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***Vanessa's  
Valley***

***By  
George G. Story***



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Gloucester, Massachusetts

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***My Children – My World***

## Part One

### A Hole in the Mountain

Karen Waverly, Janice Scott and Deborah Appleton, led blindfolded Vanessa Taylor up the thickly wooded lower bordering fringe of Still Creek Mountain. Vanessa could not remember being so humiliated in all her fifteen years. This was part of the juvenile ritual of becoming a member of this – stupid – cliquish – club. She was undeniably having second thoughts about this bunch.

Living in this hickish, boring and small town of Gloverton, Colorado, from Vanessa's way of thinking, was the most horrible and evil thing ever to happen to her. Gloverton, Colorado certainly was nothing like Boston, Massachusetts, where Vanessa was born and, up until only six months before, lived.

She started hating Gloverton the moment her mother, Susan Taylor, told Vanessa and her seven year old brother, Robbie, about the job she had taken as the third grade teacher at the Henry William Harris Elementary School. Though Vanessa had never lived anywhere else but Boston she knew deep down inside her soul that she was going to hate the whole thing beyond all reason. She was still mad at her mother, even after six months. She had barely spoken a civil word to her mother since arriving there.

Vanessa was lonely. She did not make friends easily, she was shy and it was this shy demeanor that seemed to totally rule her life. Nevertheless, she understood that if she really wanted to get along in this town the place to start would be to put up with the girls in this cliquishly foolish club.

Vanessa rarely considered herself pretty or even passably good-looking. Most of the time she felt awkward and out of place concerning her looks. Though she did not realize it she always displayed good posture and never outwardly seemed awkward. True, she had sprouted all of a sudden and early and as a result seemed to embarrassingly stand two or three inches, or more, taller than most everyone else in her class. Vanessa was self-conscious of her straight red hair and uncontrollably blossoming figure, which she was told came from her mother's family, people continually commented on her blue eyes, which ran in her father's side, as well as her fair skin that burned rather than tanned after only a short time in the sun without protection, though this was a trait which none of her relatives really wanted to claim as their own. Most of all, she was certain no one else in the entire world entertained such insecure feelings about themselves. To make matters even worse, being only fifteen years old and somewhat of a late bloomer, she often mistook the attention of others in her class. She especially misread any attention from the boy's, thinking there must be something wrong with her, which, of course, was the furthest thing from the truth.

Vanessa did not dress outlandishly. She just did not want to stand out in a crowd or attract attention to herself. She did not wear dresses often and was most comfortable in jeans with simple and plain colored pullovers. She found makeup and frilly underwear uncomfortable and was absolutely convinced she looked ridiculous with any kind of eye shadow or liner. Little did she know that she was on the verge of changing her mind about such things.

The residents of the town of Gloverton had always been proud of the landscape they were lucky enough to live within, but no one ever invaded the mountainside, it just wasn't done. Vanessa, just like all of the Gloverton inhabitants, thought it was just a cold, damp, dark, scary and uninviting location. She did not like it and she certainly did not want to be there. The truth was that no one ever wanted to be on the mountain or traverse too close to it. In reality no one ever thought about the mountain, it was just there and everyone looked beyond it, as if they did not see it. For the most part Still Creek Mountain was ignored.

Yet this ignored mountain, however, was in reality quite beautiful. It seemed to rise out of nothing

within a vast plain to a towering height well above anything else; it dwarfed everything in sight. The expansive prairie extended in all directions around the mountain for fifty miles giving way to a banked gently sloping wooded grade that formed the natural foundation and pedestal of the table-topped mesa. Out of the center of this green wooded perimeter rose the grand and majestic rocky landmass everyone completely overlooked and disregarded as if it were unseeable.

Still Creek Mountain was most striking in both the early morning and later evening when the rising and setting sun created a magnificent aura all around it. The subtle pastel colors, created by some seeming natural phenomenon, were at times breathtaking to behold and still no one took even the slightest notice or interest in it.

The three other girls, much to their own objections, had lead Vanessa into the woods close to the base of the mountain and were about to leave her there to find her own way out. This task was not as difficult as it sounds. If Vanessa simply kept her head she would realize all she needed to do is to be certain she always traveled in a downward direction; which would lead her, eventually, back to the main road that circumnavigated the base of the mountain. The raised dense woods were meant to scare her a little and that was all.

Karen Waverly, Janice Scott and Deborah Appleton were the ones chosen to lead Vanessa Taylor onto the lower mountain to fend for herself and find her way home simply because they were the newest members of the group. The girls themselves were scared of the mountain and did not lead Vanessa too far when one by one they simply stopped walking and before Vanessa knew it she was alone.

“You realize this is stupid, don’t you?” Vanessa asked sourly after what seemed to be a very long instance of silence. When she did not receive a rapid answer she realized the three girls were no longer there, which sent her into a momentary flash of panic. As she had been lead up the trail she had become more and more apprehensive, anxious and confused and right then clear thinking was not easy for her. These were feelings Vanessa had never experienced before, and it felt strange to her.

“Oh this is wonderful,” she cattily said to herself as she removed the blindfold with a disgusted snap. As Vanessa looked around she labored quite hard to stay calm, and she animatedly muttered to herself as she walked, “I’ll be lost and die from starvation and boy will they be sorry when my body’s found and the word gets out it was all their fault. That would be sweet revenge.” She said, kicking at a rock on the trail.

Vanessa, trying to stay coolheaded, struggled to remain calm; after all, nothing could be that bad about this wooded area, especially in the day light. She realized that all she had to do was climb down the mountain.

“What a stupid initiation this is. They must think I’m a real fool not to be able to figure this one out,” she garbled out loud to herself with disgust.

Vanessa carefully looked about her; she was able to see the main road leading into Gloverton not too far below her. She set off down the hill on what appeared to be a narrow trail but it was nothing more than just a few yards long. Soon Vanessa found herself working her way through the briars and bushy under growth. At times she found herself crawling under thick bushes but it was all right, the trail she blazed always led in a downward course.

Vanessa had just crawled into a small clearing and stood up to stretch and slap the dust from her jeans. She stood, balancing her weight on a fairly large stone, and was trying to take stock of where she was located when suddenly the rock dislodged beneath her; she started to slide uncontrollably down the hill. She did not slide far, however, when the earth beneath her seemed to give way under her weight and from the mighty gravitational force of her body hitting the ground. She fell some feet and landed on something hard, hitting her head. Vanessa blacked out.

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Vanessa woke, not knowing where she was or how long she had been unconscious. She was in the dark. She felt woozy and light-headed when she tried to sit up; she lay back down until her head ceased

whirling. Staring up she could see what seemed to be a fair size oblong hole well above her where beyond she could see stars in a darkened night sky. Gradually she recalled the tumbling rock, sliding down the incline and then the final drop, oddly enough however, she did not really remember hitting the ground; she may have struck her head on the edge of the opening when she dropped through the hole. The sky beyond the opening was dark and she realized she must have been unconscious for a considerable period. Her Mother would be beside herself with worry, not to mention that she had left Robbie alone for such a long time.

She rested a long moment, taking in deep breaths and when the wooziness seemed to pass she tried getting up again. As she sat up she sensed a slight imbalance and so she made each move quite slowly. Finally she stood to her full height and reached out above her toward the edge of the hole still many yards out of her reach. She jumped a couple of times but she felt lightheaded again, she stopped moving, she was afraid she was going to pass out again.

Vanessa reached out in front of her and within her outstretched arm's length she felt a smooth but rocky surface, she turned her outstretched arms to her sides and felt nothing, turning completely around she felt another smooth rock wall. She knelt and felt around the floor of the hole trying to find something to stand on but there was nothing there but leaves and moss and other debris that must have fallen into the hole with her. Groping in the dark was not the easiest thing she had ever done.

The dirt floor felt solid and hard packed. She crawled a few feet to her left and felt nothing there. Looking up she found the hole once more and crawled a little to her right and found, again, nothing there.

She now felt all twisted around, North, South, East or West were indiscernible to her. The floor she stood on seemed flat, she could not detect any downward slope. "That being the case," she said out loud to herself, "one side or the other should open to the side of the mountain within a few feet, but which way?"

In her head she "eany, meany, miney, moed" and turned to her left and inched along a few yards where she did in fact come to another wall. She felt around at eye level and did find an opening between what appeared to Vanessa to be two huge rocks, which she could never have budged. In the distance through the hole between those rocks she could see the lights of the town. She called through the hole but she was certain someone would have to be standing almost right on the hole to hear her and no one would know but Karen Waverly, Janice Scott and Deborah Appleton where she was. How long would they wait before saying anything to anyone about what they knew? Vanessa was unsure; these girls, Karen Waverly, Janice Scott or Deborah Appleton, were not necessarily her friends.

Vanessa slid down the wall and sat, tears running down her face uncontrollably. "What am I going to do?" She asked herself, "I might never be found down here," she wiped her tears with her short sleeve and cried out loudly.

In time she may have fallen asleep or passed out again; she was not sure. After she woke, and in what seemed to be a short time to her, moonlight began to shine down through the hole and she could more easily see some of where she was. The height to the edge of the hole was at least ten to fifteen feet and there was nothing for her to stand on to reach it. The opening above her was not very big and Vanessa started to realize that the only thing she could do was to see where the tunnel, the expanse of black before her, led her.

It took some time for her to muster up the courage to move from her position. Eventually she stood up under the hole. She was able to look herself over now to be sure she was not hurt worse from the fall than she felt. All she saw were bruises and bloodied scratches on her forearms. She thought she might have twisted her ankle a bit, it was sore, it certainly was not broken, it held her weight, so she knew that it could not be badly sprained.

Vanessa peered into the black that fell before her; she took a deep breath, pushed off the wall and began to fumble through the darkness. She followed along the cavern like passageway and as she went she felt nothing in her way, she heard and saw nothing. Her eyes did adjust to the darkness slightly, only being able to distinguish between total black of the rock walls and lighter black of the open space



before her, the difference being only ever-so slight.

The passageway seemed endless and she moved very slowly through the dark, feeling her way along the rocky walls. At one point she stopped because the passage seemed to veer to the left. She felt around as best she could hoping to detect any other openings that might crop up. She felt none. This was a good thing, she thought to herself, no decisions to make; so she followed on again.

At some point she realized that within the nothing void before her she started to physically feel something, a slight breeze on her cheek. When nothing is present something, even a very slight wisp of air, becomes a grand discovery. She was uncertain what it told her. There was something mathematical or scientific at work here, it was, at the very least, dramatic for her and it stirred her brain into activity. "This," she said out loud, "should tell me something, but what?" She moved along through the black space. "What does moving air mean?" She said, mumbling the words out loud, but almost in a whisper.

She was interrupted in her thoughts by a surge of panic and confusion once again. This was the third or fourth time this sensation had gripped her since she started walking. She stopped moving for the moment it took to pass. "What the heck was that?" She asked herself. It was gone almost as quickly as it had come and it left her feeling clear headed and her brain unjumbled.

A science class from a few weeks before abruptly came into focus for her. "Circulation!" She suddenly and loudly enough so that she heard an echo before her, "Moving air means circulation and circulation means not one opening, but two openings." She yelled into the darkness, hearing the echoed replies. "Everything circulates in a circle, it can be a huge circle but that means there is another opening somewhere." She joyfully screamed at the top of her lungs, as hope flowed within her. She waited as the last of the echoes died away in the distance before moving on through the obscurity. She felt renewed by this feeling of hope.

The passage seemed to straighten out, a strange sensation, she thought, for she had no real way of knowing if this was true. When she first moved along the dark cavern time seemed endless, but after a long while she began to move without thought, as if her body just moved on its own without help from her brain. Somewhere along her journey she had clicked into survival mode, her brain simply told her body to follow the breeze that gently touched her cheek.

At some point Vanessa saw a pinpoint of light in the distance, though she did not register this as anything at first glance; she was unsure if it was real or imagined. It was a light all the same and once she did take notice of it she still thought her eyes were playing tricks on her. However, as she moved along the dot did seem to get larger and soon it became evident to her that the opening she had hoped for stood before her.

She had no idea how far she had traveled through the passage. She had started out counting her footsteps but soon lost count, after four hundred and twenty-six. That seemed to her to have been a lifetime back. The opening, which lay before her, seemed to get bigger the longer she traveled, but it was still quite small and she thought she would never reach it. She thought she was almost there for the longest time, but nevertheless, she could see daylight, which told her, she had been inside the cavern at least all of one night. Was it really only one night? She did not know.

Suddenly she was very tired and she wanted sleep. A strong swirling feeling of confusion, bewilderment and panic overcame her. She could not help the feeling that she needed to rest and she sat down hard on the cavern floor just as she reached the small opening before her. Her body drooped forward, went completely limp and Vanessa slept.

## Part Two

### Behind The Mountain Hole

Vanessa slept quietly. When she woke the sun was high in the sky and warmly shined down all around her. Slowly, as she became more coherent and aware, she more closely took in her surroundings. Eventually it all fell into focus for her and she noticed she was inside a completely enclosed area, well inside the mountain, within a valley or dell. This basin area was completely bordered on all sides by very high reaching sheer rock walls.

Vanessa wandered in the open air for some time on an uncertain tract, the sun becoming rather warm and a little uncomfortable. She could easily see a body of water in the middle of the valley and she made for its edge. Eventually she sighted a gathering of buildings in the distance. At first she was uncertain if the settlement was real or not, it seemed too far away. She could see people walking around the village, as if on daily business.

Vanessa stood stretching out the kinks in her body and then continued on toward the town. After only a few steps more, however, she noted something odd about the scene before her. She stopped and stood looking at the cluster of buildings. Suddenly, and before she could study the town any closer she became scared and panic ridden, she jumped behind a rock, confusion and anxiety coursed through her body again. Her body shook and quivered; she hugged herself tightly feeling anxiety trying to take hold of her once more, sweat poured down her face. Bright morning sunlight seemed to make her eyes hyper sensitive; she had a hard time opening them. She seemed not to have control of her body. She hugged herself tightly and tried to ride out this storm one more time. She fell over flat on her face, her body trembling and shaking. As quickly as the sensation came upon her it eased and then swept away, leaving her this time tired and more worn than before. It took her longer this time to shake the distressing feelings off, start thinking straight again and to bring her vision back into clear focus.

She looked back at the town once again, getting ready to move on. But now she thought her eyes were playing tricks on her, a combination of the most recent attack and having been in the cave for too long. Maybe her eyes had not yet adjusted to the daylight properly and were not to be trusted. Further, she thought that her feelings of panic were related to the sight before her and that her brain was not registering what she saw correctly.

She looked around where she sat and she noticed nothing unusual about the surrounding landscape, everything seemed normal, however, the buildings clustered together in the distance were only a little larger than the dollhouse Vanessa's father had built her years before and still stood on a wheeling stand in her room at home. It was then that she took more careful notice of the people moving among the buildings. If her eyes were not lying to her, they could not be over eight or nine inches in height.

The people in the village all seemed quite busy and most importantly they had not noticed her. She wished to keep it that way. She was insecure in what she was seeing, which bothered her greatly.

Vanessa sat now, somewhat stunned, among the bushes, trees and rocks lining the upper rise on the outer edge of the small valley. She, more calmly now, took notice of the lush landscape lying before her. In the center of the valley was a small lake or pond giving the miniature town the feeling of a New England style seaside village. Upon the opposite shore of the lake rest another village equal in size and stature, but further away.

The sheer rock walls surrounding the valley shot straight up and rose to what had to be at least many thousands of feet above the floor of the three and a half mile wide gorged out valley. She could see the other side of this deep hollow in the mountain clearly. Quietly she sat trying to decide what she should do. She was sure she could not climb the sheer rock walls that rose above her. She knew she could not

get out the way she came in and the thought of going back into the dark cavern scared her so terribly.

So far Vanessa had sat undetected among the rocks and short green sage. The feeling of confusion she had felt in the cave just as she reached the opening came back to her. She wanted to run back the way she had come but she knew she could not. She fought back the feelings of panic that suddenly gripped her. The feelings were so strong she had all she could do to keep from crying out in sheer panic. Again she wanted to get up and run, but where to. She sat and cried and rocked back and forth, her arms gripping each other tightly and her eyes closed once again.

Once more it passed, seemingly as quickly as it had come upon her. She fought to calm down and forced herself to stay seated and take in deep cleansing breaths. "Why did that happen to me again?" She thought to herself, "it comes and goes without warning,"

Vanessa took deep breaths and slowly tried to force all of the air out of her lungs, a calming trick her father had taught her before he died and one, she thought, worked quite well. She was starting to feel more calmed the longer she sat quietly.

All of a sudden she noticed the people of the town had now seen her. Had she, in that moment of panic, done something to draw their attention and given herself away to them. She was unsure. She wanted to run but she knew there was nowhere to run to. She had no plan, and without a plan it just did not make sense to get worked up over something you could do nothing about. She was scared but, for some reason, she was calm about it, almost as if she did not care what happened to her any more. A strange sensation, she thought, euphoric.

A large number of the tiny inhabitants, who had been in the streets of the village, when first she had noticed them, were now standing together at the edge of the small town. Only two of the majority approached her, they walked slowly and carefully. As they reached the spot where Vanessa sat the smaller of the two raised his arm as if waving to her.

The voice, though not terribly loud, that came from the man was a surprise to Vanessa as well. It was not a high squeaky voice like she had thought it would be, it was midrange, very clear, he was precise in his speech and very normal, "please do not become frightened. I assure you more damage could be inflicted on us than we could ever do to you. Would you please tell me your name?" He boldly stated.

"Vanessa, Vanessa Taylor, and you sir?" Vanessa answered nervously, but politely.

"I am Mathew Collins, Vanessa Taylor, and this is Roger Tandy. Do you live in Gloverton?" He asked.

"Yes, 24 Jefferson Drive," Vanessa answered automatically.

Unexpectedly, Mathew Collins slowly reached out a hand for Vanessa to shake. Vanessa leaned forward, with just her forefinger and thumb carefully shook the tiny hand presented to her.

"Mr. Collins, where is this place?" Vanessa asked obviously scared and nervous.

"This side of the lake is Harristown and the other side is Russton," Mathew Collins replied.

"I don't mean to be rude Mr. Collins but are you human-beings?" Vanessa asked quizzically.

"We are as human as you, Vanessa," Mathew said.

"Only we are a lot smaller," quickly added Roger Tandy. Roger Tandy hesitated a moment then looked at Mathew then turning to Vanessa asked, "Vanessa, we have to know how you came upon this place and how you knew we were here."

"I didn't, I mean I fell into a hole at the other end of that cave over there and couldn't get out, I simply followed the tunnel and it led me here. I didn't know you were here, honestly, I didn't even know about a "here". I really didn't, please believe that. I'm pretty scared and my mother is probably scared too and probably worried out of her mind. All that stuff happened to me yesterday afternoon; at least, I think it was only yesterday afternoon. I hit my head and I don't know how long I was out. All I know for sure is it was dark when I woke up and when I got here, after what seemed like an awfully long time, the sun was out again." Vanessa rattled on, almost out of control.

Mathew Collins and Roger Tandy talked between themselves for some minutes. Vanessa waited politely, but thirst and hunger eventually got the better of her. Finally she broke in and said, "Could I

get a drink of water? I haven't had anything to eat or drink since yesterday at lunch in school.

Mathew turned to Vanessa and said, "Where are our manners? I'm so very sorry, young lady. I wasn't thinking properly. Why don't you come down to the village, we'll find you some food and at the same time have the doctor look at your head, just to make sure you really are all right. We'll talk more about getting you home in a little while. How's that sound?" He hesitated and weighed what he was about to say. "You don't have to worry, no one here will hurt you and I think that if we get off this hill and closer toward town you'll feel much better."

Vanessa only nodded her acceptance to the plan and got up and followed behind the two smaller gentlemen as they made their way down the hillock toward the village.

Mathew Collins was right; as Vanessa neared the village the overwhelming feelings of confusion and panic lifted from her, as if drifting away.

Vanessa walked down what appeared to be the main street of the village. The roofs of most of the buildings making up the village only came up to a little higher than her waist with the largest one, apparently the town meeting hall, as high as the middle of her chest. The other people in the village watched her closely, but did not speak. However, they did not seem to be afraid of her. It became quite obvious to Vanessa that she was not as odd to them as they were to her.

Mathew led her to the opposite edge of town and said, "Vanessa would you mind lying down so Dr. Trowt can look at your head?"

Vanessa laid on the ground and a man she assumed to be Dr. Trowt came forward without a word and moved her hair this way and that way then stepped back. He turned to Mathew and said, "just a good lump from what I can see," then he turned to Vanessa and said, "is there any blurriness in your vision or do you have a headache, my dear?"

"Other than I can't believe what I'm seeing, no sir," she replied.

"Understandable, understandable, my dear. You should start to feel better soon. I should say you ought to lie down and get some sleep."

"I can't sleep now." Vanessa exclaimed, "I've too many questions to ask."

Mathew said, "Okay ask your questions, but don't be too surprised if we can't answer some of them."

Vanessa became tongue-tied, she could not think of a way of asking what it was she wanted to know. Mathew, sensing she was having a problem, said, "You want to know who we are, don't you?"

## Part Three

### The Story Told

“We are human beings, flesh and blood, just like you,” answered Mathew Collins, then smiling as though something funny had just come to mind, he added, “and we’re Americans, as well.” He paused again, thinking about what to tell Vanessa next.

Vanessa simply sat looking down at the man not knowing exactly how to respond to his last statement. “So, you come from here then?” She finally asked.

As if he were in profound reflection Mathew Collins took a long moment before answering. “It is quite true that all of us here now were born here, our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, for that matter, were all born here, as well. I guess the best way to put it is we are all at least third, fourth or fifth generation Americans. It is true before that we didn’t come from here, but, then again, in America that’s not unusual?” He asked weakly, and then added, almost as if he were desperately making a point, “Is it?”

“When did your families come to this country?” Vanessa asked.

“Our ancestors settled here in the valley in 1887. I could show you a book of records that states all of that but you wouldn’t be able to read it, I’m sure. Someone, whose name I can’t even pronounce correctly, wrote it. It is a shame but we have lost a lot of our heritage only because there are so few of us here.”

“Where do you come from then?” Asked Vanessa.

“The plain truth is I don’t really know for sure. I’m not sure how to translate the name properly.

Why are there two villages instead of one, don’t you all get along with each other?”

“Oh that’s an easy one. We all get along about as well as any group of people do, but the real truth is; the people who live in Russton want to live over there while the people that live in Harristown want to live over here. If a bunch of people want to get together and build another town, so what, what would it matter,” Mathew answered, “and we would help them build it.”

“How big do you get?”

“We average about eight and half to nine inches, I guess, but just like you, some of us are taller, some are shorter, some are fatter, some are thinner. None of us are alike and we really are just like you in every way, except one, size.”

“How do you get your clothes?” Vanessa asked without tiring.

Mathew smiled thinking to himself that teenagers are teenagers no matter how big they are, “we used to get them from outside, we got most everything from out there but, now we have to make them ourselves which, of course, is a problem, we’re running out of material.”

How could you get almost everything you need from outside? You just couldn’t go into a store and by your sizes off the rack not to mention I’ve never heard of people your size before and I’m sure if people from outside knew you were here, you wouldn’t be here, you’d be in the circus or the zoo or someplace.”

“Well, of course we realize that and our ancestors took steps to help prevent anyone from finding us. Remember that feeling of confusion and fear you experienced inside the mountain? That’s a barrier covering the whole mountain from about half way up the rim of the valley dropping down into here. The barrier is a wall of sorts that turns people around and doesn’t let them venture too far up the mountain,” Mathew stated simplistically, and continued, “Still Creek Mountain is legally a conservation sanctuary and is owned by a trust. Mr. Gerald Harris from Gloverton is the trustee and director.”

Roger Tandy took over the conversation with some exasperation at that point and said, “Vanessa we

want to ask you for some help. This man, Gerald Harris, used to help us get the things we need from the outside. Without warning he just stopped coming and we don't know why or what happened to him. His grandfather helped our ancestors settle here and then Gerald took on the job of helping us when his grandfather died long time ago," Roger Tandy seemed anxious to get to what was important to him, "have you ever heard of Gerald Harris from Gloverton?"

I've only lived in Gloverton for a little while and I've never heard of a Mr. Harris," Vanessa answered thoughtfully. "Except the Henry Harris Elementary School where my mother teachers third grade. That's not him is it?"

"That would be Gerald's Grandfather," said Mathew. "Vanessa, we could use your help. We, just like you, can go out, travel through the barrier and away from the mountain and the valley, without any worries, but even we can't come back through it, not without the barrier block, which Mr. Harris has."

Vanessa thought about that for a minute and said, "how about the hole I came through?"

Mathew also thought about that for a minute and replied, "that is a thought, but remember that fear and confusion you felt every so often within the cavern, well that is part of the barrier that protects us from the outside. It works very well, and it does penetrate the mountain, and as you've seen, it is a long distance to walk; it's over three and a half miles through the mountain. You will have to go seal that hole up for us when you leave, before someone else falls in there and gets more badly hurt than you did. Besides, remember how high it was? You couldn't reach it and you have to remember that everything for us is about nine or ten times bigger than it is for you, so, if that hole was eight feet from the floor, in ratio, it would be like a hundred and twenty-five or even more feet for us."

Vanessa understood ratios; she had studied them in math class only a few months before. "Come, let me show you something," Mathew, said, with a wave of his arm.

Mathew led her off into the wooded area behind them where they came upon a small cabin not much larger in size than a large backyard storage shed. It was plain in architecture and looked very much the same as the other buildings she had seen so far in the village. The building was rundown and badly in need of paint and repairs. Vanessa approached the door, put her hand on the doorknob and stopped. "Does someone live here?" She asked Mathew, a look of concern on her face. "It would not be right to go in uninvited."

"That's the cottage Mr. Harris used whenever he came to stay with us, which he did quite a bit. It will be alright, open the door; you will see what I mean,"

Vanessa gently turned the knob and slowly eased the door open, she did not have to duck her head to clear the doorway, but it was close, and she stepped inside where she found a slightly cramped room with a, normal size, bed, a large cluttered table, a few chairs and some other personal odds and ends. Everything inside the cottage was of normal size, for her, which made her finally admit that she was not dreaming after all. The cottage, though not too badly cluttered, was, in fact dusty, musty smelling, could have used a good cleaning and airing out and obviously it had not been used for some time.

"Vanessa what we need help with is this; we have no idea what has happened to Gerald Harris. The last time we saw him he was going to get us some supplies. That was not unusual, he was always getting us something: lumber cut to the right size so we can handle it, parts for our train and provisions that we cannot grow here, things like that. First of all," Mathew hesitated contemplatively then continued, "we do have a list of things we need, but that is not as important to us as finding out about our friend, Mr. Harris. We have been very worried about him since he didn't come when we were expecting him. He'd never been late before."

Vanessa sat in the chair thinking intently. She did not know what she could do for them but for some strange reason she wanted to help if she could. This was certainly different, a secret, a grand secret, at that. She would try to help and maybe they would be her friends and she theirs.

## Part Four

### Vanessa Agrees To Help

After Vanessa had eaten, she laid down on the lumpy bunk style bed inside the small house, reflecting upon her present situation. She found her thoughts jumbled, to be too numerous to allow the sleep prescribed by Dr. Trowt. These people, these tiny well-mannered people, had asked her for help. No one in her life had ever done that before. It was different when you were the one being asked to give assistance, when, for the most part, you had always been the one asking for help. This instance was also different; Vanessa would be the only one who knew they were living inside the mountain, plus something inside of her made her want to help, but Vanessa was unsure how she could. How could she possibly find Mr. Harris after such a long time? Two years to her was like a lifetime. Two years before she had lived in Boston, a place where she had many friends, maybe as many as there were people here in the valley.

She was perplexed and worried. Could she, a fifteen-year-old girl, be able to keep such a large secret about people so small? Would she slip sometime and mention them to someone by accident without thinking? The people here could so easily be hurt by discovery. There would be no life for them if anyone were to find out about them. These were the worries that ran through her young mind. She found she liked these people, though she did not know why. Those she had met were very nice to her and they did not talk down to her, they treated her like an adult not a child and she very much liked that. Vanessa was not fooled by their trust in her; it was possible, she knew, that because of her size, in comparison to their own, they might simply think she was older than she really was. Vanessa thought it would be wise not to bring this matter up, though it did remain in her mind as a consideration, after all, she did know about them, a fact she would have to work with and around.

Suddenly she remembered her mother. "Oh, I have to go, Mom will be worried sick. How long have I been gone? Wow, I'll be in trouble, she'll kill me for sure." Vanessa thought to herself as she swung out of the bed and quickly moved outside.

Mathew Collins was standing not too far away talking to a few of the other people of the community. He noticed Vanessa after a minute and came back to where she was standing; "you didn't rest very long. Are you feeling any better now?"

"I couldn't sleep. I guess my mind is too filled with too many other things to let me. I should be going home now. I'm sure my family is very worried about me."

"Vanessa Taylor we appreciate the predicament you are in now," piped up Roger Tandy who walked up to them at that moment, "but we have to find out about Mr. Harris and get some things settled, if that is at all possible."

Mathew turned to Roger Tandy and took something from him then reached out to Vanessa and said, "Here is a list of the few things we need to help us get by. It is only a small list and we realize if you are unable to find Mr. Harris we will never see you again. If by chance we don't see you again, please take our best wishes with you and please don't say anything about us to anyone. We can get by without the things on that list if we have to but it would be easier if we had them. The train is waiting for you and it will take you to a protected spot on the mountain where you can easily walk back to Gloverton. Follow me." Mathew finished by giving Vanessa a directional wave coaxing her to follow him.

Vanessa looked at the tiny piece of paper Mathew handed her. She could barely make out what it said. She put it into her pocket and followed along behind Mathew to the tiny train station located in the heart of the village. The train itself sat on a set of tracks making a large and complete circle around the lake, linking Russton and Harristown. A set of tracks branched in a "Y" configuration to the right and

seemed to enter the mountain as if going through it.

The train looked like an old steam locomotive; the kind she had seen at an amusement park when she lived in Boston. It was made up of a wood fired steam engine, a closed passenger car, what looked to Vanessa to be a freight car and one good size car at the end looking much like a caboose but had a flat top and a back rest on it like a chair.

The detail of the train was remarkable and on the side of the train cars was written in large red and black lined letters "HARRISTOWN - RUSSTON RAILROAD".

"Vanessa all you have to do is sit on the caboose and relax. That's Mr. Harris's car he found it quite comfortable. The trip through the mountain will take about twenty minutes with your weight. The tracks at the station at the other end loop around and back into the mountain. We have the train run out there every day at three o'clock so if you are able to help us you will find the train there then and every, day. It waits at the station about an hour, rain or shine."

Vanessa went to the caboose, straddled it then placed her weight down on the seat carefully as if uncertain whether it would hold her. It did without trouble and she put her feet up onto metal rests and leaned back comfortably into the armed backrest. Mathew climbed aboard the passenger car and the train started to move. Slowly the train started up the slight incline toward the mountain. Once it leveled off Vanessa was able to see an opening in the mountain side and slowly the train's engine was lost in the dark breach. Suddenly, as the train entered the mountain, darkness fell upon her. Once the whole train had entered the cavern, the only light there was came from tiny bulbs that hung on the inside of the cars of the train, she was not able to see within the tunnel easily. There would not have been much to see anyway, except the rocky sides and ceiling of the tunnel. The thought of the tunnel she had spent so much time in swiftly came back to her. Once the darkness closed in around her Vanessa had a very difficult time remaining calm. She had never been afraid of the dark before, but now it made her more than a little uneasy, it scared her.

After what felt to Vanessa to be a tremendously long time the train traveled out into the open. Vanessa was now able to see Gloverton clearly. It would not be a long walk at all. The train slowed to a crawl as it came to a small ornate station house setting at the edge of the tracks. The solitary building looked to be a lonely place and seemed to be quite run down. It appeared to have not been taken care of very well of late.

The train came to a complete stop and Vanessa climbed off the caboose onto the station platform. She looked out over the town and said, "it's a wonder you've never been seen up here, I could throw a rock and hit the mayor with it from here," she chuckled and turned to Mathew.

Mathew also laughed and stated, "the barrier keeps anyone from seeing us, its like a one way mirror, we can see out but no one can see in."

Mathew stopped for a minute and looked around, "See that tree over there the one with the funny crook in it? Well once you get the barrier block find that tree and walk straight up the mountain. With the block you will be able see and hear the mountain more clearly and walk up here without feeling any of those odd sensations. Just wait for the train or leave what you have for us on the platform. Good luck Vanessa Taylor and you are welcome here anytime, you just have to find the block if you can to get back in once you are out," Mathew extended his hand to her again and Vanessa gently held and then shook it in return.

Vanessa smiled and said, "thank you for the help and if I can find Mr. Harris," she stopped and looked at Mathew questioningly.

"I know, Vanessa," he stated softly, as if reading her mind, "all you can do is what you can, don't worry about anything beyond that. If you can help us then that will be enough, if you can't then that will have to be the way it is."

At that Vanessa turned and started down the mountainside she waved to Mathew and the people inside the train and walked to the tree with the funny crook in it. When she reached it she turned to look back and could see nothing of the people, the train, or the small railway station. All she could see was plush green mountainside of undergrowth and forest. She stepped back a few feet the way she had come



down the mountain and the feelings of confusion, panic and fear came strongly back to her. She quickly turned and ran back to the tree, “that barrier thing works pretty well,” she said to herself and then turned and walked down the mountain toward Gloverton and home.

## Part Five

### Home Again, Rest and Reality?

Doctor Conti, the Taylor's family doctor, had just left Vanessa's room and her mother was walking the doctor to the door. Vanessa, lying in her bed, stared at the ceiling in deep deliberation. "How can I find Mr. Harris?" She was asking herself.

She sat bolt upright suddenly, "The phone book, that's the place to start." She got out of bed and was at the door in a flash. The telephone stand in the hall was only steps from her door. She snatched up the book and rushed back to her bed quietly. She leafed through the book and found the H's, ran her finger down the page and found "HARRIS, Gerald J. 17 Mountainside Lane.... 4 4 2 - 7 7 2 7" listed.

She heard her mother coming back down the hall and quickly hid the book under her pillow and lay back down as if resting. Vanessa heard her mother enter the room and walk to the bedside. Vanessa opened her eyes and looked up at her mother.

"Dr. Conti says you're to rest for the day. You can go to school tomorrow. He says he doesn't think you have a concussion, which is good."

Vanessa's mother stood looking at her and asked, "How did you get lost on the mountain? That's not at all like you. I've always thought that you had a good sense of direction. Now, I don't mind you taking a little hike but not when you know you should have been watching Robbie and you should never have gone without telling me."

"Well, I didn't really get lost, matter-of-fact I was able to see the town whenever I looked for it. I just fell down and must have been knocked out. I'm feeling a lot better now," Vanessa stated, stretching the truth a bit.

"I think you ought to be more careful, I've always said you were a bit of a fumble foot," her mother said with a smile, bending and giving Vanessa a kiss on the forehead. She ran her hand over Vanessa's head and said, "try to sleep and I'll call you for dinner," she turned and left the room.

"Know what I know and let's see if you can sleep," Vanessa muttered to herself as her mother closed the door behind her.

Wide-eyed, she suddenly remembered the note Mathew had given her, where had she put it. In her pocket, now she remembered. She leapt out of bed and went to the chair where she had left her clothes and fished into her pocket.

She found it and tried to read it but could not focus on the tiny letters. She went to her desk and opened the drawer and found her magnifying glass. She was now able to read the words on the tiny page.

The writing was neat but very small. She stopped and said to herself; "do they make pencils that small?" She shrugged her shoulders and went back to reading the list, it read:

#### *Things needed*

*14 - bed sheets, any color*

*50 - artist's paintbrushes*

*100 - 5" X 10" pieces of thinnest possible sheet metal.*

*8 boxes of the smallest diameter nuts and bolts you can find.*

*10 lbs. of brads*

*16 - 1/4 sheets of 1/4" exterior type plywood*

*62 pints of oil based paint (white)*

*32 pints of oil based paint (red)*

*32 pints of oil based paint (yellow)*

*32 pints of oil based paint (blue)*

*24 - small propane gas cylinders*

*5 packets of corn seeds*  
*5 packets of carrot seeds*  
*5 packets of lettuce seeds*  
*5 packets of cucumber seeds*  
*5 packets of tomato seeds*  
*5 packets of pepper seeds*

“Such a large list for such small people.” Vanessa said to herself as she placed the note and the magnifying glass upon the desk. She started to wonder what each of the items was to be used for. The seeds were obvious to her, then with just a little bit of thought she figured they would need all these things, and probably much more just the same as anyone would who had a town to maintain such as they did.

Vanessa took the list and placed it inside one of her schoolbooks so she would be sure to take it with her the next day.

She lay back down on the bed and started to think. “If I get all of those things what would I do with them? If I cannot find Mr. Harris and get the “Barrier Block” I will not be able to get anything to them anyway. I better wait and see if I can find him first.” Now, a little more at ease, Vanessa was able to allow herself to drop off to sleep. She was still very bothered by all she had to do but she had now grown too tired and weary to focus on it any longer. She needed sleep and maybe in her dreams, she thought, she might find some answers to it all.

## Part Six

### Finding Mr. Harris

Vanessa was up and ready for school early the next morning. She had to find out where Mountainside Lane was. She would have to go there after school to start her search for Mr. Harris.

Vanessa had not slept well. The expanse of black she had spent so much time in while in the cave kept creeping back into her thoughts. However, what she found in the valley, the needs of those people and her new found inner need to help them, overshadowed her long dark walk through the cavern. It was only when she totally relaxed that she felt the ominous effects of the time spent in that dark and scary place.

Vanessa did not know how she would deal with those quiet times in the future; when the dark would come back to haunt her. She hoped if she tried to put it out of her mind that would be enough. In times to come she would learn that the more she tried to forget it, the more it would be ever-present, hovering in place to bother her further. Nevertheless, she did not have time now to deal with such trivial thoughts (so she thought they were at that moment). She did not know that those quiet times would become her adversary.

She ate her breakfast distractedly; so many things ran through her head. She almost totally ignored her mother and Robbie. Robbie, being seven years old, was a pain in the neck as far as Vanessa was concerned; she most always ignored him. However, her mother noticed her strange behavior and said, "Are you feeling all right, dear?" She approached Vanessa and placed a concerned hand on Vanessa's forehead searching for sickness.

"I'm all right." Vanessa said shying away from her mother's touch.

"Well if you start to feel ill you go right to the school nurse and have her call me."

With that Vanessa got up from the table without so much as a word, took up her books and left for school, her mind still on her after school task.

Vanessa walked along the sidewalk preoccupied. Her thoughts were of the people living within the deep mountain valley and how she was going to help them, if she could. She had not walked far when she saw a policeman sitting in a white and blue police cruiser with large red block lettering outlined in black on the door, parked at the corner of her street. The police officer, she was sure, could direct her to Mountainside Lane.

She walked up to the driver's side of the car and said, "excuse me sir, could you tell me where Mountainside Lane is?"

"Why sure, little lady. Five blocks back on your left. Don't go too far up the road. There are only a few houses on it and where the road ends becomes private property so be careful not to trespass."

"Thank you officer, have a nice day," Vanessa said.

"You too, little lady," she heard the officer reply as Vanessa went on her way.

Vanessa knew who owned the mountain so she felt sure the Gerald Harris living on Mountainside Lane had to be the Gerald Harris she was looking for. "So far so good," she said to herself as she entered the school building.

School dragged by at a snails pace for Vanessa that day. She saw Karen Waverly, Janice Scott and Deborah Appleton, the three girls who had led her up the mountain, standing in the hallway. They had heard about her getting lost and were quick to escape her view. They were sure she would be very mad with them and afraid of what she would say.

At the end of school Vanessa headed straight for Mountainside Lane. She found it quite easily and walked along the dirt road. Quite a way down the dirt road she found number 17. It was the last house

on the road and was bordered in back by the looming mountain over head.

The officer was right, there were only a few houses on the street and this one, number 17, was the most run down of them all. The house, though in need of paint and some repairs, was not really so bad. It was the lawn and gardens that seemed to have been neglected totally. Vanessa walked around the house when there was no answer to her knock on the front door.

The house was quite large. Vanessa could tell that at some time someone had taken meticulous care of the home and the expanse of yard surrounding the dwelling. The building itself was a storey and a half cottage style design, but larger than a cottage and quite a bit smaller than even the smallest mansion. It was obvious, even to Vanessa who had never thought about such things, that the house had been rebuilt, renovated and added to many times over its existence.

Traditionally painted white on three sides, the trim and shutters were of light blue with an unevenly stained light green-coppered clad roof. The wide porch fashioned out of fieldstone and flat blue stone slabs, extended the entire width of the front of the building, as did the entire stone face of the first floor of the dwelling.

Four large columns of mortared fieldstone supported the coppered roof over the porch structure. Vanessa could easily count the rooms on the first floor on her first pass around the house. She saw through the large windows on the front and right side, a huge formal living room - dining room. As she looked through each window in turn of the house she found a bathroom and then what Vanessa thought to be a large pantry came into view off the kitchen. The kitchen was large and overlooked the backyard. There was a set of large French doors at the far end of the back of the house that opened onto a huge blue stone patio. Through those window paned panels in the doors Vanessa could see a large book shelved room, which Vanessa thought had to be a study or an office of some kind.

Not seeing any beds, Vanessa concluded that all of the bedrooms were located in the much smaller second floor area, which she could not see. She had seen a large ornate turning staircase leading to the second floor situated in the significant front hall area positioned between the study and the living room.

As Vanessa walked all the way around the house a second time she noticed a woman standing in the middle of the dirt road looking at her. Becoming worried she quickly made her way to the road where the woman was standing. "Is this where Mr. Gerald Harris lives?" She asked as she approached the lady hoping to avoid a scolding for trespassing.

"Its Mr. Harris's house but he doesn't live in it anymore, the poor man. Are you a relative of his?" She replied quizzically.

"Oh no, I'm not," Vanessa stammered, "A fella told me he was the man to get some information from, that's all."

"Oh some time ago Mr. Harris fell in the garden, I heard he had broken his hip and now can't walk. He couldn't take care of himself properly, the dear man, so he's living in a nursing home across town. I was hoping you were a relative, I hear he doesn't have many visitors there. I go see him now and again. He's getting very old and he's just not the same man we all knew, so spry and full of life, I think he's very lonely being away from his house and the mountain, he was always walking up the mountain," the woman rattled on.

"Can you tell me how to get to the nursing home from here?" Asked Vanessa intently.

"Sure, it's the Gloverton Nursing Home over on Jewett Street. Get back onto Main Street and follow it to Washington Street take a left there and that will lead you to Spring Street, I think Jewett Street is the forth or fifth right off of Spring Street. You can't miss it once you get down that way, big fairly new brick building in the middle of the block," the lady stated as Vanessa started down the road toward Main Street.

Vanessa got to the corner just as a bus was coming along. She was able to hail the driver and asked. "Do you go near Jewett Street, sir?"

"Can let you off at the corner of Jewett and Spring Streets, young lady."

Vanessa said, "thank you," and found a seat in the middle of the bus and watched as the town sped by her.

The driver let her know when her stop was coming up and she got off the bus and walked down Jewett Street. The big brick building was only a few hundred feet down the street on the left-hand side and she walked up the huge granite steps into the building.

A nice lady at the front desk seemed quite happy to have someone ask for Mr. Harris. She directed Vanessa down the hallway to room forty-four. Vanessa reached the door and saw a small sign that read "Harris, Gerald" with some numbers under his name Vanessa did not understand.

She entered the room cautiously not knowing what to expect when she met Mr. Harris. Sitting in a wheelchair near the window sat an elderly, and seemingly very frail, man staring off toward the mountain that could easily be seen standing in the distance.

"Mr. Harris?" Asked Vanessa, "are you Mr. Gerald Harris, sir?"

Slowly the man wheeled the chair toward Vanessa. His hair was as white as snow, he was unshaven and unkempt and though his eyes were bright and aware he looked dejected and downhearted.

"What can I do for you?" He asked in a brash manner.

"I've been looking for you, sir," Vanessa said.

"Well, you found me now, what do you want, girlie?" He shot back.

"Mathew sent me to find you, sir. Mathew Collins, you know Mathew Collins, don't you?"

The man's eyes shot up and his hand reached for his neck feeling for something. "Mathew sent you looking for me? How could you — it's impossible — you could never — how... ? This isn't some kind of a joke is it? Because if it is, it's a poor one to play on a man my age," the old man said questioningly.

"How would I know how to play that kind of a joke and even if I was joking how would I know that name?" Vanessa shot right back at the man, now ready to leave.

The man wheeled his chair to the door and closed it tight and spun, as if to block it, then looked at Vanessa awkwardly. "I'm sorry, I don't know what's gotten into me lately. I haven't been myself, you know. Tell me who are you, how do you know about Mathew and how much do you know?"

## Part Seven

### Mr. Harris

“Well, my name is Vanessa Taylor,” Vanessa started, slowly at first as if looking for the right words to begin her story, “and some girls took me up the mountain to scare me and I fell into a hole and couldn’t get out. I followed a long shaft or cave or something and when I got to an opening I found Harristown and Russton. I met Mathew Collins and Roger Tandy and Dr. Trowt there.”

The man closed his eyes, listening and taking in every word Vanessa said. When she had finished he leaned forward in his chair as if he were going to whisper to her but he did not, he said normally, “How are they?”

“I really don’t know for sure, sir. Everything seemed okay, but, they are concerned about you. They said you just stopped coming and they didn’t know why?”

“Well, that is the way it would be. They would worry about me first and themselves second,” the man sat in thought for some time before he said anything again. “Well it would appear you and I share a secret, young lady.”

Vanessa nodded and stood waiting for the man to continue. “Well, now what do we do?” Mr. Harris finally asked.

“I don’t know, I was hoping you would have an idea when I found you,” she said.

Tapping his temple with his finger he answered, “I have lots of ideas, lots of them I tell you, and if it weren’t for this darn wheelchair I’d do them, too. I’ve always been in good health young lady, up until one day when I had what I thought to be a back spasm. I fell and hurt my spine and now I can’t walk.”

“That’s too bad, sir, that’s for sure,” stated Vanessa.

“Yes, yes it is, but that’s the least of our worries now, isn’t it?” He sat in his chair tapping his fingertips together, deliberating over the next thing to do.

Vanessa walked over to the window and looked out toward the mountain, “It must be tough on you knowing about them and not being able to help. I’ve been worried because if I couldn’t find you I didn’t know how I was going to be able to do anything. Mathew said I couldn’t go back without the, what’d he call it, “Block”, the “Barrier Block”, is that right?”

Gerald Harris reached around his neck and pulled out from under his shirt what looked to be a locket or pocket watch hung on a heavy gold jewelry chain. “Yes, that’s right. You can’t go back up the mountain too far without this. That’s the only thing, I think, that’s kept me sane all this time, knowing that no one can go up there and easily find them. I’ve worried about them day and night since this all began. I watch the mountain, though, just to make sure there isn’t any change in it. I’ve often thought there wouldn’t be much I could do from here if there was.”

Vanessa could tell the man was a good man and she liked him. She was also glad to have some help even if it was just the fact that someone else shared her secret.

“You’ll need money, Vanessa, to pay for all the things that they’re going to need. They must have a massive list by now,” Mr. Harris said thoughtfully.

“The list they gave me wasn’t all that big,” Vanessa answered.

“Oh my goodness, I’ve missed two planting seasons by now. I hope they have been able to do with the food they had. I should have taken someone into my confidence but I didn’t know whom. Besides, what do you think anyone would have said if an old man started talking about little people only this high?” He put his hand out over the table signifying the size of the people in the valley.

“Mr. Harris, one thing isn’t clear to me,” Vanessa said, “where did they come from and how did they settle in the valley?”

Gerald Harris sat thinking. He was unsure if he wanted to answer that question. Should he tell this teenage girl what he knew or not. He almost instantly made a decision. He would tell her the story of the people of the valley living within the mountain.

"I'm swearing you to secrecy," he said, "you shouldn't ever tell anyone about them until you are ready to hand on helping them to someone else, something I didn't do when I should have. If you do reveal their secret they'll never have another peaceful day as long as they live."

He sat back in his wheelchair and readied to tell the story, as he knew it. "Back in 1887 my grandfather, Henry Harris, was living in a small shack right where my house on Mountainside Lane is now. Of course there wasn't a Mountainside Lane then, there wasn't even a Gloverton or thoughts about it. The closest town at that time was Denver over ninety miles away."

"Well," he continued, "my grandfather was sitting outside his shack having an after dinner pipe when he saw something he thought to be a shooting star. Just seconds after he had seen the streak across the sky he heard what sounded like thunder booming in the distance and a faint flash of light somewhere on the mountain."

"It was too late for him to set out that night to look for anything so he waited until the next morning. At dawn he left. My grandfather knew the mountain like the back of his hand. He had been prospecting for gold on it for three years by that time. He hiked up the mountain to a cavern he knew led to the interior of the mountain, the valley as you and I call it now."

"He had hiked about five miles when he finally reached the valley floor. What he found there was the most unbelievable thing he had ever seen. Still smoking from the crash laid the wreckage of a spaceship. Now, you have to remember at that time people on Earth weren't even thinking about automobiles let alone things that fly in the air much less traveling in space. My grandfather couldn't comprehend what he saw, couldn't even explain it."

"He fought the urge to run because there just didn't seem to be anything around to be afraid of. When he got closer to the craft, though, he found bodies of small people that looked just like us. Unfortunately most all of them were already dead. He found thirty two that showed signs of life and over the next few days six more of them died leaving just twenty six survivors out of what he found out later to be over two hundred."

"My grandfather was no doctor and the nearest one would have been in Denver. He didn't even try to go find one. He just knew there wouldn't be any of them alive if he left them. He nursed them back to health as best he could. He did little more than bandage wounds and keep them comfortable over the next few days."

"His supplies were few and he made do with what he had. It wasn't long before one or two of them were able to talk, of course they didn't speak English and it took some time before they came to some form of common ground for understanding one another." Gerald Harris stopped as if tired. His face showed he was searching for how to proceed.

"What happened next Mr. Harris?" Asked Vanessa, sitting on the bed hanging on every word the man uttered.

"Well, most of the survivors were in tough shape, but some of them were coming along nicely. It was those that were getting better that finally ended up taking care of all the others. My grandfather helped them as much as he could, considering the language gap they faced. My grandfather told me he had tried many times to make heads or tails out of their language, he just never made it I guess."

"It was six months or so later that they were picking up the pieces of the craft in an attempt to rebuild it that they discovered two things. First being the ship was beyond repair and the other was when it crashed it crashed right into a vein of gold six inches thick and a good eighteen inches deep that ran almost three hundred feet straight up the side of the valley wall."



## Part Eight

### Malatorians

“Where did they really come from?” Asked Vanessa.

“That’s a good question. The leader of the group had been killed in the crash and none of them were sure from which direction they had come,” Gerald Harris stated.

“Finally, after they were able to learn to speak some English, they came up with the name Malator for their home planet. I’m not quite sure if my grandfather ever really accepted the fact that they really came from out there in space. I think he had trouble with the concept of space. To him space was the expanse that lay before him on the ground. The idea that people could really fly must have been boggling for him,” again Mr. Harris stopped as if to reflect and rest.

Vanessa by now was standing again by the window gazing out at the mountain. Her thoughts were muddled and troubled, not to mention anxious. “So they were shipwrecked here just like Robinson Crusoe was stranded on his island.” Stated Vanessa, her back to Mr. Harris and gazing out the window, up toward the mesa seemingly so close, but still, in her mind, so far away.

“That’s about the size of it. They had some tools and some salvaged gear they were able to pick out of the wreckage and in return for all the help my grandfather had given them they helped him mine the gold in the mountain wall. They built themselves a settlement of sorts and started life just like the Pilgrims in Plymouth did or the planters in Jamestown.”

“There are a lot of details and little things one could tell about. Old Henry, my grandfather that is, made trips out of the valley with the gold and in total they got over twenty million dollars for it. After that Henry, and the Malatorians, too, were rich, but no matter, he knew he couldn’t simply leave the Malatorians on their own. They had helped him mine the gold ore and he also knew if they were left all on their own someone, one day, would discover them. He had formed an attachment to those little folk and they liked him and as the years went by he helped them anyway he could.”

“About five years after the crash Henry was standing on a ridge on the mountain side when he saw a string of horse and oxen-drawn covered wagons approaching from the east. Somehow he knew life was about to change drastically here in the area. He had a meeting with the Malatorians. My grandfather was for going down and forcing them to leave. The others were more insightful than Henry was, they knew that would only start trouble rather than end it, so somehow, and I’m not sure how it works, they put the barrier in place and made only one “Barrier Block”, this thing right here. Over the years I have tried to figure out how it works but there is no way to get it open and from what I can gather from the Malatorians they don’t know how it works either. They have lost a lot of their knowledge, their technology.”

“Henry and the “People of the Valley” as he always called them, had acquired ownership of the mountain itself and the land around it as far as you can see and further by a long way. He eventually gave a fair portion of the land at the base of the mountain on the eastern side to the people that came there and helped establish the town, always remembering that his first consideration had to be to help the “People of the Valley.”

“I could go into a long story about my own family but my parents lived both here and in New York and so I spent my life living here with my grandfather. My father knew little about the valley and he had not taken an active role in helping them. He was the real businessman in the family and he made very wise investments. He set up everything that’s in place now regarding the people of the valley. It’s all quite business like and pretty well protected.”

“Vanessa that’s as far as I can tell you, now. The basic facts are these; I was your age when I first

started helping them, they are all the family I have. Will you help me help them?"

Vanessa sat very quiet and very thoughtful. Of course she was going to help; someone had to. She also knew she was only a young girl and only one person. How could she do it all alone?

"I'll help in anyway I can," she said, looking out the window without so much as turning to look at the elderly man.

"Good, now this is what you have to do. First go to my house. You said you know where that is, right? Then find a strong box under some loose floorboards under my desk. In the box you will find cash money, you take what you need to buy the items on the list Mathew gave you and do like he told you to do," Gerald Harris said excitedly.

He took the chain from around his neck and said, "Come here young lady. I'm putting the Barrier Block in your care. Whatever you do, don't lose it; I haven't had it off my neck since my granddaddy put it there almost sixty years ago. From now on it has to be your most cherished possession. Don't ever let it out of your sight and never entrust it to another living soul."

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That night Vanessa lay in her bed rolling the small locket like "Barrier Block" around in her hand. She was deeply concerned over her situation. One problem had been solved, finding Mr. Harris and getting the "Barrier Block" from him.

"Now what should I do?" She asked herself as she lay there. "I must get the money from the box in the floor then get all the things on that list and deliver them to the train station as soon as I can."

"Don't ever let it out of your sight and never entrust it to another living soul." Mr. Harris had said. This was a responsibility Vanessa was not really sure she was ready for yet, "I've known and helped the People of the Valley since I was your age," he had also said to her. Had Mr. Harris been ready for that kind of responsibility at her age as well? He had his grandfather to help guide him and Vanessa had no one she could tell. She was sure her mother would never understand and besides the more people that knew about the People of the Valley the greater their chance of discovery.

Vanessa was confused and more than just a little concerned about her role in all of this. She now realized it would take a lot of effort to help the small people she had met. Was she willing to give up her free time to do all the things asked of her? She was unsure and uncertain just how much time and trouble she would be put to?

Suddenly, like a lightening bolt striking, she had a thought. She had Mr. Harris to help guide her just like he had once had his grandfather to help him. Although she was unsure what an old and wheelchair confined man could do.

All these thoughts entered her head and she became more confused by them. How would she be able to do all this by herself? It meant she had to know a lot of things she had never even thought about, she rarely went to the store for her own mother. She had no car; she could not drive yet. The more she thought about it the more it scared her to death. She envisioned the list of things they needed in her head. Oil based paint; she knew the color but not the brand. What if it was the wrong kind? She did not even know what a brad was. How would she know how much money she would need? Nuts and bolts, she had never thought about such things. She had barely even used a screwdriver or a hammer.

"Okay, I'll price everything one day then go get the money and buy it all the next. That would work," she said out loud to herself, "the train comes at three everyday and waits until four. I've got school and where do I put those things until I can get them there where no one will question what they are or who they are for?"

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The rows of paint cans were vast. The young fellow standing next to Vanessa was trying to be as much help as he could. He wore blue jeans and a white and red-striped jersey with the words Gloverton

Hardware and Lumber Company printed on it. A rectangular blue plastic framed badge with his name, Peter, written with black marker in bold uneven and poorly written letters was pinned to his shirt.

He smiled in a way that told Vanessa he was having a good time showing off what he knew and she did not. "I think I have them all listed now," Vanessa stated, "I'll be by tomorrow after school and pick them up. Thank you for all your help."

Vanessa walked out of the shop much more confident than she had when she walked into it. She had learned the difference between tacks and brads and nails, for one, and, of course, the difference in latex and oil base paints. "Not bad for a stupid teenage girl," she told herself, "who yesterday didn't know or care they even existed."

Her next stop was to Mr. Harris's house on Mountainside Lane. The key Mr. Harris had given her fit the lock and she walked in through the front door. The house was a mess. Cobwebs hung in every corner, dust was easily taking over the whole house and the air seemed as stale as ever it could be, almost unbearably.

Vanessa found the desk Mr. Harris had mentioned sitting in a fairly large and cluttered study. She searched under the desk for some minutes before finding the loose boarding she had been told about. Just as Mr. Harris had said, there was a gray metal box lying beneath the floor. There were stacks of bills. Twenty-dollar bills and fifty-dollar bills and even hundred-dollar bills, Vanessa had never seen so much money before.

## Part Nine

### The Thief

Vanessa needed two hundred and forty six dollars and eighty-six cents in order to make the hardware and lumber purchases. She had never held that much money in her hand in all her life before and she was hesitant to touch it now. So hesitant, in fact, she did not want to even place her hand in the box. This was an awesome responsibility she was taking on and she had not thought about the vast amount of cash she might be made to handle. This part of the situation made her extremely nervous. Her mother had always warned her of carrying too much money; there was always a chance of being robbed. Of course, Vanessa could not remember her saying this since they had moved to Gloverton. Living in the big city of Boston there was greater danger of that sort of thing.

Vanessa took a deep breath and plunged her hand in, scooping out a clump of bills. She laid the money on the floor and sorted it out, ten, twenty, fifty and hundred-dollar bills each in their own pile. She stopped counting the money at some point beyond twenty four thousand dollars and there still was a far greater amount left in the box lying beside her.

Vanessa picked up two one hundred-dollar bills and one fifty, that being as close to the amount as she could get. She neatly folded the cash and slid it into her pencil pouch hanging inside her school notebook cover. She sorted the remaining bills into separate piles without counting it and placed them neatly back inside the gray box. Putting the box back in place she then covered it with the boarding and the rug as she had found it.

She then probed about the house from one room to another. Though there was dust and cobwebs throughout the entire house, unlike the cluttered study the rest of the home was as neat and tidy, as the thick layer of dust would let it. "What this place needs is a good dusting and airing out," Vanessa thought to herself, with a slight choke and cough in her throat.

Vanessa found her way back to the study. She wanted to see if there was anything of interest pertaining to the Malatorians. She was fairly certain there would be no mention of them anywhere.

As she passed by the large picture window overlooking the dirt road in front of the building, she saw a sight, which froze her statue like. In the road stood the lady from the few days before with a police officer. The woman was pointing in the direction of the house then to the street. Vanessa could tell, even without the use of words, the lady was telling the story of their meeting in the road.

Instantly a warning flashed through her mind. This was the same officer she asked directions from on her way to school. She remembered his remarks now; "all that part of the street is private property so be careful not to trespass."

Trespass? She had not thought of herself as trespassing, she had permission to be there and the key to the house to prove it. She had not given the lady living so near a thought. She was a good neighbor and watched out for the house. She had called the police when something looked out of place. Vanessa could not blame her; she might have done the same thing had their roles been reversed. However, this would complicate matters. Whether she had permission or not she would have some explaining to do.

Vanessa did not have much time to think the two were walking toward the house and up the walkway, as she stood there immobile. The officer did not knock on the door he simply tried the knob and walked inside the house, with the lady not far behind him. Vanessa was still standing in front of the window peering out contemplatively when they espied her.

"That's her officer," the lady said, almost shouting in excitement, "she's the one who was here that day, casing the joint."

The officer studied Vanessa closely and calmly raised a quieting hand to the woman when he noticed

Vanessa did not move to flee. Motioning for the lady to stay where she was, he walked forward into the study looking around intently. He was a bright young man and promptly noticed the young girl had not created the cluttered condition of the study, the dusty covering had not been disturbed. “Miss, can you explain what you’re doing here?” He asked, not unkindly or menacingly.

Vanessa was still thinking and frightened, she could not bring herself to look at the officer right away. She stood chewing on her lower lip, something she had never done; of course she had never been in danger of being arrested before. Vanessa just didn’t know what to say. She decided the truth was the only way to go, so, she turned to the uniformed man and said, “I’m doing an errand for Mr. Harris, he sent me here, see, he gave me the key.”

“Alright, but let me have that key for now,” he said calmly, “and we’ll straighten this all out. If what you say is true there’ll be no harm in checking. I’ll need your name and parent’s telephone number.”

Vanessa handed the key to the officer. She gave him her home phone number hoping her mother would not be too mad with her.

Vanessa sat in the police cruiser while the officer, using his police radio, called the station and asked the desk officer to call Vanessa’s mother and have her meet them at the Gloverton Nursing Home in Mr. Harris’s room.

The officer searched Vanessa’s notebook and found the cash she had put in it. “Where did this come from? That’s a lot of money for a girl your age to be carrying.”

“In the house, that’s what Mr. Harris sent me to get for him,” Vanessa replied, now becoming more scared than she had before.

“I guess we’ll see, won’t we, young lady?” The officer’s voice took on a different tone with the discovery of the money.

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The drive across town seemed to take forever. Vanessa was scared and she felt like running but she suppressed the urge. She knew there would be nothing to gain from that.

When Vanessa and the officer walked into Mr. Harris’s room at the nursing home they found Mrs. Taylor and Mr. Harris sitting together by the window. Mrs. Taylor rose as they entered. “What’s this all about Vanessa? I get a call from the police to meet them and you here and I have no idea what it’s about. What have you been doing? Officer, whatever trouble she may have caused, all I can say is she hasn’t been well. She sustained an injury while hiking on the mountain the other day. She’s never been in any trouble before, it has to be related to that.”

Vanessa suddenly found her anger welling up inside. She finally blurted out; “it’s not caused by a bump on the head. I was doing an errand for Mr. Harris, that’s why I was in the house and that’s why I had the money. He sent me to get it. I even had the key,” while she talked she moved through the room and ended up standing next to Gerald Harris, who was watching and listening closely, hoping Vanessa would, in her anger, be able to censor her words if she started to talk about the People of the Valley.

Vanessa looked into Mr. Harris’s eyes and continued, “you needed two hundred and forty six dollars and eighty six cents and I got two hundred and fifty dollars because that was the closest I could come and there wasn’t any change.”

“You see?” Mr. Harris took over, throwing his hands in the air for effect, “its very simple. There just wasn’t any change. I needed two hundred and forty six dollars and,” Mr. Harris stopped there and looked at Vanessa.

Vanessa added with precision, “and eighty six cents.”

“Yes, right, and eighty six cents. I told her where to get the money, right there around the desk. I suppose I should have given her a note or something giving her permission. I just never thought about it until Mrs. Taylor walked in and we started to talk. I figured there must have been some trouble. Its all right officer, I’ll take care of the situation from here. There really isn’t a situation to take care of, just my own short sightedness. Thank you officer for the good intentions, however.”

“I’m glad it all worked out. She didn’t seem to be very menacing when I walked in on her. I thought it was worth clarification Mr. Harris. Sorry about the mix up, young lady. Just trying to do what they pay me for.” The officer returned the key and Vanessa’s notebook with the money still in it, turned and walked from the room.

Mrs. Taylor stood quietly while Mr. Harris had been talking. “Now suppose someone try to explain to me what’s going on here? I understand Vanessa was doing you a favor but I don’t understand how all this came about and I would like to,” she stated, with a hint of concern in her voice.

“Mrs. Taylor, please have a seat over here,” Mr. Harris said politely offering her a chair beside him. “There are some aspects in my life I have been unable to care for since I have been here. Matter of fact, chances are very good I may never be able to take care of these things on my own ever again. I’m getting too old to do some of the things that are of interest to me. My house is one of my biggest concerns. You see, I will probably never be able to care for it the way I would like to see it taken care of. Vanessa went to my house, got me some money I needed, sometimes even in here we need some cash laying around,”

Mr. Harris stopped and thought for a moment. He appeared to have made a decision, then continued. “Mrs. Taylor, what do you do and is there a Mr. Taylor?”

Vanessa’s mother looked at Vanessa then at Mr. Harris before responding. “My husband, Vanessa and Robbie’s father, died three years ago. We moved here from Boston just at the beginning of the school year. I teach at the Harris Elementary School. Are you related to that Mr. Harris?”

My grandfather was Henry Harris, the man the school is named for. At one time he and a small group owned all the land around here.” Mr. Harris noticed his slip of the tongue and smiled at how true that statement was.

“Mrs. Taylor, my grandfather was a self made man. Old Henry was a strange man as well; he was no businessman either, in any sense of the word. He made a lot of money; I mean a lot of money even by today’s standards. He decided he wanted to be sure people less fortunate than he benefited from his money as well as he did. He taught me to follow in his footsteps. In the past day or two I have made up my mind to train my successor.”

“Well, all’s well now and we can get back to the life at hand. Vanessa, thank you for your help and I’m sure we’ll keep in touch with each other. Its nice to know there are people around who care about others.”

Mr. Harris turned his wheelchair toward the window in a way that led Vanessa and her mother to believe the dialogue was over. They both turned to leave the room. When Vanessa got to the door she looked back at the man sitting staring out at Still Creek Mountain. At the same moment Gerald Harris turned and looked toward the door. The two made eye contact. He winked at her and she winked back. This was the last exchange they had that day as Vanessa closed the door behind her.

## Part Ten

### The New Beginning

Vanessa pushed the wheelbarrow up the steep incline to the pocket-size train depot on the side of Still Creek Mountain. It was Saturday. She was making her fourth trip up the mountain that morning. The worst of the loads had been the plywood; it kept slipping off the wheelbarrow, also two heavy loadings of just paint, in half pint cans, eighteen gallons in all, then one heaped and overflowing with all of the rest.

She sat on the dwarfed but sturdy station platform writing a note to Mathew Collins while she rested. It was just prior to noon and she promised to get back to her house before one o'clock so Mrs. Taylor could go shopping.

*Dear Mr. Collins,*

*I hope you are all fine. I found Mr. Harris in a nursing home in Gloverton. He had fallen, hurting his back, and is now unable to walk. Now that I am helping him for a while he can get back to helping you. He has been as worried about you as you have been about him. Now all is well and we will get things fixed before too long. I will come and look for notes and try my best to help, when I can, until something else can be worked out. I wish there were a way I could go and see you all again but right now that is impossible. Anyway, I will, before too long, plan a trip to the valley. Good-bye, for now.*

*Your friend*

*Vanessa Taylor*

She placed the note on top of one of the stacks she had made and placed a small can of paint on top of it to hold it in place. She then walked down the mountainside, pushing her wheelbarrow, toward home. She had been concerned over the situation of the Malatorians for over a week. They were stuck in the valley, not that there was anything wrong with the valley, but stuck all the same. They had been living through this problem of not knowing what had happened to Mr. Harris for two years. In all the years they had been up there this was probably the first time anything like this had happen to them. "There has to be some kind of safeguard put in place in case this ever happens again, though I don't know what," Vanessa thought to herself as she walked.

"We are in the age of computers and radios and televisions and telephones and cell phones," she allowed out loud on the path. She stopped and thought for a minute, "Why can't a radio or cell phone be used, no, we have to be sure it can't be mistakenly over heard, besides, I wonder if it would work with the barrier being in place. It has to be a solid wire type telephone line running from the valley to.... To where?" She thought. That posed a problem; to where could she run it. How could she string a telephone line, she didn't know how to do that, she was only fifteen years old, and a girl at that, she had never done anything resembling that, she did not know how to do things. That would be a huge job. She once watched a telephone repairman install a new telephone in her house and a new wire to the telephone pole from the roof. It looked to her to be a huge undertaking, "he had a truck full of tools and stuff," she said out loud to herself. How could she find out how it would have to be done? Besides, it was absurd, she could never do a job like that by herself, she was sure of it. She would broach the subject when she saw Mr. Harris again, she would even look into alternatives, as well.

She pushed the wheelbarrow into the yard and placed it by the tiny metal shed in the furthest corner of the patio. Vanessa walked to the kitchen back door stoop and pulled open the screened storm door to enter the house. As she passed into the living room she heard her mother talking to someone. The two

turned to her as Vanessa came into the room. Her mother saw her and said, “Vanessa, this is Mr. Doan, Mr. Harris’s lawyer. He is here on an errand for Mr. Harris.”

At that point Mr. Doan interrupted as if to expedite matters, “Vanessa I have come, at the request of Mr. Gerald Harris, to speak with you privately and then with your mother. He has been precise in his instructions to me regarding this matter. I am to talk with you privately first then with both you and your mother. It is an important matter and not one to be taken lightly. Could we all go to my office it is very close by and we can continue our conversation there, and in private.”

Vanessa’s mother nodded her stunned acceptance of the situation and they all left for Mr. Doan’s office once Robbie’s charge was taken care of.

Mr. Doan’s office was a plush affair, to be certain. He was a prominent and very well known lawyer in the area, though neither Vanessa nor her mother had ever heard of him before he entered their lives. Vanessa entered the inner office while her mother waited in the anteroom. Vanessa took a seat in a huge over stuffed chair, probably the most comfortable one she had ever sat in before and waited for Mr. Doan to begin.

“Vanessa, Mr. Harris is a client for whom I’ve done legal work for over thirty years. Our attorney/client relationship is an odd one. Over that period I have worked closely with him and there are things about him I don’t know and suppose I’ll never know. He is a secretive, and private, and extremely quiet man,” Mr. Doan said, stopping to catch his breath and collect his thoughts.

He continued, “One would think I would know more about him than anyone living, and that could be quite true as it is. However, I still know very little about the man. I have taken care of his legal affairs, we have become good friends over the years, and yet, there is still a mystery about the fellow which totally eludes me.”

He held up a sheaf of papers, as if showing her something, and continued. “There are business arrangements in his life, investments, and certain death provisions and insurances in his will which I cared for but, frankly, don’t understand, nor can I get him to explain them. I have worked blind; I guess you would say, in his behalf all these years. I do and have done things without explanations for so many years I no longer find it strange.”

He slid a copy of the same papers in Vanessa’s direction and said, “Vanessa, before I talk to both you and your mother I am suppose to ask you one simple question. Are you willing to work with and learn from Mr. Gerald Harris in his endeavors and interests? He said you would know and understand what these endeavors and interests are. If the answer is yes we can call in your mother and she can become part of the conversation now.”

Vanessa did not pick up the papers placed in front of her. When she glanced at them she did not understand most of the words in the first sentence so she went no further with it. She surely did know what Mr. Harris was asking. He was asking for her help in taking care of the people in the valley. He wanted to teach her how to do it. He wanted Vanessa to be the predecessor he had mentioned when last she saw him. It was a grave responsibility. It would take time. She had been thinking about this. She wanted to help the people of the valley, she needed to help the people of the valley and help keep their secret.

“Yes, Mr. Doan I do understand what he is asking and I’ll do it.” She said after a long pause. Mr. Doan was now sitting in his chair, when did that happen, Vanessa asked herself. It must have taken her longer than she thought to answer.

Mr. Doan got up from his chair and opened the door and called Mrs. Taylor into the office. He showed her a chair equal to the one Vanessa sat in and Mrs. Taylor sat down in it. “Mrs. Taylor,” he began, “Mr. Harris, as I have just explained to Vanessa, is a very private man. I have never known him to be anything but a gentleman, a fair businessman who makes fairly conservative investments, honest and sincere, and an absolute pillar of the community. I think he is eccentric, I am sure he would not agree, then again, he can afford not to agree.”

He paused for a moment before going on to think and clear his throat. He continued, but in a way which felt as though he were feeling his way and being careful about it. “As I have said to Vanessa,



most of the work I have done for him in the past I have done blindly. I have never regretted doing it. As far as I know everything he has ever done has been worthwhile. To the best of my knowledge he uses the money he has to make more money to give away. For example: the town needed a new library, Mr. Harris saw the need and wrote a check and when the project ran over in costs he wrote another check. He is an extremely rich man.”

“If I had another client who asked me to do what Mr. Harris has I would question their judgment, but not Mr. Harris. I tell you this up front so you will understand what I am about to disclose to you is not a joke in anyway.”

Mr. Doan cleared his throat, played with the tip of his tie trying to straighten it out and then said. “As I said, Mr. Harris is a very rich man, so rich in fact that to do what he has asked and come up with a hard dollar figure will take some time.” He stopped, thought, cleared his throat again then said, “Mr. Harris has directed me to place into Vanessa Taylor’s complete control one hundred percent of all the real estate he owns as well as fifty percent of all invested and cash assets now in his control. The remainder of his estate will remain in escrow to cover all of his needs and lifestyle until the time of his death and then his will takes effect. I have been instructed to tell you at that time, with the exception of certain bequests and instructions, the bulk of the estate will go to her control.”

Vanessa’s mother sat stunned. After a minute or two she looked up at Mr. Doan and simply said, “Why.”

“He wishes to train Vanessa to take over doing what it is he has done all of his life. He must see some potential in her and feels she will represent him and his interests well. They also share something I am unaware of, I know he has sworn her to secrecy and he has made a provision in the agreement that if that secrecy is ever breached, except to you and then only in the case of an emergency, the agreement ceases. The money is not Vanessa’s; it is in a trust that she will control as the administrator, to that end she has broad discretionary powers. She is accountable to Mr. Harris until his death. At that time other plans and allowances have been made”

“So, if I understand this correctly, Mr. Doan, Vanessa is to work for Mr. Harris? Taking care of something, which must remain a secret between them only?”

“Please allow me to reassure you in all of this,” Mr. Doan replied. Everything will be kept above board and proper, I give you my word on that. There is nothing to be afraid of in any way, Mrs. Taylor. Her education will be assured; she will have almost free rein to develop for herself, she will learn about the real world, and yes, share this secret with Mr. Harris. All in all, it is a chance and challenge for Vanessa many would love to take on.” Mr. Doan said sitting back in his chair, spinning it to look out the window, as if to give Vanessa and Mrs. Taylor privacy.

“I want to do this, Mom. I have been real unhappy here, felt out of place. Boston was where I was happy because I fit there. I’m not like the other kids here; they all come from this part of the country. Now I have found something, which makes me happy, and I’ve found a friend and teacher all in one, a man in a nursing home who may never be able to leave it. He wants to help me help others the way he has enjoyed it all these years.” Vanessa sat back in her chair as well and awaited her mother’s response.

Mrs. Taylor sat in serious consideration. Finally she looked at Vanessa and said, “All right, I’ll go along, I’ll also be overseeing, and if I feel something is wrong, well, all bets will be off. Is that fair enough?” She answered, and then looked at Mr. Doan who nodded his head in agreement.

“I will have all of the accounts looked at to be sure they are in proper shape. I’ll have 17 Mountainside Lane opened up and cleaned and readied for you. I will look for a new maid and have her there as quickly as possible. Mr. Harris said something about needing this transition completed as soon as possible, though I don’t know why.”

Vanessa took a deep breath and slowly let it out. She was looking past Mr. Doan and out the window behind him. She was scared; maybe more scared than she had ever been, even in the darkness of that long cave leading into the valley that she had spent so much time in. Finally she refocused on Mr. Doan’s face and said, “I know why Mr. Harris thinks that, and it should be done as soon as possible. Mr. Doan,” she hesitated slightly, “I’ll take care of the study myself. If I’m going to use it as my office,

I ought to start working there myself.” Vanessa said in reply. Then she looked at her stunned mother and then turned once again to Mr. Doan and added, “Mr. Doan, can you arrange for movers? I think we’re going to be pretty busy adjusting to this.”

## Part Eleven

### Vanessa's Valley

After five months Vanessa had become, at least since that terrible ordeal of moving to Gloverton in the first place, happy and content. Busy, sometimes tired, sometimes frazzled, sometimes even overwhelmed, but she was content and happy all the same.

The Taylor's moved into Mr. Harris's house on Mountainside Lane. The house was large in size and fairly plain and quite flat architecturally. All in all, however, the house was homey. The yards and grounds behind the waist high fieldstone walls, bordered by the looming mountain and lower lying woods from the back, were huge and extended for quite a ways back. They, the Taylor's, needed help getting it all back into horticultural health and order, then to maintain it all. Mrs. Taylor, after getting used to the budget set aside for running the household and grounds, hired a staff to help with it all; a full time groundskeeper, a full time handyman, and a full time housekeeper and each had an assistant that came in as needed.

Vanessa used Mr. Harris's office and study as her own work place and space. Besides working at home every day for an hour and a half and doing her homework she went to the nursing home three times a week to consult with Mr. Harris. Mr. Harris helped her make decisions, taught her how to balance accounts, how to order certain things needed in bulk, how to haggle prices, (more because it was fun to do and sometimes simply because people expected it) and to help think of better ways of doing things so Vanessa's job would not be so time all-consuming and difficult for her. She had a life to lead and Mr. Harris was very concerned she would miss a lot of living if she were to become too consumed with her job. Most of all Mr. Harris was glad to have a visitor, and more content now that someone knew and could deal with the "people of the valley" if anything was to happen to him. As well, he was happy to be working again and feeling useful.

After a while, and at Mr. Harris's suggestion, Vanessa retired her worn old wheelbarrow and acquired a small tractor and a fairly good size flatbed garden trailer she could drive up onto the mountain to the train station when she had a load to be delivered to the train station. She most always drove it to the station, whether she had a load or not, when she went to the valley for visits, which now were for at least one over night stay each month.

In the first few months of her new position she made some drastic changes. Harristown and Russton started to bustle with activity. The valley had come alive once more. In the two years they had been left to themselves much had deteriorated from lack of replacement parts, proper tools and materials to keep things working correctly. Everyone was busy getting everything working properly again. Everyone was happy that Mr. Harris had been found and a connection was being maintained with him almost daily. Though everyone was busy, they were also very happy with their new outside help. Vanessa was working hard and really cared about the Malatorians. The people of the valley could, rightfully, perceive this.

One of the biggest problems the people of the valley faced, and the one, which would become Vanessa's first true challenge, was the DC electrical system. It was breaking down more and more frequently. Roger Tandy, who was in charge of the power plant, had done everything he knew to keep the system on line, a battle he seemed to be losing at an alarming rate. The old system had not been updated since it had been put into place almost fifty years before. Roger felt that if he had been able to better care for it over the lost two years he might have been able to save most of the system, but by this time it had just gotten too far out of hand for him to deal with any longer.

A new system was needed. Vanessa knew one thing for sure, photovoltaic, the gathering of energy

from the sun through solar panels, was the only way to go. The valley was too small for them to use wood for the steam engine any longer to generate power; she had recently learned this in school. She would not allow the chance of polluting either the huge spring fed lake or the air within the valley. However, for all that she knew about solar power she needed to know more. In this she tapped the vast knowledge of the people of the valley. They had many books on the subject. Roger Tandy went to work studying the options open to them while Vanessa got more recent books and articles dealing with this type of energy producing equipment. Everyone rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

A combination of photovoltaic cells, hydroelectric turbines and wind generating machinery made sense. She thought it gave them a good backup system and a non-pollutant way in which to create the power they needed with plenty of power to spare.

The people of the valley never had radio or television, only because their source of electricity was so unpredictable and the barrier block seemed to scramble outside reception completely. With the new electric system and because of Videotape and Digital Video Discs they would now be allowed this luxury.

There also became noticeable to Vanessa the lack of hobbies and outside interests of the Malatorians, especially the younger ones. They were locked for the most part in their world and could not leave. She decided to introduce some fun activities to them, such as sailing, hang gliding, and bike riding. They had never even seen these things before.

When Vanessa first saw Harristown and Russton she thought the setting looked like two small New England seaside villages. What was missing in these little seaside villages? "Boats are missing, that's what's missing," she thought to herself. She took a step without the guidance of anyone, the first time she took the chance. She ordered two traditionally designed, and built to scale, schooner-rigged sailboats that measured eight feet in length for use on the lake. Unfortunately, the wind in the valley was too insufficient to make good use of either the wind-generators or the sailing vessels. Nevertheless, Vanessa felt finding recreational activities to be imperative for the health and welfare of the people of the valley. She also ordered specially built electric cars and trucks, and peddling bicycles and tricycles for anyone who wanted one hoping to spur activity. She felt they worked too much and had too little free time in their lives.

One problem she faced in the beginning was in the process of being righted. She needed a way to be able to contact the valley and they needed a way to contact her in case of an emergency. The anxiety in which they had been forced to endure for two years was not right. They started a crew working on stringing telephone line along the railroad track bed through the hidden pass to the train station. Vanessa had studied the situation carefully. She found she could run wires inside plastic pipe for protection and lay the pipe in the ground to the house and then directly into her study. It was a long job and she had no help after the line was started down the mountain to a new barn Vanessa had built half way to the train station. How she managed it over her summer vacation she did not know. Everyone was much happier when the phone in the little building used as a town hall in Harristown, also linked to Russton, rang and for the first time Harristown and Russton were connected to each other as well as the outside world, even though they hoped they would never come in any closer contact than that.

Other problems she faced constantly were the size of standard items used by people outside. The Malatorians averaged about one ninth average size. Vanessa stood five feet seven inches tall, to Vanessa that would seem to be the same as fifty feet three inches, the height of a standard five-story building. Though she understood this fact she had a hard time adjusting to it. This meant that things such as telephones, sinks, bathtubs and farming tools had to be specially made for the Malatorians to be able to use them. This posed a huge problem. Vanessa had to find people to make such things if they, the Malatorians, were unable to manufacture them themselves. A good many times things like telephones took on a different shape than Vanessa was used to working with, but the Malatorians always got them to work properly in the end, no matter what it was.

She quickly realized she needed to get plans and blueprints and electrical schematics for everything she wanted to have altered to suit their needs best. Soon she had a long list of people all over the

country that could do these things for her, being careful not to have any one person or company make too much. There are companies, which deal in real working miniatures of all sorts. Money was no object, the Malatorians had plenty to spare and so did Mr. Harris who never seemed to blink at the cost of anything.

It would seem that no matter how much Vanessa spent on the Malatorians and their needs there was always more coming in from bank interest and what investments they had made than what was spent each month. Mr. Harris often told her to use her creative juices and experiment with new ideas. Vanessa was always on the lookout for new gadgets to make life better for the people of the valley. Some worked wonderfully, while others did not. No matter, Mr. Harris never complained, she was doing her job, and doing it well.

On her sixteenth birthday, Vanessa stood looking out over the valley from the behind the rock just outside the cavern she had first observed it. The temperature was now cool, as if fall were rushing in, when in reality it was early spring, and winter was still two seasons away and not far from behind. Matter-of-fact Vanessa had come to notice that the valley was oddly environmentally affected. Rarely was the weather inside the valley in sync with the weather outside the valley. The high rocky mountain walls, and maybe the barrier as well, protected the valley from severe and sudden changes in the elements.

Vanessa stood in amazement. Silently she asked herself if these were the same two villages she had come upon by accident? The settlements looked like new. All of the buildings had bright new clean coats of paint and some of the older and more rundown buildings had been torn down and replaced by new structures. The people of the valley were happy again and life was good and bustling. Even Vanessa's terrorizing nightmares, caused by her long night's stay in the cavern-like passageway, seemed to have slightly faded, though not completely. Making matters nicer, however, instead of eighty-seven Malatorians in the valley, there were now ninety-five. Time marches on, even there.

**Not Quite THE END**

**Let me Know what you think.**

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Or

e-mail me at:

[george\\_g\\_story@comcast.net](mailto:george_g_story@comcast.net)