



THE CAMELOT HOUSE

Cassie Pennington jerked awake with a start, breathing hard, half expecting to see men with swords attacking her. She shook her head slowly as she sat up. What a dream! Never had she dreamed so vividly before! It had felt like she had actually been there participating in the events, as if taking part in a movie. She'd had some pretty weird dreams before, but nothing like this one. She looked out across the camp, hoping she hadn't woken anybody. Sarah still slept soundly beside her, swaddled in a blanket, a peaceful expression on her face. On the other side of the fire, Cassie saw two unmoving lumps in blankets, which she knew to be David and William.

She stood and stretched, wincing at the pain in her sore muscles. Riding for an hour or two at a time was all well and good, but riding almost nonstop for a week over hilly and sometimes mountainous English countryside was not something she had thought to prepare herself for. Fortunately, William had said that they'd reach Glastonbury today. Or tonight, rather, she thought, looking up at the sun. They'd done a lot of their traveling by night, trying to avoid people, towns, and roads, and they had traveled much faster than she thought was possible. Sometimes they had ridden all night and then gone for hours in the daylight as well. Both dogs and horses had shown incredible speed and stamina over the journey.

Seeing the sun low on the horizon, she calculated that they should head out in about an hour. Since they were close to their goal, they could afford to rest a little longer. She turned back to the campsite, noting that the dogs, Kai and Dassah, slept as heavily as the humans. She looked around for the horses and spotted them grazing a short distance away. She headed over to them. “Hey, guys. No alarms while we slept?”

Nope, her black mare, Twi, replied, lifting her Arabian-looking head. *Only a few birds and rabbits.*

“That’s good, though I doubt they’d be able to follow us since we’re keeping well outside the towns. I’m more worried about finding them at our destination.”

They do not know where we are going, the mare assured her rider. Observing her frown, Twi added, *Are you upset about something?*

Cassie shook her head. “No. I just had a weird dream that woke me up.”

What happened in it?

“Well... I’m still sorting that out. There was a boy and a girl, and they took a woman to some island where she galloped off and literally disappeared into thin air. Then they got surrounded by bad guys who started attacking them, and then it ended so I didn’t see how it turned out.”

Hmm. Sounds like one of those stories you like reading.

“Yes, it does, doesn’t it? Maybe it’s a result of not reading anything of that sort for the past week.”

Perhaps. Twi sounded uninterested and went back to grazing. Cassie sat on the ground, leaning against Twi’s legs. Normally this wasn’t a safe thing to do, but Cassie knew Twi wouldn’t move. It was one of the advantages of being able to talk to your horse. Her thoughts turned once again to her dream, this time wondering about the woman. Never once had she heard her name, but she had clearly been very important. And then there was the fact

that she and the horse had just disappeared into nowhere. It didn't make sense, but not much in her life recently had made much sense, and then again, it was a dream. She raised a hand to her ear and fingered its shape, not rounded like a normal person's, but slightly pointed, a tell-tale sign of her Brenwyd ancestry. That ancestry was the reason she was currently sitting out in the middle of nowhere in the English countryside. She still had no idea how she would rescue her parents and Mr. Thompson from the Reficul Brotherhood, or what she would do next. There was the prophecy, which was somewhat reassuring, but she had no idea how to go about that either, and frankly, it freaked her out.

Her hand fell to the locket clasped at her neck and she opened it, gazing fondly at the images of her parents that were revealed. Could it really be only a day over two weeks since the camping trip that had turned her life upside-down? It seemed like so much longer. Fifteen days since her parents had been captured. Fourteen days since she'd met William. Eight days since leaving the States for England. Seven days since William's betrayal and six since his helping them escape, turning his back on the organization that raised him. He had gotten Cassie, David, and Sarah out of the Brotherhood prison, and now they were fleeing to Glastonbury on horseback. It would have been much easier to use the transfer ability that Brenwyd horses possessed, which allowed them to "teleport" in a fashion from place to place when they hit a speed normal horses were incapable of achieving. But Phoenix, William's chestnut gelding, was not a Brenwyd horse, and there was also the problem of transporting the dogs, not to mention none of the teens had ever been to Glastonbury. It had come as a surprise to Cassie and the twins to learn that their horses were Brenwyd horses and had this unique ability, but Cassie privately thought it made sense because all three had a large portion of Thoroughbred blood, and the modern Thoroughbred breed owed much of its origin to England,

where the Brenwyds had made their home. It made her wonder about Phoenix, whom she could tell was a good chunk Thoroughbred, but the gelding had shied away from her questions and she figured he would have said if he was a Brenwyd horse.

Cassie looked down at her wrists and studied the faint, criss-cross pattern of scars that now covered them, a souvenir from her time in devil's iron chains as a prisoner in the Brotherhood headquarters. Though the metal temporarily stripped Brenwyds of their vitality and special gifts, she had finally been able to heal what remained of her wounds, but the scars remained. Her thoughts returned to her dream. She was sure the girl had represented her, and both the boy and woman were familiar. However, though she could make a guess as to the boy's identity, she had no clue where the woman had come from. The events depicted matched no story Cassie ever remembered reading or hearing. Cassie tried to remember what exactly the woman had looked like, but the details were fading in her memory. She could picture long hair and blue eyes, but the image of her face was blurred. The details of the city she'd glimpsed were fading as well. Then there was the body in the clearing. Who had that been?

As Cassie continued to ponder the dream, she realized it seemed similar, in a way, to a dream she'd had back in the States, after translating her father's notes about the project for which the Brotherhood had kidnapped him. Cassie had thought the other dream was just random, even if it had given her an idea of what the Brotherhood might be after in Arthur's treasure trove, but now she wasn't so sure. That dream had referred to the King Arthur story, she knew, and hadn't one of the men in her recent dream mentioned Mordred? Perhaps it was just a sign she was thinking about her father's stories too much.

"Cassie!" a familiar British voice called. She looked up. Apparently, he hadn't noticed her sitting down next to Twi.

"I'm over here, William. Don't panic," she said, standing up. William wasn't that far off, but he was looking in the wrong direction.

He turned around, relief evident in his blue eyes as he caught sight of her. "I wasn't panicking. I was just concerned," he said.

She chuckled. "Yeah, right, and I'm the queen of England."

William looked at her askance, the strong breeze ruffling his black hair and blowing wisps of Cassie's own strawberry-blond hair into her face. "Well, you definitely are not, but you're still wrong."

"Am I?"

"Yeah."

She shrugged. "Okay, whatever. Learn to take a joke, why don't ya?" His only response was to roll his eyes, but she was pretty sure she detected a smile at the corners of his mouth.

They went back to where Sarah and David were getting out some of their dwindling food stores, namely granola bars. The twins looked up when they heard them coming. "Went for a stroll, Cass?" David asked. She nodded, and gazed at him intently, deciding that her guess was correct - the boy in the dream could have represented David. But why on earth would David have been in her dream? And he had been shot with an arrow. She had no idea why her subconscious would imagine that. "Cassie? Are you okay?" he asked.

"Fine. Why do you ask?" she queried.

He gave her a careful look. "You were looking at me funny."

"Sorry. I was just thinking."

"Bout what?" Sarah asked. Her hazel eyes still looked sleepy, but she seemed alert enough. Her long, dark brown hair, the same shade as her brother's, was tied back in a ponytail, but Cassie could see it was much curlier than usual, likely because of the length of time since any of them had had access to a real bathroom and its niceties.

"Oh, just a dream I had this morning," Cassie said, sitting down.

Kai cocked his head at her. Neither he nor Dassah had deigned

to move from their sleeping places just yet. The trek was hardest on them, having to keep up with the horses while on a lean diet, so they tried to conserve their energy whenever possible. *What kind of dream?* he asked.

“Just a dream. Nothing important,” Cassie said, trying to dismiss his question.

If it was not important, you would not still be thinking about it.

Cassie shrugged. “If you’re so interested, I’ll tell you, but I don’t really get it myself.”

“Is anyone supposed to understand dreams?” William asked, raising an eyebrow skeptically.

“Eh, sometimes, maybe,” Cassie said. She went on to narrate her dream as they ate their meager meal, describing all she had seen and felt. There was a thoughtful silence when she finished.

David spoke first, in a light, teasing tone. “So you dreamed I got hit by an arrow? Thanks. Now I know where I stand with you.”

Cassie laughed. “It was your arm, not your heart, so I’d be grateful if I were you,” she said. “And I don’t think my thoughts had anything to do with it. I certainly wouldn’t want you to get hit with an arrow. It just happened.”

“But who was the dead woman in the clearing?” Sarah wondered. “Cassie, maybe it’s not just a dream. Normally dreams aren’t remembered that well.”

“Do you have dreams that somehow turn out to be real, too?” William asked, sounding a little wary. Despite the fact he had realized the Brotherhood perceived Brenwyds all wrong, Cassie knew her abilities still made him feel a bit edgy.

Cassie chuckled. “Not that I know of,” she said. She focused on Sarah. “But what else could it be? My brain can think really weird thoughts at times, ya know.”

“I know that, but... I don’t know... it just doesn’t sound like something you would just think up randomly,” Sarah said. “You’ve

told me some weird dreams you've had before, and they were just weird dreams. But the way you describe this one... it sounds different, somehow."

The One often sends His people visions, Dassah said. It is recorded in the Book. It sounds to me as if you saw something that is yet to happen.

Cassie looked at the dog skeptically. "A vision? Why would God send me a vision? Not that some guidance wouldn't be helpful, but it looked like it happened a long..." Cassie's voice trailed off as something she'd missed hit her - everything had looked like it belonged in the Middle Ages, not the present day.

"A vision?" William asked. "Where'd that idea come from? You mean like what fortune tellers have in stories and stuff?"

"No," Cassie said. "Dassah just mentioned that in the Bible, lots of people had visions and dreams from God either giving a revelation about something or telling the future. But if the dream was supposed to be helpful, I sure don't get it. Besides, it can't be the future. As I was saying, it looked like it happened far in the past. So I don't think it could be a vision, but for some reason the woman seemed a bit familiar."

"Have you had visions before?" William asked.

"No." Cassie wasn't quite sure why they were all taking the dream so seriously, but figured it was preferable to talking and worrying about the Brotherhood. "Anyway, the impressions I got are confusing me more than the events. I felt like I - or the main person in the dream - had to hurry, that it was really important to get this woman to the hill in time, important for an urgent reason on a personal level. But if it was a vision and not just a dream, then it was of something that happened hundreds of years ago. It definitely couldn't have occurred recently. There is no logical way it could've been me, or David, but that's what I think I saw. Even the horses were the same. But that makes absolutely no sense." Everyone sat quietly, trying to figure it out. Cassie realized as soon as

the words left her mouth just how impossible it all sounded, but enough strange things had happened lately to make her believe in almost anything. Except flying pigs. Maybe.

Describe the woman to us, Kai said. Perhaps we can help you figure out why she looked familiar.

“That’s the thing. I don’t remember exactly what her face looked like. She had blue eyes and long hair, but I couldn’t tell the exact color,” she said. “It looked brown, with maybe a hint of red.” They all were silent in contemplation.

Cassie found her eyes resting on William, who returned her gaze steadily. “Don’t look at me. Just because I have blue eyes doesn’t mean I have a clue as to who she is,” he said.

“Sorry.” Her gaze moved to the surrounding countryside. Suddenly, something clicked in her brain as she thought of the foggy island. “That tower on the Tor was constructed around the fifteenth century as part of a church, right?”

“I think so,” William said. “Why?”

“Because I think I just realized what the island is. Or was. I think it’s the Glastonbury Tor.”



In the wee hours of the morning, Cassie finally spotted their objective on the horizon. She had never seen it in person before, only in pictures, but it was unmistakable. She stopped Twi, and pointed to it. “There’s the Tor. Not too far off now.” Her voice was tired, and the others were all slumped on their horses.

David squinted, trying to see what Cassie was indicating. “Where?” he asked wearily.

“Right... oh, you guys may not be able to see it just yet. But we should reach it before long.”

“As long as we get there, I’ll be happy,” Sarah said. “Do you think any hotels would take in four minors?”

Cassie groaned. "Don't mention the thought of a soft bed right now. I'll consider it when it's a reality." They moved off again.

"What exactly are we going to do when we get there?" David asked.

"Recuperate and figure out what to do next," Cassie replied.

"Any idea what that will be?"

"Not really. But we'll think of something."

David contented himself with that, too tired to inquire further. Cassie, on the other hand, felt her energy level rising with every step Twi took. Some sense told her that this was where they needed to go, echoing her initial feeling a week ago. Scrutinizing the distant hill, she decided that she was right in guessing that the island and the Tor were one and the same. She had once read that hundreds of years ago the area around Glastonbury had been swampy and marshy. Twi seemed to feed off her rider's energy and started stepping out more vigorously. "Anybody feel like a trot?" Cassie asked, strangely eager to reach the iconic hill as quickly as possible.

"Okay," William said, though without enthusiasm. "It'll help me keep awake, at any rate." The twins nodded assent and the teens urged their horses into the bouncy gait. They continued in a walk-trot pattern for a while, until they weren't far from the foot of the Tor. There they halted.

"Now what?" Sarah asked.

"I'd say make camp for what remains of the night, and find something more permanent in the... er, later this morning, rather," David said.

"Sounds good to me," Cassie said. They found a copse of dense trees with some soft ground to lie on, and everyone quickly fell into a deep sleep.



Gwen Smith sat up in bed and looked out the window letting in the first morning rays of sun. She didn't have to get up so early,

but it was merely habit and she was too old to change now. Besides, the guests and children would be rising soon enough and they would need their breakfast. She headed to the kitchen to prepare it. Despite having lived here for nearly sixteen years, the ease with which she could do kitchen tasks that had once taken her kitchen staff enormous effort continually amazed her. If only she hadn't had to pay such a price... she shook her head of those thoughts and concentrated on making breakfast. Once that was done, she took some time to herself to read and pray, as was her custom, and then went to take care of her horse, Wynne. Usually by the time she was done with that, the first of the children were up and ready to eat, followed soon after by guests eager to start the day. Today was no exception.

It was as she was feeding the late risers at about nine that her day started to take an unusual turn. Katie, an eight-year-old foster child who had been with Gwen for about a year, rushed into the kitchen with news, exciting news to judge by the gleam in her light blue eyes. "Miss Gwen, Miss Gwen, there are four teenagers outside who would like breakfast. And they have two dogs! They're very dirty, but one of the girls says it's just because they haven't been able to take a bath in a while, not because they like being that way."

Gwen smiled at the little girl and patted her fair head gently. "Well then, why don't you invite them in? Everyone is welcome at my table." As Katie rushed off, Gwen moved to the window so she could see the teenagers in question before she met them. Her predecessor had started the inn years ago to give help to any who might need it, but to children especially as a foster home. The guests who frequented the place provided the revenue to cover its expenses, and many children had passed through the house as the years went by. But as charming as the children were, there were places in Gwen's heart that only a certain few people could fill, and she had lost them all long ago.

Looking out the window, she saw a group of the children clustered around four taller figures slowly making their way to the inn

door. Gwen lived on the outskirts of Glastonbury, and the location appeared fairly isolated, though others actually did live close by. Her long driveway afforded her a good view of whoever might be coming up it. She saw now that most of the children's excitement was centered around the two dogs Katie had mentioned. The smaller one was medium-sized and looked like a Border collie. The bigger one was dark brown and resembled a wolf-hound, though not so big, and it reminded her strongly of dogs she once knew... *but that is behind me now*, she thought. She shifted her attention to the humans. There were two boys and two girls. One of the girls, with braided hair, bent down to one of the smaller children and seemed to whisper something that caused the child to giggle. The teenage girl smiled, and Gwen felt her heart warm toward her instantly, though a moment later her eyes narrowed as she continued to study her. She was close enough now for Gwen to see that her hair was strawberry-blond, her face was dirty, and her clothes were a little the worse for wear. The other girl had wavy, dark-brown hair in a ponytail, and resembled one of the boys so closely Gwen had a feeling they were brother and sister. The final boy had black hair, was the tallest, and his face... his face was achingly familiar.

Gwen felt her heart nearly stop, and she put a supporting hand on the windowsill, hardly daring to believe what her eyes were telling her. Yes, it had been sixteen long years, but was everything truly coming to pass at last? *Oh God, let it be so.*



Cassie smiled at the little girl in her arms. "You're sure your mother won't mind us coming in?" she asked her.

The girl shook her head. "Nope!"

"She's not our mother," another voice piped up. Cassie looked at a fair-haired girl who seemed about seven or eight. "We don't have parents, but that's okay 'cause Miss Gwen takes care of us. She's the best mum anyone could have. And she sent me here

herself to tell you to come in.” The girl looked very pleased with herself for delivering this announcement.

Cassie smiled at her, and looked at William. “Trust my instincts now?” she asked, putting the girl down.

William returned the look. “I’ll thank you when this woman gives us food and doesn’t turn us out. You can’t be sure. Although, please tell me if she gives you a Dr. Stone feeling.”

“I will. But you have to admit, the sign was promising.” They’d left the horses in the copse of trees and ventured out, hoping to get to Glastonbury, but they’d come across the sign for this inn and decided to try their luck. The sign had said:

*The Camelot House
Everyone Welcome*

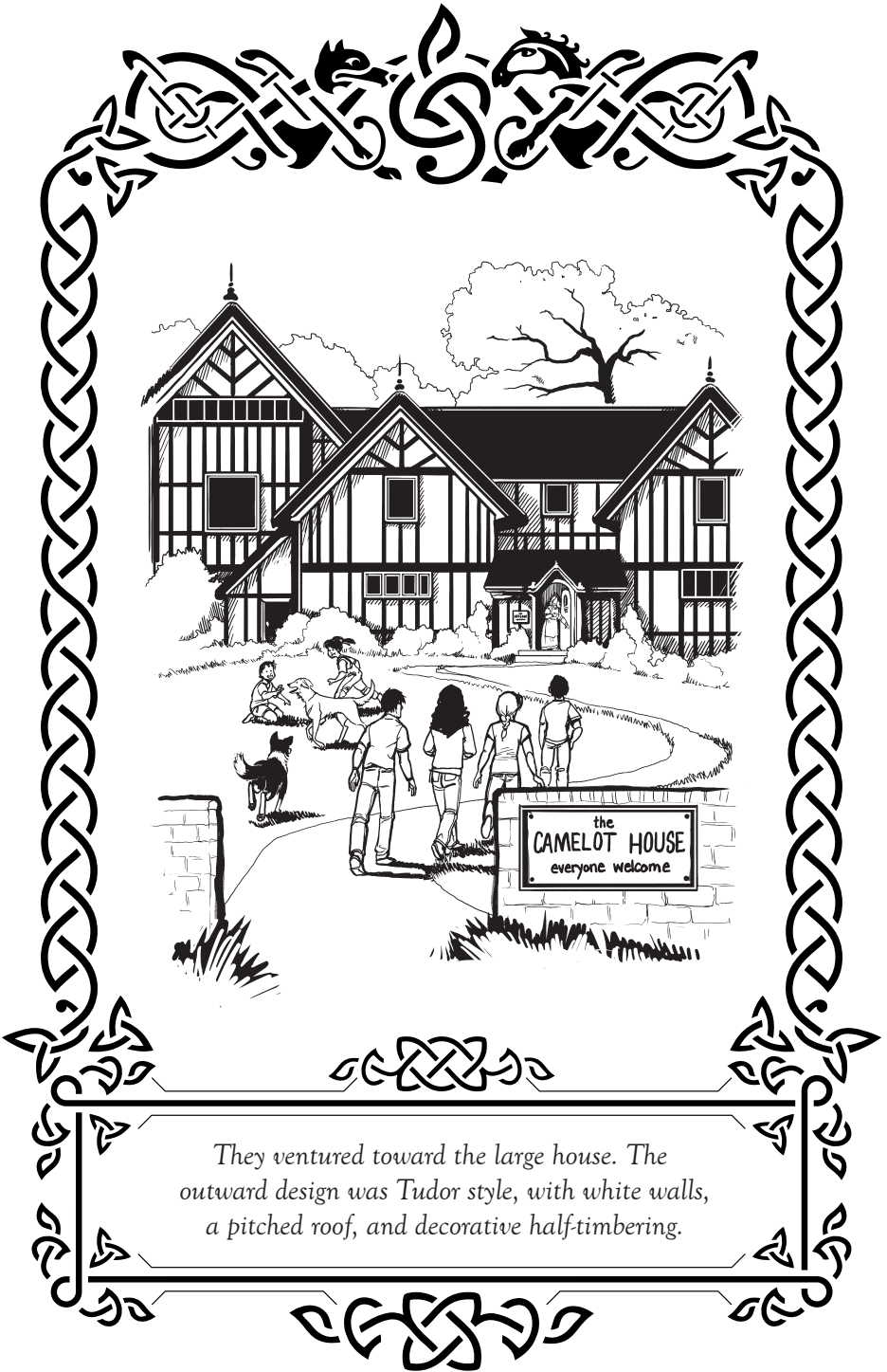
They had been ambushed by the children halfway up the driveway as they ventured toward the large house. It looked like it had three stories, and the outward design was Tudor style, with white walls, a pitched roof, and decorative half-timbering. A woman came to the doorway and smiled at them, but Cassie thought she detected eagerness and something else in her eyes, something like... recognition? Or was it incredulity? The woman spoke to the children in a kind voice, scolding them good-naturedly. “Now, let them at least get in the door unhindered.” The children backed away some, but they hung around Kai and Dassah.

“Can we play with the dogs?” a boy around twelve asked.

“If their owner says you can,” the woman answered. The children all turned pleading eyes on Cassie and Sarah, and they both chuckled.

“Go ahead,” Cassie said. Kai gave her an impression of horror, but she knew he didn’t mind. He liked children.

“Please, come in. You look hungry,” the woman said.



They ventured toward the large house. The outward design was Tudor style, with white walls, a pitched roof, and decorative half-timbering.

“Yes, ma’am,” they all chorused. They stepped in and Cassie looked around. The house was simply but elegantly decorated, and was neat and tidy, though some scattered toys made it obvious children lived there.

“I hope we’re not imposing,” Sarah said to the woman.

The woman smiled. “Not at all.” Cassie turned her attention to her, and a slight frown formed on her face. The woman seemed familiar. She looked to be in her late forties to early fifties. Her facial features were strong and striking, though Cassie wouldn’t necessarily have called the woman beautiful. Her eyes were blue, her hair a chestnut color with gray mixed in here and there. Cassie wondered where on earth she could have seen her before. Her voice sounded British enough, but Cassie detected a slight lilting quality behind her words that made her wonder if the woman was originally from Ireland. The woman’s query jerked her from her ruminations. “What are your names?”

Cassie glanced at her companions, but they indicated that she was to be spokesperson. She gave them a look she hoped conveyed her feelings about that role. “I’m Cassie, and these are Sarah, David, and William.” As the woman’s gaze passed over all of them, Cassie got a strange feeling that she had known their names already. But how could that be? She noticed the woman’s gaze lingered on William especially. *Uh-oh*, she thought. *I hope this woman isn’t a Brotherhood informant.*

The woman blinked rapidly several times. “I’m Gwen, and I’m happy to meet you. Come on into the kitchen. There’s some breakfast left.” She turned quickly and went through a door, but the teens stayed behind, looking at each other.

“Anybody else pick up on how she focused on William?” David asked in a low voice. Cassie nodded, as did Sarah and William.

“Do you think she’s like Dr. Stone?” Sarah asked.

William frowned thoughtfully. “I don’t know, but we can’t be too careful,” he said, glancing at Cassie.

“I didn’t get the Dr. Stone feeling, but that did come after we’d been with her for a bit.” Cassie hesitated an instant before asking, “Did she look familiar to any of you?” They looked at her in surprise and shook their heads.

“Why?” David asked. “Does she look familiar to you?”

“I don’t know. I thought so, but maybe I’m just imagining it.”

William drew in breath to ask a question, but the woman – Gwen – looked out of the door before he could. “Is something wrong?” she asked.

“Oh, no,” Cassie said. “We were just resting a minute.” The woman’s eyes reflected understanding, but Cassie thought she saw uncertainty as well.

“Been on the road awhile?” she asked. They all nodded. “Well, you can stay here as long as you need to,” she told them as they headed through the door.

Cassie frowned. “Um, we really don’t have much money–”

“Don’t worry about it. I make it my business to help children in need,” she said, looking them up and down with a slight smile on her lips, “and I think you qualify.”

“I won’t argue with that,” William said as he sat down at the table. The others seated themselves as well. Cassie couldn’t get the faint sense of familiarity out of her mind. Maybe if she figured it out, she’d have a valuable piece of information that could help her. But how? Surely if the woman knew them she would have said so. Cassie tried to dismiss such thoughts from her mind so she could focus on answering the questions Gwen would surely ask.