

HEART OF A PURPLE CLOVER

By *Chad Robert Parker*

(Draft: chapters 1-2)

April 9, 2008

CHAPTER ONE: HIS VENT

Angelica stood motionless; her head tilted toward the sun. Her blindfold—warmed by the sun’s rays and resting on the bridge of her nose—gave her a tingling sensation. A fresh cool breeze reached her nose filled with smells of trees and shrubs. A single drop of cold rain touched her cheek and tickled its way down to her neck. She smiled and raised open hands to the sky.

“Argh, now it’s going to rain on us. That’s just great!” Angelica’s younger brother Oden, bellowed. “What’s taking them so long?”

“It has only been a minute or two. Be patient.” Angelica’s older brother Curtis said stiffly.

Footsteps raced back toward them and thumped to a stop, followed by a loud clap against the side of the family mini-van nearby. “I win, again.” Angelica heard her dad cheer in between forceful pants.

“You cheated,” her mother’s muffled voice hurtled along the path after her husband.

“Hey, what’s that mom’s carrying,” Oden laughed. “I can only see her arms.”

“No fair, no one said he could take off his blindfold,” Curtis retorted, pulling his own off with curiosity.

“Oh yes, everyone take your blindfolds off and see how silly your mother is,” their dad proclaimed.

Angie removed the blindfold to find her mom engulfed in dingy off-white blanket-like coverings as large as pirate sails, old and worn with holes. Her mother stumbled to the ground and was red in the face with laughter. “You cheated,” she finally said between muffled laughs. “I had to bring your pile, too.” She poked her flushed red face through the coverings.

“Well you never said bring them back to the car—just out of the house.” Mr. Albright corrected her.

Oden jumped into the pile of coverings and hugged his mother, who was still shaking her head with a smile at their father. “Can I go in now?” Oden asked.

“Yes, we’re ready. You can go and see the new house.” Mrs. Albright answered.

Curtis and Oden raced off with Oden falling clearly behind. Angelica paused though; she always loved when rain fell on a sunny day. Its refreshing drops glistening from the pure white clouds above, reassuring her that everything would be wonderful here. She touched the tingling dew from the sky, while admiring the shiny life-supporting water that rested on her fingertips and on brilliant shades of green leaves, on trees around her. A peaceful breeze brushing across her face carried no sound of the beautiful scenery stretched before her deep thought-filled emerald eyes.

Before her stretched a pale hand-laid cobblestone path, which wound through a lush wooded lot—a completely new world of glistening emerald shades of green atop dark rough shades of brownish-gray tree trunks. The cool breeze of the ocean, hot sand massaging her feet, suddenly giving way to the brisk engulfment of waves climbing up her ankles, would just be a pleasant memory now—from her California past. She was alone for a moment, her family rushing on, putting claims on rooms to their new Indiana home. With a jolt, she shook herself free from her daze, excitedly picked up a light-purple backpack at her feet, which contained a

few days clothing, then flung it over one shoulder and skipped onward. The trail widened exposing a beautiful cottage-like abode in appearance, only it was much larger and seemed to rise majestically—from a slated stone foundation—branching upward with magnificent logs, as though carved out of the forest itself. She didn't think it a mansion, but it was grand enough to her seven-year-old view. Her brothers, Curtis and Oden, had already run inside, but her parents stood outside, arm-in-arm, side-by-side, gazing appreciatively at the dwelling. Her dad motioned for her with his free arm as though anxiously waiting her approach. And then just when she was within reach, he swiped her off the ground by her waist and pulled his cute little giggling daughter close to his side, her dress swishing around her, blue ribbon swaying between dark curly locks that were bouncing below an intricate wire-formed silver and blue winged butterfly, set in her hair—wings now fluttering; she turned into him and hugged her father back.

“Your brothers probably found their rooms by now,” He smiled, almost laughed. “But no matter, I'm sure they left your room alone.” Angelica's father looked intently at his daughter's confused, but excited gaze. “Your room is like stepping into a little girl's dream, not exactly what Oden wants.”

Now anxious, Angelica's eyes widened. She respectfully looked at her father as though awaiting some kind of signal.

“Well, don't let us keep you,” her father chuckled.

Her mother smiled warmly. “Go ahead! We'll be in, in a minute.”

Angelica strode briskly to the entrance, then pulled open one of the sturdy wooden front doors by the golden handle, and disappeared within.

“She would have whatever was left her.” Mrs. Albright spoke softly, almost choking on the realization of her words; her head now resting gently on her husband’s bosom, below his chin. “We don’t need all this, you know.”

“She’s more precious than anything we’ll ever give her,” Mr. Albright returned.

A pleasant smell of deep antique wood with a fragrance much like a soft-scented cologne first caught Angelica off-guard, but as she entered it dissipated; and it was quickly replaced by a musty smell she would expect would fill an old museum storage room. Angelica’s bare feet clacked on the gleaming dark wood floor of the entrance, quietly sunk into the warm burgundy carpet of the living room at the right—set below a lofty ceiling—and continued around covered furniture, through French Doors to the guest dining room with the large chandelier, then pitter-pattered across the chilly gray, black, and white mixture of marble floor around a long oval-shaped but covered table accompanied by covered chair shapes, in the kitchen. There along every wall were carved mahogany baseboards and deep chestnut-colored cabinets above, accenting the warm hues of white walls, which were textured to form soft sweeping motions where light could dance over them. To the left side of the living room extended stairs toward the guest dining room, concealing a half-bathroom below it, then curving left, formed an archway over the main hallway to the kitchen, and curving left again extended to the upstairs bedrooms. Angelica stopped short of entering the deep green carpet of the entertainment room, the main bedroom beyond that, a main bathroom attached, an octagonal study offset that, which looked like a multi-paned greenhouse—only the greenery was on the outside entirely surrounding it, and a hallway connecting to the guest room to complete the circle back to the front of the house. There was such elaborate design, unique lighting fixtures, and intricate woodwork to discover. Instead, however, she quickly remembered her earlier objective and returned to the stairwell she

had passed before. Knowing her room would be near Oden's excited shouts, now echoing above her, she raced upstairs. Then she stepped softly across more wood floor, letting her hand slide over the rail collecting soft dust. For the first time she noticed how the upstairs overlooked the living room from that railing. And on the large front room wall before her view, was a circular stained-glass window reflecting brilliant colors throughout the living room; on it there was a bright yellow sun gleaming in a dazzling blue sky with a pure white dove descending over emerald green hills. Back at the top of the stairs, at an angle, was a shut door, whereon Oden's pirate sign already hung—a sullen skull with crossed bones underneath, and all—read **Keep Out**. Another door angled next to the first was slightly opened, revealing a restroom. She spun around the turnstile of the intricately carved handrail and trailed her hand along the rail as it continued back overlooking the stairs she had just come up. In front of her now was another door and to her left the hall continued, where she could see a different entrance to the restroom on the left side of the hallway and an office door on the right. She knew Curtis's room—to Oden's dismay—would be far removed from everyone who wasn't about to be a teenager, somewhere at the end of wherever that hall led; but her new room, on the other hand, was surely right before her. She trembled with a chill of excitement then slowly she opened the door.

Sunrays flowed through a vaulted window, illuminating a large queen-sized bed whereon lay a billowy white comforter, with pink and light-blue shapes; at the bed board were layered mountains of various one-toned pillows. She had to jump to get onto her bed, but then sunk peacefully into its embrace. From her back she gazed at the light-blue concave ceiling with its white cloud-shapes above—a picturesque painted sky, as though her room opened into the heavens. She closed her eyes, forgetting time. On the wall at the foot of her bed was a painted trail that parted the clouds and seemed to extend far beyond down a dreamy path through

mountains to a castle fit for a princess, like what she had seen in storybooks, only this wasn't a story and somehow the illusion of the painted trail led to an actual life-sized doll house in the form of a castle, appearing to be sculpted from stone. She rubbed her eyes as though it were a dream. Then slowly she opened her eyes and at the side of her bed was a unicorn rocking horse. She smiled. Then she glanced into the corner of the room to her left, where a shelf lined the wall and thereupon set a row of antique dolls.

Angelica leapt from her bed. She fell to the plush carpet below, but with a thud nonetheless. Then she thrust her arms to cuddle the nearest doll, swinging it side-to-side. She buried her nose in the coarse unkempt hair, smelling its seasoned aroma. Doll on her hip, she strode across the only wood flooring of her bedroom, or rather the drawbridge to her castle, and then sped up a white spiral staircase to enter the tower. There she leaned against a wall letting her hair fall down over the circular tower's edge. She set the doll atop the wall and rested her head in its lap.

"Those dolls are very special. You'll need to take good care of them. They're antiques, now." Angelica reeled around startled and then smiled, embarrassed at the sight of her mother's misty eyes.

"But where did they come from?" Angelica asked.

"What do you mean?" Angelica's mother looked puzzled.

"Whose dolls are these?" Angelica asked innocently.

"Well, they're yours. I was about your age, when my mother gave them to me, and now that you are old enough, I am giving them to you. They didn't stand a chance when you shared a room with Oden, anyway." Angelica's mother beamed—a sparkle in her eyes.

Angelica nearly leapt from the castle balcony to her bed below, but contained herself, knowing her mother wouldn't allow it. She raced down the spiral steps and into her mother's arms, doll still in hand. They hugged long and tightly. "Thank you. It's all, almost too perfect." Angelica slowly turned and gently caressed the doll. "I think she needs her hair combed."

Angelica's mother let out a laugh. "Yes, I suppose she does. It has been awhile I'm sure."

"Where's dad?" Angelica asked.

"He's checking out the boy's rooms with them. So what do you think? Are we going to like it here?" Mrs. Albright wiped a lone tear from her cheek and smiled.

"How could we not?" The two grinned. "I want to see what the boys think." Angelica's eyes beamed brightly up into her mother's.

Her mom looked at her, inquisitively. "Why don't we go and see." Mrs. Albright offered.

Mother and daughter went hand in hand to Curtis' room. Curtis door was now wide open. He was inside pushing the double-paned boxed window from the center to open it out toward the front yard view—precisely according to his father's instruction. Oden was there too: tugging at his dad's pant leg for attention, trying to get him to come see how cool the secret loft was, with a ladder to it and everything. Eventually the excitement of the new surroundings died down, but only after the kids had shown their parents everything they had discovered, a few times over. The Albright's gathered into the living room to discuss the evening's plans.

"Help me remove some of these covers, will you Curtis?" Mr. Albright instructed his son.

"Whose furniture is this?" Curtis asked warily.

Mr. Albright hesitated to answer as they waved the first cover, old and gray and filled with holes, sending a cloud of dust into the air. “They’re ours,” he said. “They were auctioned off with the house.” He looked over at his wife, now exhausted. “There we are. Now your mother has a place to lie down a moment.” He took his wife by the arm and escorted her to the couch where he helped her to lie down. “Why don’t you kids go play outside?” Their father winked at them and gave Curtis a nudge.

“Hey Angelica, do you want to go exploring with Oden and me?” Curtis asked, genuinely.

“I thought Angie and I would unpack some boxes together, first,” Mrs. Albright said as she rose anxiously from her couch.

Mr. Albright looked sternly in her direction.

“Well, what do you think, Angie, would you like to go play too?” Mrs. Albright instinctively grabbed her hand as though her sub-conscious did not want to let her go.

Angelica’s mouth dropped. And so did Oden’s. “You mean I can go play with the boys?” Though they never really invited her before, she never would have been permitted anyway. And now her mother was even suggesting that it was okay. Growing up near Los Angeles may have influenced the change, since now the nearest neighbor would be miles away, which surely put her mom at ease; but on the other hand, her brothers were always granted freedom to play within earshot, regardless of the surroundings. Her mother usually just told her that while boys may romp around the neighborhood, it was never appropriate for such a girl as delicate as she. Angelica didn’t feel any less fragile, but she was not going to pass this chance up.

Angie's mom looked uneasy. "Okay, you three go have fun, but once the mover's finish unloading our things we are going to need more help getting situated."

"Mary, they can't help us with the large items, anyway" Mr. Albright folded his arms as he spoke to his wife.

"Well Curtis can, and while he helps you, I'll move the mini-van closer to unload with the younger ones." She nodded her head assertively.

Mr. Albright sighed. "Okay, go exploring but keep close enough for us to call you when we need you."

Had Angelica's parents seeming switch of roles had anything to do with letting her go exploring? She had never before ventured beyond the confines of a fenced-in city yard without her mom close by. Now, her dad, who usually made sure they stuck to task when they had work to do, was encouraging delinquency. Angelica didn't pause to question the result, and so with a squeal of delight that she couldn't help but let out, she strode past Oden.

Oden rolled his eyes at the excitement she had. He didn't say anything though, fearing that Curtis would remind everyone how he had convinced Oden to dig a hole to China and escape the overprotection of his mother, just before he had turned six. He was sure that if he had had better tools and more time, he could have done it. At age six though, Oden's mother had relented that he could tagalong with Curtis in the outdoors; but Angie was sure that it had more to do with Curtis turning twelve and becoming more responsible for him than anything else. A rush of excitement filled Oden as he grabbed his shoes, with the sudden realization of forests and plains endless as the energy of his youth; for a moment he now forgot himself and his composure, and let out a loud squeal identical to Angie's.

Everyone laughed, including a red-faced Oden, once he realized what he had done.

The other two children anxiously put their shoes on. Then Curtis and Oden, with jackets in hand darted for the front door.

“Well are you coming, or not?” Curtis’ head motioned toward the outside, his hand resting impatiently on the doorknob.

“I can’t find--” Angelica started to say.

But Oden interrupted, “Yeah, are you coming, or not?” His mimicking words had a slight more snide-like tone than his older brother.

Curtis shook his head, unable to restrain a smile at his little brother’s antics, and then looked warmly at his sister. “Go get your jacket, we’ll wait for you.”

Oden moaned and looked at the floor. Angelica grinned wide-eyed, in a way that must have looked absurd. “Really? I’ll hurry. I will.” Angelica had already checked the front closet twice, so she retraced her steps to the other rooms. *Where did she put her jacket?* She couldn’t remember in all of the commotion. *She always put it in a front closet, though. But then again, it was a new house.* Curtis and Oden watched as Angelica darted from one room to the next.

A burst of air escaped first through Oden’s nose past his cupped hands, and then turned into outright laughter.

“What is so funny?” Curtis asked. “Oh no, Oden,” Curtis said disgusted. “Did you hide her jacket, again?” One look at Oden’s reddened face, struggling to regain air in between laughs, gave him his answer. “Where did you put it?” Curtis walked over to Oden and put a hand on each of his shoulders, staring him squarely in the eyes. “Come on Oden, we don’t have time for this.”

Mrs. Albright's torso moved forward instinctively to the rescue, but her husband had clasped a hand on one shoulder holding her back. He whispered lovingly to her, "Let them solve this. We can't smother her anymore."

"Do you want mom to change her mind and have us help with unpacking, now?" Curtis said sternly, a serious frown covering his face.

Oden pointed down at the floor beneath him, unable to speak through his laughter.

"The dungeon?" Curtis asked. Oden nodded. "Angie come here, we know where your jacket is. Well—Oden does." He frowned in Oden's direction. "He threw it downstairs." Angie came walking slowly into the front room. The pink color had flushed free from her cheeks to a ghostly white. "I can get it for you, Angie." Curtis offered. "You and Oden can go ahead. I'll catch up."

Mr. and Mrs. Albright exited the room evasively and walked toward the master bedroom trying to appear as though they were not interested in their children's conversation.

Angelica looked at Oden, who was now dead silent. She stared at him with narrowed eyes; then she smiled and softly spoke. "No, I'll get it. You guys go ahead."

Oden's eye's boggled in disbelief. Curtis opened the front door. "I guess she thinks you need a head start there, Oden."

Oden gave a determined look. "Not me!" He crossed his arms and stood stubbornly, making it clear he didn't feel he needed to take an unfair advantage.

Curtis closed the door, blocking the chilly morning air from continuing through. "We'll be up here waiting, if you need us."

Angie strode confidently to the top of the stairs, her brothers curiously following more slowly behind her; She opened the creaking door. And as she stared down the dark, dirty spiral

stairwell into the black hole gaping before her, she gulped, but her swallow halted in the middle of her throat. She couldn't help but look back at her brothers one more time, then before her eyes could narrow and adjust to the darkness, her outstretched foot met firmly with the first metal step. She grasped for the cold railing, clung to it, and regained her balance and composure. Her teeth chattered and her throat continued straining, trying to gulp back the fear. *Just take one step at a time.* She whispered this over and over, again and again—thirteen times in all—winding her way down deeper and darker, then stumbled as she abruptly met the flat floor of the basement. She let out a sigh; and then she took in her first real breath of air, realizing now that she had been holding her breath. A musty stench of dead air rose through her nostrils. She coughed and sputtered. She looked back to where she had come from and almost ran for it, but found herself relieved at how far she had come instead. Light was pouring out of the doorway above and in its wake she caught sight of glistening fibers woven in a circular mesh. Her head must have just ducked under the sticky cotton-like web that loomed across the passageway still undisturbed, a large spider in its center. Spider webs likely filled every corner. She pressed forward thinking how she didn't want to wait around for the owner of any other spider webs. And she kept clear of the wall with this in mind. She paused a moment. *It's just a basement.* The thought helped her calm down. *Yeah, everything is fine. This isn't so bad.* Just then the upstairs door slammed shut. A scream nearly escaped her, but she held it in. Oden would want a reaction and somehow she restrained herself from giving it to him.

Her hand fast found the rippled surface of a cement wall. Powdered dust made its edges soft to touch. Somewhere in the middle of this dark chamber was a single light bulb attached to the ceiling. She had seen it. A pull of the string and a friendly click would greet her with light. But she could not bring herself to step so boldly into the middle of this dungeon. Finally she

took a couple steps into the dark. But fears overcame her and she returned to press her back firmly against the cold wall.

Okay, Oden couldn't have thrown my coat far. He would be too scared to come even as far as I had. And it's silly to think someone else is down here.

Her reasoning was just enough. In a desperate move she sprawled on the floor and began crawling around the pillar of the spiral staircase. Stretching her arms and legs she covered large portions of the floor with sweeping motions. For a moment she pictured in her mind the rainbow-like patterns that must have formed in the thick dust pushed by her legs and arms; an angel-like figure came to view. *An angel, like mom says you make in the snow.* Then moving further with more confidence she caught hold of the felt fabric that she knew to be her jacket. Her fingers glided over its warm surface and ran along the zipper column. Not sure whether she was shaking from cold, sudden relief, or fear, intuitively put her jacket on. Still uncomfortable, she shuffled quickly towards the only exit she knew, back from where she had come. But just as she reached the bottom of the stairs a gruff manly voice sounded directly behind her.

She gasped. And there she stood paralyzed and helpless. Not even a scream could escape. The words were not clear to her. *Where did they come from?* But now her attention focused solely on hearing that voice again. *Maybe he can't see me.* Again the deep tones of a man's voice filled the stagnant air. She reeled around in the direction of her invader and slammed into the wall where she had previously leaned. In a raspy voice that only a mouse could mimic she surprised herself and uttered, "Who is it?"

No response came. She was frozen, her joints stiffening. The worst thing imaginable was happening—and of all the times for it—her legs refused to carry her to safety. She tried to control her breathing so as not to give up her position, but to no avail. She was sure the intruder

could hear the deafening thump of her beating heart anyway. She willed herself not to faint with the overexertion of it all.

Another voice pierced the air. It was mothers. The words were muffled and distant, but it was her voice. Comfort flowed back through her, releasing her locked frame; somehow it warmed her from the inside out. The voices weren't talking to her, but to one another. Another manly voice joined the conversation. It was her fathers. She was safe now. She could walk freely to them if it weren't so dark. So trailing her fingers casually along the soft, now comfortable ripples of the cinderblock wall, she walked in the direction of their conversation. She nearly called out more than once, but remembered how rude it would be to interrupt adults. She even let go of the wall forgetting about the fear she had of walking through spider webs, making her way through the dark with the help of the voices beyond her. Then at a quickened pace, she briskly strode across the large expanse of cement floor.

Her eyes searched the darkness trying to see the figures of her parents. The voices continued but the sound was still so faint. She was fixated on their voices, still seemingly in the distance. Without warning, she collided into a wall. The voices continued in conversation, almost before her face—but there was no one. Cold air rushed against her feet carrying more distinct words.

“Why did you come here?” The gruff voice confronted her mother.

“It is our home. We bought it at the auction.” Angelica's mother chimed in through a pleading tear-filled voice.

“It was not yours to buy. It's mine,” the gruff voice continued.

“It was for sell. We bought it,” her dad contested, just as brusquely.

“That’s not why you came,” the gruff voice countered. “You can at least admit as much.”

“We couldn’t let someone else buy it,” Angelica’s mom replied. “Its legacy means more to us than its price.”

“Then take it when I’m dead.” The gruffness in the voice faded but didn’t waver. “I don’t need your money or your pity.”

There was a long pause. Angelica felt all along the wall for the source of the conversation.

“You’re right! We didn’t come for the house. And when we saw the auction held by someone else, we thought you were dead for all we knew. Can’t you understand, what it means just to see you alive? But this is not just about us. Your grandchildren need you.” Sobbing overcame her mother’s voice, trailing off in the distance.

Bewildered, Angelica stared blankly at the black wall. Then light clicked on behind her.

“What have you been doing down here?” Curtis asked.

“Shh. They’ll hear you.” Angelica whispered.

“Who?” Curtis looked around with raised eyebrows. He walked toward his sister.

Angelica turned back toward the wall. There, protruding from the wall about a foot above her ankles was a vent with wooden shades. “I can hear mom and dad through that.” She pointed at the dirt-laden slats of the vent.

“You shouldn’t spy on mom and dad.”

“But they’re with someone else.”

“I don’t hear anything.” Curtis grabbed her by the elbow.

“But they were just there.”

“Where? Inside a concrete wall? Come on, Angie, Oden won’t wait for this.” He looked at her as though she just might be crazy. It hadn’t been the first time she had heard people that he couldn’t see, and he personally thought her too old for imaginary friends. He shook his head and tugged at her arm.

He tugged his reluctant sister away from the basement up to the other impatient brother.

“About time!” Oden jeered.

Angelica smiled. Oden looked disappointed with his sister’s calm reaction. “Did you see anyone up here, besides mom and dad?” Angelica asked Oden.

“Like who?” Oden asked.

“No one,” Curtis blurted.

Angelica just looked at Oden earnestly, for an answer.

“Well, of course I did. Moving people keep coming in and out. Why?” He looked at his sister struggling to come up with a word of explanation. “What is she talking about?” He looked to Curtis for an answer, but got nothing.

“Never mind. I could hear another person inside our house, that’s all. It was probably just a mover.” Angelica relinquished.

“I scared you. Didn’t I? I scared you. I scared you.” Oden teased as he danced around her in a circle poking at her arms.

Angelica shrugged him off, scrunching her face in disapproval.

“Well come on, let’s go already.” Curtis opened the back door and waved them through it.

CHAPTER TWO: FINDING A LEGACY

Sunbeams through the trees lit up paths of soil particles in the air. A scent of fertile forest earth permeated the breeze. The earlier sprinkle of rain had stopped falling, but the increased amount of clouds remained tainted gray. Light sparkled on droplets, trickling down leaves. The children squinted from the stark contrast of light as they stepped from the backdoor. A cool rush of wind, hinted of autumn. It pushed its way through the doorway nipping at their cheeks. Drops still covered the tips of blades of grass in the shadows of trees where the sun could not reach. Angie was glad to still have her jacket. But Oden threw his on the ground at the first hint of sunny weather. He then ran through thick grass to a path that stretched from the backyard porch down the hillside, winding its way to an opening in the woods. Once in the trees—May Apples brushing at his knees—he stopped to gain his breath and make sure his siblings were coming so he wouldn't be alone. But once Curtis and Angelica got close enough, he rose from his panting position and ran up a nearby hill overlooking a stream on the other side.

“I'm king of the mountain,” Oden thrust his fists triumphantly up in the air, squinted and exposed clinched teeth.

Curtis looked amused as he tied his jacket around his waist. He turned to Angelica, and smiled while shaking his head. “We're not playing ‘King of the Mountain,’ stupid.” Curtis yelled.

Oden collapsed, exhausted. He fiddled with a twig in the dark rich dirt. “What are we playing, again? I forget.” Oden sincerely asked, then shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, we're exploring, like I said before,” Curtis offered.

“What for? You didn't really say what we're looking for.” Oden pointed out.

“So you do get it.” By now Curtis and Angelica had made it to where Oden stood. “Had we told you what we were looking for, you would have never waited for me to get Angie out of the basement, would you?”

Oden smirked, knowing Curtis was right. Curtis then jumped onto Oden, put him in a headlock and began rubbing his head with the middle knuckle of his other hand. “Quit it! Quit it!” Oden begged, squirming away from Curtis, but smiling strangely as though he might have liked it. “We’re exploring! Remember?”

“What are we looking for?” Angelica asked, partially wanting to save Oden from what seemed to her like it would be torture. “Can I look for a flower?”

“A flower? No way! I’m not looking for a flower.” Oden contested.

Curtis released Oden, momentarily. “How about a four-leaf clover?”

“What good are clovers?” Oden asked.

“They bring luck,” Curtis, now completely distracted, let go of Oden entirely.

“Does Indiana even have four-leaf clovers?” Oden asked from his knees; his hair disheveled.

“Duh. Does Indiana have luck?” Curtis asked.

“I don’t know,” Oden shrugged, “That’s why I asked,” He added, when Curtis looked squarely at him.

Curtis laughed. “Everywhere has some luck.”

“I thought clovers only had three-leafs,” Angelica said.

“Most do. But some have four and five and even six,” Curtis looked pleased with his knowledge on the subject.

“Six!” Angelica paused long enough to take this in. “I want to find one with six for extra extra good luck.”

Curtis snickered. “Those are bad luck. Witches use them.”

Angelica shrugged, “I still want to see one,” she said quietly to herself.

“Are all clovers green?” Oden asked.

“Of course they are!” Curtis said quickly.

“I heard some are purple.” Angelica said.

“Who would tell you that?” Curtis asked, disbelievingly.

“I told you, before we came here. When I dreamt about Indiana. There was a prairie filled with purple clovers. The nice elderly woman in a brilliant white gown showed me.” Angie spoke sweetly.

“Dreams aren’t real.” Curtis passively cut her off.

“What if I find a purple clover?” Oden jumped in between Curtis and Angie. “I would be the first ever, probably.” He looked to his siblings for validation.

“There’s no such thing,” Curtis insisted. “Didn’t you hear me? They’re only green, except in Angie’s dreams, which don’t make sense. I don’t get either of you. And dad says you two may have to become my best friends, here.” Curtis spoke under his breath disgusted. “Are you two ready to find green four-leaf clovers, or not?”

“Well, I’m going to find the first purple one,” Oden went on, “for courage.”

“Okay fine, you do that. You find a purple one.” Curtis’s eyebrow rose slightly. “If there is a purple clover, I would find it first. But when I find the first green clover, just like the ones in California, I’m still the winner.”

“Hey look over there—a stream and a bridge,” Oden announced, although he was the only one who hadn’t already seen it before. Oden quickly scampered to the footbridge that curved over a few feet of water. His hollow steps trampled to the center of the bridge. With body fully extended, he leaned over the railing and peered at the water as it trickled by.

“You won’t find any clovers in there,” Curtis retorted, reluctantly trailing after his brother.

“Are there any fish?” Oden asked.

“What do you think? Do you see any fish?” Curtis asked, smugly, now looking over the water, too.

“Nope,” Oden said.

“It’s just a stream,” Curtis said, knowingly. “What did you expect, a whale?”

“What do we do now?” Angelica was on the bridge on her hands and knees; her body was bent through the railing so she could try touching the water.

“What do you mean?” Curtis asked, curtly. “Mom’s right. You two get distracted easy. She needs to let you out more. We are going exploring, far into the woods. Remember?”

Oden had bent down to try to reach the water also, but got up with a start. “Hey, where are we. Are we lost?” Oden’s face showed deep concern. “Mom said to stay where we could hear her.”

Curtis was beyond impatient at this point. “Why? Are you lost? You’re the one who brought us here.”

“Well we came real far already. I can’t even see the house now,” Oden whimpered.

“It’s just over the hill, dummy!” Curtis muttered. Curtis could not understand how Oden could get lost so easily. Curtis, after all, could remember how to get anywhere his parents took

him, ever since he was only five. “Just follow me. All right?” he exhaled, “I’ll show you where to go.” Curtis strode confidently, taking long lanky strides along the stream. His posture was perfect and his focus keenly aware of his surroundings. Oden followed lackadaisically.

Occasionally he would bounce upward as he walked, taking one out-of-the-ordinary step where his heel would not touch the ground, and pressing off with his toes exuberantly. His head was tilted toward the sky, seemingly studying the large, now blackened, marshmallow clouds. Once and a while he would trot to keep up, or rather to make up for the aimless wandering of his zigzagging pattern, behind Curtis’ straight path. Angelica skipped along happily behind them.

“Here, Angie,” Oden handed Angelica a big stick. “Explorers need sticks to hunt alligators.” His voice rose excitedly. “When you find one, hit it between the eyes.”

Curtis rolled his eyes. “Are you just crazy?” Curtis now yelled; he had stopped abruptly and Oden—not paying any attention—bumped right into him. Oden rubbed his forehead.

“Owe, what did you stop for?” Just then a butterfly caught Oden’s attention. “Angie, a butterfly. I’ll catch it for you.” He dropped the stick and chased it right past Curtis. Curtis disgustedly shook his head, and then entering a meadow, began busily scouring the earth for clovers, again.

Angelica watched Oden; he chased the butterfly from one flower to the next. She giggled in delight. The butterfly was the first creature they had seen in the woods; it fluttered over a shallow portion of the stream, so Oden leapt awkwardly in its wake, from one stone to another, the butterfly just out of his reach. He jumped and swiped at it, just missed it, then slipped and fell into the stream. Clumping through the water he continued, and then up the bank he smashed recklessly through a large stretch of brush, trampling everything in his path.

“Oden, stop!” Angelica heard herself saying.

“Stop what?”

“You’re destroying the flowers.”

“I am not.”

She quickly changed her approach. “Watch out for the alligators?” Oden completely forgot about the butterfly. “They might be in the water.”

“Oh yeah, you’re right, they’re always close to the water.” He looked back at the stream and wandered along its bank farther. “You have to watch out because alligators are fast.” Oden added, convincing himself more than anyone else. And by the way he stayed clear of the water; he actually seemed to believe himself, so much so that he might as well have been in his own world.

Curtis was done bothering with Oden. In the meadow he had found a whole patch of clovers, and he was determined to show Oden that it paid off to stick to the search. But upon careful examination of individual clovers, he had only found clovers with three leaves. He threw clumps of clovers to the ground and hastily picked more. Though Angelica loved watching Oden’s carefree play, she distanced herself from him to talk to Curtis in secret.

“Curt,” she tugged at his sleeve, unable to gain his attention. “Did you know grandpa is still alive?” Her own earnest, adult-like tone surprised her.

That got Curtis’s attention. He stood up quickly. “Why do you say that?”

“I heard him in the basement, through the vent that I showed you.”

“No, that’s impossible. You couldn’t have.” Curtis shook his head, but his eyes were uncertain. “You just daydream too much.” Curtis became more assured as he spoke. “Besides, he would never come here?” Curtis spoke as if questioning himself out loud.

“But he is alive, then?” Angie persisted. “You know something about him.”

“No! That can’t be true.” Curtis shook out of a trance. “What would make you ask that, Angie?” Curtis braced himself. “We never talk about our grandparents, because we both know that they are all dead.”

“I heard a man and he said this was his house.” Angie spoke urgently. “And then mom told him that his grandchildren need him.”

“How could you have heard grandpa down there? No one was in that basement.” Curtis said, doubtfully. “So, maybe you heard someone else’s grandpa.” Curtis blurted out. “One of the movers maybe. Grandpa died before we were—,” but he stopped short of finishing that sentence.

“What is it, Curtis?” The words didn’t come easy, as her chest seemed to compress with the weight of it all. Angie’s head was spinning. *First, her parents had to have been lying to her about her grandpa, and now maybe Curtis, too. What else did he know?* “Before we were, what?” She urged. She studied Curtis’s wrinkled brow. “What is it?”

“We thought he died before we were born, right?” Curtis paced, head down, as though pondering the flattened patch of clovers at his feet. He stopped abruptly and straightened his posture, then cleared his throat. “But I may have met him, once.”

“I want to meet him, too” Angie stated, exuberantly.

“I don’t know if it was him, Angie. But I know I have been to this house before. If what you say is true, the man I met at this house is our grandpa.” Angelica tried to speak but Curtis covered her mouth. “But, you can’t tell anyone until we’re sure: not even Oden.”

“Tell me what?” Oden had gotten bored of being alone and had found his way to them. “Oh wow, you guys found lots of clovers. Wouldn’t tell me, huh? Well fine, I found them, too—all on my own.” Oden grabbed a handful.

“It doesn’t matter, none of them are four-leaf clovers,” Curtis said.

Oden discarded a clump of green mesh to the ground. But one remained in his hand, held closely to one eye, admiring the three leaves it did have, as he rolled it by the stem. His fingers twisted it until it shriveled into a green mesh, staining his fingers. A loud burst of thunder split the sky and rocked the Earth. They had never heard such a powerful disregard for the sound barrier. It would have taken ten or more jets from Edward’s Air Force Base, simultaneously reaching deafening speed. And it wouldn’t be the last or the greatest this night; a succession of splintering sonic booms followed. The first explosion and shaking of the ground nearly sent them sprawling to the Earth and Oden’s hand released his clover in fear. Now, instinctively, they were in a dead run. Not a word was spoken as Oden led the mad dash back to the house—rain spilling onto their heads.

“Curtis, Oden, Angie. Hurry in! Help me with these windows.” All the windows of the home had been opened to the breeze that had led up to the storm. The fresh forest air had permeated the interior anew, but the rain now threatened to invade the house, which eventually would leave a different smell, of moldy wood—their mom explained. The trees swayed violently in the wind. Curtis was the last one to the house; he had retrieved Oden’s jacket before returning. The family rushed throughout the house closing windows. Flashes of lightning that filled the sky as far as they could see, accompanied the thunder that was directly above the house. “Come away from the windows,” their mother yelled to Oden, who was awestruck. The sky was now lit up more often than not, revealing clouds that bore down around the woods; everything became sickly, like a shade of green trying to decide between the inside and outside color of an avocado.

“We need to get to the basement kids, and fast.” Dad emerged from his room with a couple flashlights and a hand radio already blaring. “There have been reports of tornadoes in the state,” he declared.

Angie held her mother’s hand tightly as mom led the way with a flashlight bouncing directionless, from her other hand. “Take the children. I’ll get the Storm Cellar key.” She placed Angie’s hand into Angie’s father’s hand.

“Are you sure there’s a key?” Mr. Albright shouted above the storm. “Didn’t we sign an agreement—that we wouldn’t go into the Cellar?” He emphasized the last part. Oden had latched on to dad’s flashlight hand and was tugging him down into the previously forsaken basement.

“This is an emergency! He wouldn’t have us sign that, if he didn’t leave the emergency key.” Mrs. Albright fled toward the kitchen.

Mr. Albright shook his head, “there’s no time,” his plea echoed after her. Then he herded the children down the spiral staircase, following closely with his flashlight aimed ahead. They gathered into a corner where two cement walls combined. A loud boom shook the house, followed by the sound of electricity powering down. They hadn’t had time to turn off lights, and the fizzled resonance of burnt out bulbs was the result. “Good thing we brought our flashlights,” their dad remarked. He pointed his toward Oden and then Angie. The flashlight was now a great beam through the thick darkness. Dad grinned big. “What’s the matter? Haven’t you ever been in a storm?” Though he had not been in one like this, Oden was speechless for once.

“Is mom coming?” Angie, asked looking hopefully into her dad’s eyes for an answer, to a question she guessed he only really knew as much of an answer as she did.

“Mom will be fine. We will all be safe. The storm will pass. I would have grabbed some blankets, but I don’t even think we’ll have to spend the night down here.” Mr. Albright adjusted the radio as he spoke, but because of the confines, no words could be discerned through the static. Their dad confirmed to them that the last he knew tornado warnings were still in effect, and funnels were quickly moving their way, across the heartland.

Mom’s flashlight strobed the stairs ahead, jolted by each step. She exhaled with relief upon joining the others. “Well, welcome to the Midwest, I guess.” She stopped for breath. “Storms with power like you’ve never seen, but then it will be a refreshing calm like you’ve never felt. You’ll see.” She walked to the wall with the wooden shaded vent and felt along a seam until her hand knowingly came to a concealed handle. She pulled and a door of the wall came loose creaking on its hinges. Dust powdered the flashlight streams.

Oden was quick to his mother’s side. “Cool!” He proclaimed. “What is it?” Oden peered up a shaft glimpsing occasional flashes of lightning, reflecting off walls from above rooms. He was now standing in the center of what looked to be a small closet.

“It’s a laundry chute.” Mom put a hand on his shoulder. “And I expect you to use it, too.”

Oden smiled slyly, then looked away.

“And I mean for laundry,” his mother squinted, knowingly.

Curtis and Angie joined Oden in peering up the chute. “Does it go to each room?” Curtis asked.

“Every room.” Mother held out a hand with a key. “Can you open the next door?”

“Is it really necessary? Aren’t we safe enough in this basement,” dad scoffed as he lowered his wife’s arm with the key dangling from it.

Angie cupped her hands over Curtis' ears, while her mother was distracted, "I told you I heard his voice in the walls." Curtis nodded.

Oden tugged at Angie's arms, "Hey, no secrets."

"Curtis isn't obligated to any agreement!" Mrs. Albright extended the key to her eldest.

Curtis grabbed the key before another protest. The key fit in the lock, and with a turn, he pushed forward and the chamber opened on a swivel, the door rotating just like the type found in ritzy downtown buildings of Los Angeles.

Oden's voice echoed from inside the laundry chute. "Cool, the wall moves." Oden and Curtis pushed through and disappeared on the other side.

"Now wait a minute, before we go any further we need to talk about something important," Mr. Albright rushed after them.

"Are you going to finally tell us the truth about this house?" Curtis stopped at the end of a hall at the top of stairs that led down into the cellar.

"What do you not know?" Mr. Albright looked puzzled. "We can talk about anything you want to."

"Whose house and furniture was this, anyway?" Curtis asked.

"Well, that is partly what we need to talk about." Curtis's dad said. Their mother gave her husband a stern glance. Their dad paraphrased: "Your mom and I need to go back to California, tomorrow. The moving company brought the wrong van, and the wrong furniture."

"You said the furniture came with the purchase of the house," Curtis pried.

"What about us?" Oden asked.

"We have found a really nice babysitter for the three of you," Mrs. Albright answered Oden softly, but to the point.

“But you don’t know any babysitters out here.” Angelica sounded very concerned. Oden nodded approval with a quick glance back to his mother.

“Now everyone calm down.” Mr. Albright interjected, lowering a hand; he walked to one wall where he opened a panel. Within was a hand crank that he turned. A generating sound clicked on, but was overtaken by the sound of rushing water.

“What’s that sound?” Oden tugged at his dad’s pant leg.

“If everyone will sit down a moment, I will explain as much as I can. The water you hear will soon generate enough power for us to backup the electricity in the cellar, but it will take a moment. Can you listen to me that long? I know it has been a long day for everyone.” All but dad sat down in the places they had each been standing; the children anxiously focused in on their father. “The furniture that is here is staying. The furniture that was delivered here by the moving company has been packed back up and is being hauled back to its rightful owner. Our moving van was unloaded in a warehouse back in California, and your mother and I have demanded we be flown back to California to prevent any further mistakes in shipping our belongings. We have asked a really nice lady, who was once the caretaker of this house, to look after you while we are away. I know the house doesn’t look like it has been kept up, but that’s not because she is not a good caretaker; no one has lived here for a while. Anyway, your mother knows her to be a good babysitter, because she used to baby sit your mother.”

Mrs. Albright gasped. “I thought you were going to let me tell them.”

“Tell us what?” Curtis asked.

“Mom needed a babysitter?” That revelation confounded Oden.

“It was supposed to be a surprise. When your father and I return from California, I wanted to be the first to show you the town of my childhood.” Mrs. Albright beamed.

“You lived in Indiana?” Angelica asked.

“Right here in Idlewood.” Mrs. Albright acknowledged.

“Right here in this house?” Curtis interjected. Complete silence ensued. Not even the storm could pierce the chamber’s stillness. Curtis uneasily broke the hush. “Well, isn’t that how you knew to find an emergency key?”

“Your mother knows the man who owned this house—quite well, too. Why, you even met him once, Curtis.” Mr. Albright shut the panel, seemingly satisfied.

“Then I have been here before,” Curtis spoke with thought-filled words.

“I told your mom you would remember. You helped us move the old man, and knowing you, you could probably find his place again, if you wanted.” Curtis’s dad winked proudly at him.

“Why would I want to see him? He wasn’t a very nice person then—was he? Curtis folded his arms.

“I’m just saying, you remember everywhere you go, that’s all.” Dad noticed the lights turn on in the corridor below. He moved past Curtis’s disappointed glare, towards the illuminated passageway to the downstairs. He beckoned Curtis to follow, but Curtis didn’t budge. “Let me show you the rest of the house. You might have more questions answered, by seeing everything in this house.”

Oden rushed past. “Me first!” Curtis unfolded his arms. Angie’s eyes grew larger, twinkling with the new source of light coming up the stairs of the corridor. She took her mother’s hand.

“Be careful, Oden.” Mr. Albright caught hold of Oden and with an arm across his chest cleared him away from the door at the bottom of the stairs. “We must not disturb anything that might be in the cellar. That is the rule. It’s not our belongings.”

Their dad opened the door. With a click of a light switch, and in turn, a glorious array of shimmering lights filled the room, mostly chandeliers of handpicked clear and colored glasses or luminescent crystals and even diamonds set in gold fixtures. Also hanging were many artistic conglomerates of shells, and different colors of crystal formations—including crystal-formed humming birds—making the shine of the lighting that much more spectacular. At the heart of the room was a fountain trickling over rocky falls that generated the source of light and life to the creations around it. The family entered slowly with awe, even Oden, through an archway trellis with garden vines weaving around it. And garden plants throughout the room watered by streams from the fountain. The floor was a pattern of hand-placed glazed brick. Firm log beams structured the walls and ceilings and handcrafted wood-workings were throughout: carvings of wood, framed mirrors, intricately designed shelves, octagonal picnic tables, imprinted images on wooden porch benches, and swinging benches. On the shelves set fine china, and various clay pot formations—some painted with great detail. Adorning the walls were woven tapestries with paintings of rural Indiana sunsets across farm lots. And along the base of one wall was a miniature railroad track weaving through rolling country hills, whereon was a wooden-carved train that began to generate steam from the water circulating to its boilerplate, which set the train in motion.

Oden rubbed his eyes at the sight of the train, but for once he was still too amazed by all that he was seeing, to even move. And he wasn’t alone. The children’s parents even seemed thrilled. Their father nudged his wife and whispered so only she could hear, “I told you he

wouldn't just throw it all away. It had to be down here." They both giddily began to laugh at the sight of their children's awe and wonder.

"Now can you see why we haven't told you more?" Their dad began. "You almost have to see it to believe it. The man who owned this house, created all of this. We couldn't possibly tell you everything about him, tonight."

"Go ahead and see it all for yourself." Mrs. Albright said. "You won't get another chance, until we return." She looked reproachfully toward Mr. Albright. "Your father will be locking this room while we are away. The storm was our only excuse to be down here, anyway. I think we really could have remained safe just in the basement." She looked as though appealing to her children, but knowing their attention had passed. Even the storm was distant, forgotten and unheard.

Mr. Albright smiled as he shook his head. He gained his wife's focus. "Aren't you the same person who had to go and get the key? Listen to you." He laughed. "We could have stayed safe in the basement." He teased, and then hugged his wife around her neck from behind her, and whispered in her ear. "Isn't this about what you expected?" They both smiled and continued to look on happily at their children exploring a legacy as large as life.

Angelica was overwhelmed after a while, but didn't know how to ask what questions still remained. Not once had her parents made mention of her grandpa being the man whose house this was. Did they expect her to ask? "When will we meet the man who gave us this house? Can we thank him?"

Curtis kicked the back of her heel and gestured for silence.

“Oh, I don’t know if you will meet him, sweetie.” Angie’s mother bent down to meet her gaze. “He really doesn’t want visitors. Try to understand that it can be different when someone becomes old. People aren’t the same. Some just want to be left alone.”

Angie continued to look with longing in her eyes. Her mother had often told her to try to understand, when she was really just being too protective. Angelica was always too young or too delicate as a girl, to do this or that. Besides, she was certain no one actually wanted to be alone, as her predicament had often left her behind and lonely.

“I know it doesn’t make much sense, dear. But look around. See what his hands have done. You can know a lot about someone by what they have done.”

The children grew tired as they took in all they could. With their parent’s close by they were careful to observe, but not to disturb the surroundings. It was all too perfect, to be touched. Even Oden sensed that these belongings were somehow more important, because of the great care that someone took in each individual piece. They even asked permission first, before using the swinging benches to rest on. Then, before long the children were asleep.

Mr. Albright gathered Oden over his broad shoulder. Oden groaned, but was too unaware to care about sleeping alone during a storm; he couldn’t even protest the fact that he would wake up to his parent’s not being there. Then Mr. Albright rustled Curtis enough to wake him up. He directed him with a hand on Curtis’s shoulder, allowing him to lead the way up the stairs. Curtis mumbled something about the storm, to which Mr. Albright replied that it was nothing more than nature’s music now. Curtis nodded lazily and stumbled onward. Mr. Albright started to give some more details to Curtis about his confidence in him being the man of the house and looking after the others, especially Angie, while he and their mother were away, but he quickly realized that he wasn’t being heard.

Angelica easily pretended she was sleeping, when her mother lifted her from her resting place. Her body lay limp like a bag of sand; her head hung down over her mother's arm. A long eventful day was over, and yet, though she was tired, she really couldn't sleep at all. Her mother whispered a quiet plea, maybe a prayer, that her little daughter would be looked after, that she would be safe, being free to experience wonders of the world around her like never before. Too many thoughts for anyone to consider, swirled around in her youthful mind. Though Angelica didn't understand the full meaning of her mother's words, she knew her life was already different.