

“Clara, close your book and help cook dinner. The fire is ready,” Mom called. Reluctantly, I obeyed and went to mix my hash over the campfire. Her timing could not have been worse; I was at the best part of my book! Coming back to Earth from the magical realm of Parkland, I have to remember where I am. My surroundings tell me where I am; my favorite campground. Mom and I arrived not long ago. It was just the two of us. I unpacked myself and started reading while Mom finished unpacking. We had a weird tradition of eating a mixed hash on the first night, even though we don’t have any leftovers yet. It was my favorite meal to eat around the campfire. Back home, I’m sure Dad and Evie were enjoying a pizza and watching Evie’s favorite movie, Cinderella. She’s watched it so much I could probably quote the entire thing. Let’s just say, I was much happier being in the fall wilderness than at home.

The trees reflected the sun, making everything illuminate in oranges and yellows. My own auburn hair seemed to be...glowing! The wind had a crispness to it that caused me to wrap my sweatshirt and blanket closer to my pale skin. The temperature was just warm enough; sitting by the fire was quite comfortable. Mom and I enjoyed our meal and random conversation. After a while, the sun sank below the horizon, leaving a trail of pinks and blues in its wake. Evie would call it a cotton candy sky. The sudden ache for my sister surprised me, though I knew I would see her soon enough. We continued to talk until fireflies glowed like Christmas lights among the trees.

The faint red and occasional blue bursts shone out at me in the reflection of my mom’s pale green eyes. I’m sure my own matching eyes showed the same. The flight of a bat startled both of us, enough to make us laugh. Hard. That’s one of the many things I love about my mother. We can always make a conversation out of thin air and laugh about everything and nothing at the same time. After a good five minutes of consistent laughter, we noticed the first stars. Over marshmallows and chocolate, we swapped stories like teenage best friends. Despite her age, mom always gave her fair share of gossip. We traded stories about frustrating middle schoolers (me), annoying co-workers (mom), and silly things three-year-old Evie had done (both). The night slowly ticked on, which I was oblivious to. By the time the night got dark, you couldn’t tell if a minute or an hour had passed.

Before I knew it, Mom checked her phone to find the number 11 staring back at her. Mom looked as surprised as I felt. Suddenly, the enclosing trees and sharp breeze seemed more intense. Thankful I put my pajamas on early in the afternoon, I quickly slipped into my sleeping bag. Four blankets get piled in the empty space around me. I snuggled close to my mom for extra warmth and comfort. I was able to get to sleep surprisingly fast, even with the slight discomfort of the bumpy ground below me. I woke up about three hours later. I remembered my book. The thought prompts me to get up to grab it from where I left it on the picnic table, middle of the night or not. I carefully crept out of the tent, when a sight stopped me in my tracks.

I blinked and pinched myself, everything I could do to double check it was real. What could have caused this? As I stared at my book, I was amazed to see it was glowing! Music gently floated out of it. I slowly walked over to my fantasy book, careful to step around the firepit,

still glowing red with embers. I took a deep breath, paused to look up at the bright stars in the sky above, and flipped to a nearby page of the book. There was a whirlwind of colors and sounds; then everything stopped.

The campfire and stars suddenly disappeared. The landscape was full of fields and growing crops. The sun shone brilliantly, unlike the darkness in the sky at home. Although the combination of no trees and bright sun made the temperature seem like it should be hot, it felt comfortable outside. Past the surrounding green, a small village poked out of the flat landscape. The scene looked like something straight out of a storybook. With a gasp, I had an idea of where I was.

How could it be? People didn't get transported into books everyday as far as I knew. I turned around and caught sight of someone traveling quickly through the fields to me. She had long, wavy black hair. Her dark tan skin was complemented with a lavender outfit. She looked exactly like I imagined the main character in my book.

My questions continued to pile up. They ran through my mind, distracting me from my surroundings for a moment. I hadn't noticed as the person in the fields slowly came closer and ended up standing directly in front of me. I snapped back to attention just as her face came into view.

At that second, she started speaking to me. "I'm Gloria, the fairy princess of Parkland."

"I... I... I'm Clara, from Omaha. I'm a little lost. Can you tell me how I got here?" I stammered out.

"I asked for someone to help me save my kingdom. Then you appeared."