

Secrets of the Mystery Mountains

Chapter 1 - The Invitation

Lena has always thought her grandfather's disappearance was just another tragedy of the wild. He'd gone hiking in the Mystery Mountains thirty years ago and never returned. Many believe that those peaks were cursed. Locals spoke of sudden storms, unmarked cliffs, and travelers who simply vanished into the fog.

When the old man's belongings were finally released by the authorities, Lena received a package: his compass, a faded map, and a leather-bound journal along with some other old stuff. She opened the journal with trembling hands, expecting notes about weather and wildlife. Instead, she found pages filled with symbols and sketches; specifically spirals, spirals that twisted inward. Row of hollow eyes, and jagged lines that labeled "The Cavern of Secrets", "what you'll uncover are ancient secrets of the magic world..." - ~~The Secret Symbols~~

The last entry chilled her:

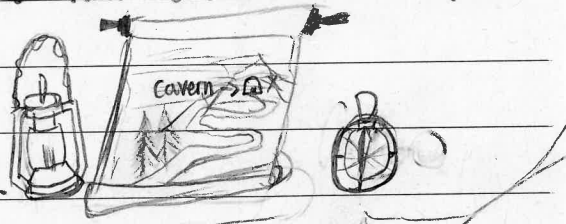
"The mountain speaks. It knows your secrets. To enter is to trade truth for silence. Forgive me, but I have to go." - John Sebastian Turner

Lena stared at those words for a long time. Her grandfather had always been a man of science, a skeptic, a geologist who believed only in what could be measured. For him to write something like this meant he

had seen something extraordinary — or gone mad.

Three nights later, Lena loaded her pack. Compass, lantern, and the map with the faint red trail her grandfather had drawn. She told no one where she was going.

Some secret weren't meant to be shared...



Chapter 2 — Into the Fog

The Mystery Mountains rose before her like a wall of jagged teeth. Mist curled through the valleys as if the peaks exhaled their own clouds. The locals at the gas station had stared when she bought supplies. One man muttered, "Don't climb after dusk. Not if you want to..." He was shushed by a strange person wearing a cloak.

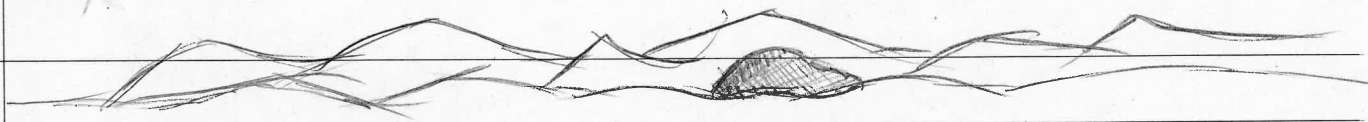
She didn't ask who they were.

The trail began clear enough, marked by faded signs and moss-covered stones. But the higher she climbed, the less the world made sense. The air was too still. Birds that had chirped earlier were gone, their silence pressing on her ears. Trees twisted in unnatural ways, root breaking through boulders as if trying to escape the soil.

By noon, the fog rolled in like a tide. It clung to her clothes and muffled her steps. She checked her compass. The needle spun several times before it settled somewhere between north and east. This is very strange, Lena thought as she continued on the path. She remembered that it should be somewhere in the west, the complete opposite.

Hours passed. When the sun began to bleed into a orange-red color, Lena spotted something half-buried in dirt; a tin mug, rusted and crushed. A few feet farther, a boot. Its leather was cracked but not decayed, as if it had been dropped yesterday. She crouched, heart pounding. There were no footprint, no signs of a camp, just relics of someone who had walked this path long ago and never returned.

The fog thickened. Shadows swayed at the edge of her vision, but when she turned, the trees stood still. By the time she found the cave, night had fallen.



Chapter 3 - The Cavern of Whispers

The entrance yawned like a wound in the mountainside, footstep of her own echoing through the endless cave.

The walls glittered faintly, veins of crystal pulsing with a cold blue glow. Her breath fogged in the chill air. The deeper she went, the more the cave

seemed to hum, not sound, but through vibration, like a heart beating beneath the stone.

Then she heard it.

A voice. Faintly at first, like wind curling through cracks. But as she stilled her breath, the whisper sharpened.

"Lena..."

Her blood froze. The voice was her grandfather's.

"Grandpa?" Her voice trembled, echoing through the dark.

"Lena... you came..."

She spun, lantern swinging. The passage behind her was empty.

The whisper came again, but now it wasn't just one voice. It was many, overlapping, murmuring in a language that just wasn't quite... human.

"You came to know," they hissed, every syllable bouncing. "And you will pay the price."

Her lantern flickered... Then the world exploded with shadows...

Chapter 4 - The Pact

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Your secret." the voices spoke as one now, low and hungry. "One truth. One piece of you. Give it... and leave."

Her mind raced. "That's it? I tell you something, and I can go?"

A long pause. Then, a whisper: "Confess what you've never spoken. What festers in silence. Feed us."

Her throat dried. She thought of all the small lies in her life, but the mountain's hunger pressed deeper. It didn't want scraps. It wanted the marrow of her soul.

Her lips trembled as a memory surfaced, one she'd buried so deep it still burned when touched.

It was two years ago. A road slick with rain. She and her best friend Kara, laughing, drunk on freedom. Lena had been driving too fast compared to the speed limit, music playing in the background. When the creature dashed from the curve ahead, she froze instead of braking. The crash spun metal and glass into chaos.

Kara died instantly due to not wearing a seatbelt. Lena told the

"I..." Her voice broke off. "It was me, I killed her. It was my fault. I lied."

The whispering fell silent. The cave seemed to breathe, slow and deep. Then the shadows recoiled, their forms rippling like smoke in the wind.

"Accepted," the mountain sighed. "Leave."

Relief slammed into her like a wave. She turned, running towards the faint mouth of the cave.

But then the whispers returned, soft and mocking:

"One is never enough!" Followed by Lena's scream... and then, Silence...



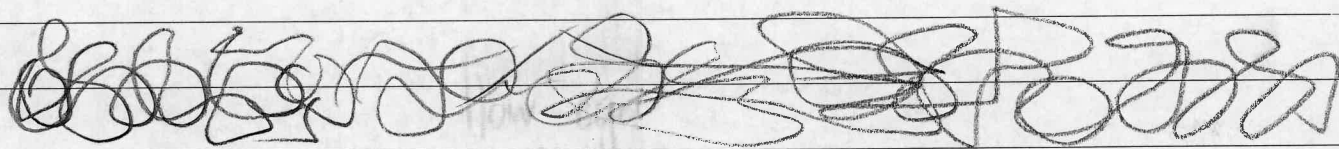
Chapter 5 - The Final Carving

Morning broke clear and bright, as if nothing had ever happened. Two hikers found Lena's pack at the base of the trail. Her footprints led upward but stopped half way, swallowed by the fog.

Deep in the cavern, the crystals pulsed with new light. On the wall,

among spirals and hollow eyes, a fresh carving gleamed. A woman's face, mouth open in a perfect scream, more specifically, Lena's scream.

"Now you know."



Epilogue - The Journal

Three months after Lena vanished, a park ranger was clearing old debris near the Mystery Mountains trailhead when his boot struck something half-buried in the mud. He crouched and pulled out a leather bound book, its cover slick with damp earth.

Inside were sketches of spirals, hollow eyes, and a note about a strange cave. The last entry read:

"I've found the entrance. Tonight, I will learn the secret. If I don't return... don't follow."

But somehow the words are like magic, pulling the ranger to test the limits.

He started climbing the path. And then came the whisper, so soft he almost believed it was the wind.
And so the Mystery Mountains waited...

Achnologments

First I want to thank reader who has currently finished reading my story. Secondly, I would like thank my family for supporting me along my way (It took forever to write and new idea kept forming). Lastly I want to thank the judges for taking their precious time to read my ordinary story. This is my last year entering, I hope I win 😊