It wasn't large, and it was clear that she was alone inside of it. She wrapped her chilly arms tight around herself and peered at the crowded shelves. The jars were filled with things she couldn't quite identify: things that were red and powdery, things that were yellow and

oily, things that had legs, things that *were* legs, things with petals or thorns or bones. It seemed to Olive that there might have been a few more gaps in the rows than there had been last time she was down here—but there were so many jars, and so many gaps, and so many bits of broken glass scattered across the floor that it was impossible to be sure. And why would anyone want these jars in the first place?

Shivering, Olive turned toward the high wooden table that stood in front of the shelves. Bits of torn paper were strewn across its surface, just as they'd been when Olive first found them a few weeks ago with their handwritten words all broken apart like the pieces of a raggedy jigsaw puzzle. Olive turned over a few scraps, managing to make out *Gree*— and *-olet* and *mix with b*— by the trickle of distant daylight. A big mortar and pestle covered with orangeish powder stood nearby. Olive reached into the bowl and brought back a fingertip covered with orange dust. She sniffed it. It smelled like a rotten orange peel. Very cautiously, she put out her tongue and tasted it. It didn't taste like a rotten orange peel. It didn't taste like anything Olive had ever tasted before. She wiped her finger on one of the scraps of paper, drawing a little squiggly wave. Then she sighed, chafing her arms, and surveyed the room again.

Clearly, this place was important. Leopold had been guarding it for who-knew-how-long, and now, not one but *two* secret entrances led to it. She had to be missing something. She had missed important things before. And Olive had learned that when she missed something important, it was usually because she was looking at things in the wrong way.

She tugged the spectacles out of her collar and put them on. In the dimness, she stared hard at the rows of jars. Their contents didn't move. No secret words appeared, letter by letter, in their glass walls. She studied the room itself, but everything looked just as it had a moment ago. Olive sighed. She was just about to take the spectacles off again when her eyes landed on the paper on the table.

The little orange squiggle that she'd drawn with her finger was waving and rolling across the page, just like a real wave in a powdery orange ocean.

Sometimes when you put change in a vending machine, there's a long, mysterious pause while the inner workings catch and turn, and the coins slide into the right slot, and you wonder if the drink you ordered is actually going to fall through the swinging door at all. And then, suddenly: *Clank. Thud.* The can of pop appears in the doorway, and it's icy cold, and it's exactly what you wanted. This is what happened in Olive's brain when the little orange wave started to move.

Her feet pounded the packed dirt as she tore along the tunnel, arms out in front of her, barely noticing the near-total darkness. She stubbed her fingers hard against the ladder beneath the basement's trapdoor, but even that didn't slow her down.

"Leopold!" she shouted, flinging open the trapdoor.

The cat sprang off of the moving platform, whirling around mid-flight and landing gracefully on his feet.

"Is that you, miss?" he exclaimed. "But how did you—"

"Leopold, someone dug a hole in the backyard. Down into the tunnel," Olive gasped, hauling herself out of the trapdoor and scurrying across the basement to turn on the light. "I fell through it. Somebody has been in the room down there. With the jars."

Leopold's eyes widened. "Was anything disturbed? Taken? Vandalized?"

"I'm not sure," said Olive. "It looked like there might have been a few less jars on the shelves. But maybe they were just the ones that were already broken."

Leopold paused for a split second, appearing to think. "I'll get the other guardians. We'll examine the backyard."

"I need to put on a clean shirt, but then I'll come outside too," said Olive as Leopold turned away.

“Give me just a minute.”

Heart pounding, Olive watched Leopold bound up the basement stairs. She waited until the tip of his glossy black tail had disappeared from sight. And then Olive did something so clever and secretive and sly, she herself wondered how she'd come up with it.

She went to the dryer, which stood in one of the basement's cobwebby corners, dug through the clothes inside, and took out the largest T-shirt she could find. She tied the bottom of the shirt in a knot, turning it into a makeshift bag. Then she scrambled back through the trapdoor, down the ladder and along the tunnel to the stone room. Being careful not to miss a single scrap, she swept all the torn bits of paper from the tabletop into the T-shirt bag. If Annabelle wanted what was in the jars, then she would want what was on these papers too. In fact, if Olive's slowly solidifying theory was correct, the papers might be even *more* important than the jars. She had to keep them safe.

On top of the ragged bits of paper, Olive placed five jars, picking those whose contents had the most widely varied colors. One was powdery and white, another was viscous and black, and the other three were yolk-yellow, deep red, and a beautiful, water-color-ish blue. Making sure not to trip and smash the whole sack, Olive darted back along the tunnel, up the ladder, through the trapdoor, and up the basement steps.

The first floor of the house was quiet. The cats were nowhere to be seen. Scanning every hall and doorway, Olive smuggled the T-shirt up the staircase to her room and stuffed it underneath her bed.

Crouching there, while Hershel, her brown bear, gazed down at her from the pillows, Olive paused to really *think* for the first time. What she had beneath her bed, right next to the pink penguin pajama bottoms and a single dusty slipper, were the ingredients and instructions for Aldous McMartin's magical paints.

An electric shock of joy buzzed through her. A second later, the buzz fizzled into a shiver as she imagined what the cats would do if they found out.

They would take the jars away. They would stop Olive from trying to put the pieces together. They would tell her that dealing with Aldous's magic was wrong and dangerous, and that if she didn't want to become like the McMartins herself, she should simply sweep it out of her mind.

But Olive couldn't do this.

She couldn't let the paints or the papers fall into the wrong hands. And the tunnel clearly wasn't secure, even with the cats guarding it day and night.

Besides, if she figured out how to create them, maybe she could use these paints to do *good*. Maybe she could help the people trapped in the painting of Linden Street. Maybe she could undo some of the evil that Aldous McMartin had left behind. All she needed was time to think. And as long as the cats believed that Annabelle, not Olive, had taken the missing jars and the torn-up papers, then Olive's secret was safe.

Giving the bed one last glance, Olive brushed the dirt off her hands, tugged a clean shirt over her muddy one, and hustled downstairs to join the cats.

Horatio, Leopold, and Harvey had assembled behind the garden shed, out of sight of the house. Their low, arguing voices trailed across the grass toward Olive as she tiptoed closer.

“It's your station,” she heard Horatio saying. “Couldn't you keep *one little area* safe?”

“With all due respect,” Leopold's gruff voice answered, “the grounds are a shared area. I've examined the hole. It was dug several days ago, possibly weeks. And none of us noticed it. Harvey, didn't you monitor the backyard during night patrol?”

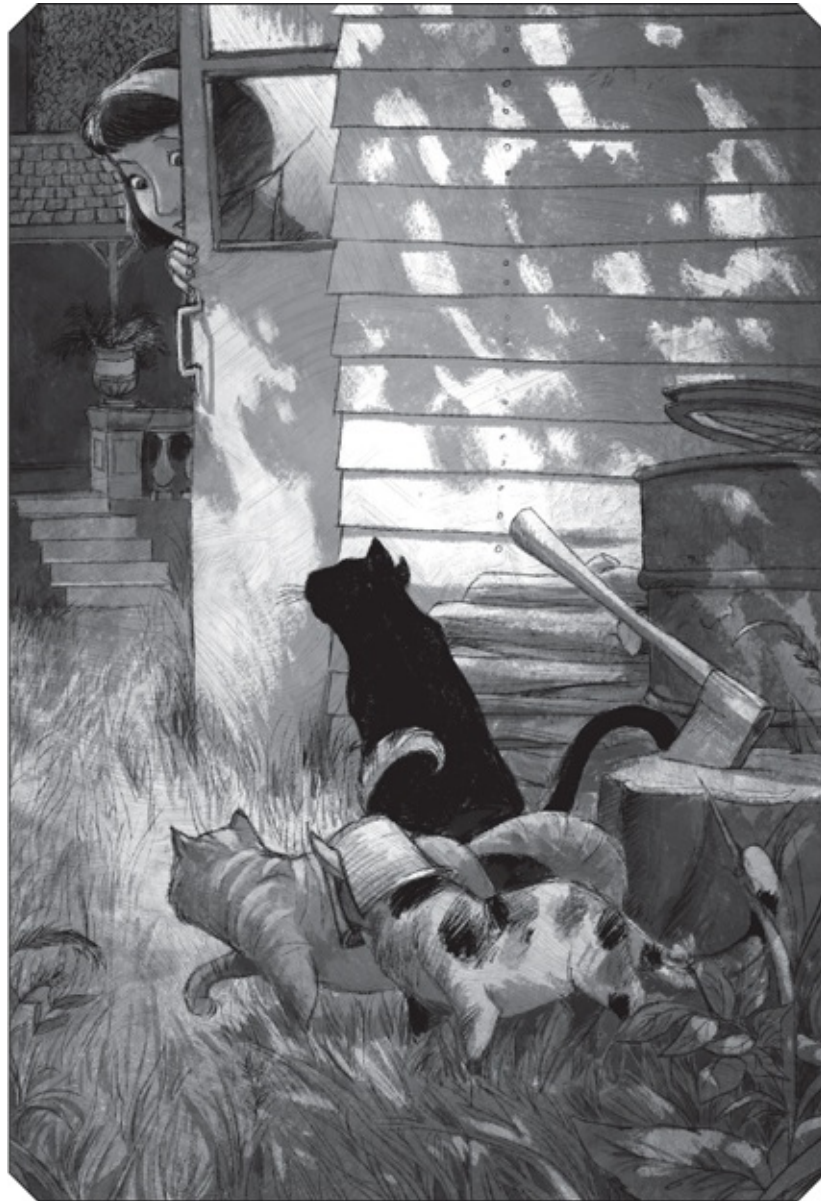
“I am not sure who sees this ‘Harvey’...” said Harvey's voice, in Sir Lancelot's accent, “but I am nevertheless certain that he watched the backyard with awe-inspiring bravery.”

“Indeed,” said Leopold. “Then I do not see how—”

“This is *Annabelle!*” Horatio cut him off. Olive crouched behind the shed’s open door, listening hard. “Furthermore, it’s not the backyard that matters, it’s what is *beneath*. Do you both realize what damage she could do with a single one of—”

At just that moment, bumped by Olive’s elbow, the shed door gave the kind of loud, rusty creak that makes most people try to use their shoulders to cover their ears. Olive flinched.

Horatio stopped speaking. A second later, the bright green eyes of all three cats appeared around the corner of the shed: Horatio’s angry, Leopold’s wary, and Harvey’s half eclipsed by the coffee can.



“Olive?” said Horatio.

“Oh,” said Olive, trying very hard to look casual and fumbling with the shed door so that it gave another violent creak, “so you’re not *inside* the shed. I thought you were. Inside, I mean. That’s why—um...”

“Well, come over here, so we can speak without shouting to you,” snapped Horatio.

Olive scurried around to the other side of the shed and crouched down until she was at cats’-eye level.

“Miss,” Leopold began, “we owe you our apologies. I was”—he fought to get the next words out—“an *incompetent* guardian. The security of the tunnel was compromised, and I deserve to be disciplined.”

“You desairve to be burned at zee stake!” hissed Harvey, with a knightly toss of his coffee can.

“Beheaded! Put on a pike!”

“Hey!” objected Olive, even though it sounded to her more like a reward than a punishment to put cat on a fish. “You have no right to criticize, considering that I found *you* asleep at your post about half an hour ago.”

“Zat is true,” said Harvey, in a smaller voice. “But napping ees not treason.”

“Annabelle is tricky,” said Olive. She looked down at Leopold, who in turn was looking sadly down at his toes. “Almost anybody could be fooled by her.”

Horatio let out a long breath through his nose. “She’s right,” he said at last. “I suppose our only course of action now is to fill in this hole and redouble our efforts.”

“The price of safety is eternal vigilance,” Leopold mumbled to his front paws.

Olive patted him on the head.

“Leopold,” Horatio commanded, “go back inside and patrol the tunnel. Harvey and I will get to work out here. Olive...” Olive straightened up, ready to be useful. “Go wash up. Your parents will be home soon, and you look like you’ve been rolling around in a coal scuttle.”

Olive sagged again. She headed toward the back door obediently, wondering what a coal scuttle was. Leopold slumped along beside her. Behind them, Harvey and Horatio were already crouching at the far side of the garden, examining the tunnel’s newest entrance.

“You may not see much of me for a while, miss,” said Leopold, not meeting her eyes, once the back door was safely shut behind them. “I will be going underground for a time. But if you ever need me, you’ll know where to find me.” With a nod that lacked its usual soldierly sharpness, Leopold vanished down the basement stairs.

Olive watched him go. Then she stood by herself in the kitchen for so long that her feet began to go numb. She was stacking up a tower of thoughts, and Olive knew that if she moved, the whole tower might come crashing down.

If it *was* Annabelle who had dug her way into the room at the end of the tunnel (and it seemed more than likely that it *was*), then she would almost certainly have taken some of the jars. However, she hadn’t taken the papers, which gave Olive a sliver of hope. Furthermore, with or without the paint-making instructions, Annabelle wasn’t a painter, as far as Olive knew. It was *Aldous* who was the artist of Elsewhere. What good would the paints be to Annabelle? Olive chewed on a strand of her hair, thinking. What good would the paints be to *her*?

Well, they would be no good at all unless she knew how to concoct them. And in order to even begin to do that, she would have to put together all those thousands of bits of torn-up paper. And that could take *ages*, if she managed to do it without losing her mind first. One Christmas, an aggravating great-uncle Dunwoody had sent Olive a jigsaw puzzle. It was made up of five thousand pieces, and every piece was covered with a broken picture of other puzzle pieces. If you put all five thousand pieces together, you had what looked like another pile of unsolved puzzle bits all tumbled together on a tabletop. Just the idea of putting that puzzle together made Olive’s brain start to hiss and sputter like a frying egg.

Even if she *did* manage to reassemble all those torn-up papers, and even if they *were* recipes for paint, and even if she *could* figure out how to use them...what would she use them *for*? What could Olive possibly paint that would be worth bringing to life forever?

Olive was still thinking and chewing when the front door creaked open.

“Hello, junior high school student!” called Mr. Dunwoody cheerily as he and Mrs. Dunwoody set down their briefcases. The words *junior high* kicked over Olive’s tower of thoughts very efficiently.

Mrs. Dunwoody bustled down the hall, kissed Olive on the head, and went into the kitchen to turn on the oven. “I’ll get dinner started, and then we want to hear all about your first day.”

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