

"To have some fun!" Emma's voice floated back. She was already at the bottom of the hill.

"You're going to get in trouble!" ~~shouted~~~~said~~ Claire. But Emma ignored her. She marched down the road with her lip jutting out. Claire sighed. She stamped after Emma, feeling as if the entire universe had conspired to make her life as unfair as possible.

Emma kept walking, but she was too far ahead for Claire to catch up right away. She was still ignoring Claire's shouts. They walked past house after house until they came to a wooded area. It was a place they had explored many times together. They used to go there every day to pick blackberries from the thorny bushes that grew by the stream there and to play in the water or the falling leaves. They used to call it the "Glen" when they came as children, but Claire had stopped coming a while ago. Now, she just called it "the woods down the hill," like her parents. From the road, a little ~~gravel-paved~~ path ~~paved with gravel~~ led into the area. This was the path Emma took.

Claire hitched up her backpack and jogged after her sister, ~~reaffirming~~~~noting~~ with each heavy swing of her backpack how tired and angry she was. She stepped onto the gravel with a crunch and slowed to a walk. Claire knew the gravel path well. She knew the trees and ~~she knew~~ the bend in the path. She knew ~~the~~~~every~~ shape of every shadow cast by the rustling autumn trees overhead. But as she rounded the bend, she saw something she did not know. Emma was walking up to the mouth of a small, dark tunnel. Claire didn't remember seeing one of the old mining tunnels in this wood, but it was partially hidden by brush and seemed to be much older ~~—, even,~~ ~~older~~ than the

other ~~mining old~~ tunnels. It was also smaller and hadn't been boarded up like some of the others. She shuddered. She didn't like the old mining tunnels. They smelled funny and they were so dark. She was glad she had not known about ~~this one~~ before.

Emma hadn't missed it, though. She had left the path and gone straight towards it, sloughing her backpack on the way. She looked back at Claire with a cocky expression just before ducking inside. A dare.

At first, Claire had been curious. Now she was furious. She took off her backpack too and ran all the way to the tunnel entrance. ~~She Emma~~ was trying to get Claire in trouble! ~~Claire She~~ stopped short of going in, though. It was a short tunnel and so dark. And this one smelled, too. The stale air wafted out to her as Claire squinted into the darkness.

"Emma!" Claire hunched and yelled into the tunnel. "Emma! You'd better come out right now or — or you'll be sorry!" she ~~stuttered said~~, fumbling over the appropriate threat. Claire couldn't see anything except for rocks and dirt. There was no answer either.

Claire stood up, not quite willing to follow. There was a reason her mother had put ~~her Claire~~ in charge of keeping Emma away from these things. Claire had always been afraid of the dark. Especially when the dark was in a ~~close~~, narrow, rocky, echoey place. She didn't like the tunnels. Or any tunnels, for that matter. She looked around. The sound of the stream still bubbled merrily behind her, but there wasn't another person around anywhere — only Claire, and presumably Emma somewhere inside the tunnel. ~~Claire She~~ shivered.

“Emma!” she shouted one last time. Still, no answer.

“It’s not my fault,” Claire grumbled and then took a deep breath before plunging into the cool, stale darkness. She took the first few steps quickly even though she was bent over to avoid hitting her head. But the next few steps were the worst. The small light from the tunnel entrance shrank to no more than a baseball-sized window in the distance, and Claire could no longer see the ~~rocks~~ pebbles beneath her feet. She put out a hand to feel the wall, but as soon as she felt its cool, damp surface, she retracted her hand. She didn’t want to know what kind of spiders or snakes or bats or rats lived in this place or what they felt like.

“Emma!” she called again, but her voice was weaker this time, and then she slipped. It wasn’t a large fall, but Claire screamed and covered her face until she came to a stop at the bottom of ~~a~~ the small hill. She peeked out from between her arms and saw, in the distance, another baseball-sized window of light. Had she turned around somehow? Then she saw a figure block the light for a moment and step through into the sunshine, her golden hair glinting in the sun.

Claire jumped up and ran as quickly as she dared after her sister.

“Emma! Emma!” she called, until finally she tumbled out of the tunnel. She ended in a sprawl on the ground.

Emma laughed. Claire looked up. They were outside again, and now in the middle of another forest—~~—~~one that Claire did not recognize. Emma laughed again. Claire found her whistling to a little white bird perched in a tree. The bird would

whistle and Emma would whistle back and the bird would cock its head, as if skeptical about Emma's conversation.

When Claire came up behind them, Emma turned around and, for a moment, it seemed that she had forgotten how angry she was with Claire.

"You're here!" she ~~exclaimed~~~~said~~. "I thought you would be scared."

"I wasn't scared!" ~~said~~ Claire ~~retorted~~, looking ~~towards the ground and away from her sister~~~~down~~. "Anyway, where are we?"

Emma shrugged. "I don't know. But it's not home."

"How do you know?" ~~asked~~~~said~~ Claire.

Emma pointed through the trees ~~and said~~, "Look over there."

Claire followed ~~Emma's~~~~her~~ finger ~~with her gaze~~ and drew closer to the gap of the trees. Not too far from them, she saw the border of ~~what looked like a~~~~kind of~~ town. But not ~~like~~ any town ~~like~~ Claire had ever seen. The banner flying above it was purple and gold, and all the houses ~~or buildings~~ were made of brick. But they looked run-down. The buildings were faded and cracking. If she hadn't seen the figures moving between them, Claire might have thought the town was deserted.

"Let's go!" said Emma, now at Claire's shoulder. She grabbed Claire's arm. She was grinning. "Let's go and see!"

Claire shook her head. "We should go home," she said. She looked over her shoulder towards the small, dark tunnel again and grimaced. She didn't want to ~~go~~ back into that thing.

Emma frowned. "Well, I want to go. You go home, if you want," she said. With a defiant "~~H~~umph," ~~S~~he strutted away and towards the city.

Claire ~~turned over her shoulder~~~~watched her back~~ for the second time. She looked at the town and then back at the dark little tunnel. "Fine!" she groaned, running after Emma, "Fine! I'm coming! Happy? But if we get in trouble, it's your fault this time."

Emma smiled. "Yeah, yeah," she said, waving Claire off.

They reached the town quickly. It was closer than it had appeared. And much smaller. As they drew near, Claire saw that the figures she had seen from a distance were also small—~~at~~ least a full foot smaller than either her or Emma. The town had a small set of wooden gates that stood open. There were no guards, and the hinges looked broken, like the houses. The people in the streets stared at them as they passed. Claire didn't blame them; she and Emma towered above them.

Emma didn't seem to mind. She was staring at everything with wide, ~~wondering~~ eyes.

Commented [SC1]: "wondering" or "wandering"?

"This is so amazing!" she ~~said~~~~marveled, her eyes glowing with excitement,~~ "Everything's small! It's like a whole city of dollhouses! Isn't it amazing? Maybe we grew when we came out!" she said, elbowing Claire.

Claire was quiet. There was something strange about the little town and about the people gaping at ~~them~~ them—~~something~~ something more than just the size.

Ahead of them, they heard noise. There were more people as they drew closer. Some of the little people began to follow them. Claire heard them whispering behind