



The Trap Door

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

For Casey
—L.M.



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Amber Waves of . . . Corn?

“FOR THE love of Madison. Er . . . mincemeat, I mean,” Sera said, looking down at her fashionable yet extremely wimpy slipper shoes, which until recently had been red. “My toes are freezing.” She glanced over her shoulder to make sure Riq and Dak were there with her, too, and hopefully nobody else—after their adventures in Vikingland, when a too-enormous-to-be-genetically-possible hound named Vígi had hitched a ride, one could never be too sure.

All of their shoes were covered in mud. It was raining—no, it was *pouring*, and windy, too, and they were standing in a weather-beaten cornfield. More like a huskfield, actually. The corn had obviously been picked months ago and only the tall graying stalks remained. In one direction Sera could see a small town and a sizeable river with the tips of sailing masts bobbing along it, and in another direction a few enormous plantation houses and some smaller ones, with lots of farmland in between.

Sera put the Infinity Ring back into the satchel on

her belt. They'd just used it to warp away from Washington, DC, in 1814, where they'd fixed a Break at the White House, of all places, and hung out with the First Lady, Dolley Madison, of all people. And her slaves.

That part had been a little weird.

"Where's the SQuare?" she asked. She knew they had arrived somewhere in Maryland in the year 1850, but to learn *why* they were there, she needed to check the tablet computer given to them by the Hystorians. "And if you say it's in your pants one more time, Dak, I'm going to get mad. Just warning you." Dak was Sera's best friend, but she had her limits. Hanging around with two smelly boys was getting less and less enjoyable as the days passed, that was for sure. If only they'd had time for a bath in the White House . . . now *that* would have been a story to bring home.

Home. She closed her eyes as a Remnant—like an almost-memory of something that should have been—washed over her. She wasn't sure if it was just a coincidence that warping through time seemed to make her Remnants stronger, or if these conditions met the Theory of Nonlocality, but it certainly seemed like they were related. And since Riq's Remnants were getting worse, too—even though he wouldn't talk about them—Sera was pretty sure the two experiences had to be connected somehow. Maybe the Remnants had to get worse before they could get better.

"The SQuare? It's in my pants," Dak said, which set him off laughing and slapping his thigh.

Riq, who was a few years older, rolled his eyes. “Knock it off. And be quiet. We don’t know if anybody’s around yet.” He sighed. “I’m getting a little tired of babysitting you two. Geez.”

“Did you say ‘cheese’?” Dak roared with laughter again. He turned to Sera. “Did he just say ‘cheese’?”

It had been a long, exhausting few days.

Sera was used to Dak’s obnoxious jokes, but Riq’s comment about babysitting was just unfair. Especially after she and Riq had bonded in medieval France, when Dak had been missing in action. *She* hadn’t been the immature one. *She* hadn’t gotten captured by Vikings or lost the Square or eaten the king of France’s cheese or . . . or anything like that. She turned her head away, folded her arms, and hugged herself against the cold and rain as the wind whipped her sopping dress around her padded, puffy legs. She looked like a rejected yard-sale rag doll, tossed from a car window into a mud puddle.

Riq scowled. “Sorry,” he mumbled. “I’m just . . . I’m tired. We all are. Come on, let’s get out of this blasted hurricane and figure out what we’re here to do.”

Sera pushed past him, but not very hard since he’d said he was sorry, and then intentionally bumped into Dak extra hard for being so annoying. She tried to stomp down the row but one of her slippers sucked right off her foot and disappeared into the mud. “Jiminy nutcracker,” she muttered. She shook her head at the spot where the useless slipper had been and kept walking, one foot bare, cold mud squelching between her toes.

She'd have taken her white elbow-length gloves off, too, if they weren't the only things keeping her from losing her fingers to frostbite.

When they reached the end of the rows of corn, Sera saw an old shed and made a beeline for it. Head down and wishing she'd at least left the White House with a parasol, she barreled forward with one goal in mind: finding shelter inside the shed.

Except for the howling wind, it was quiet. There seemed to be no one around at all. Just a shed with a door banging open, and a lantern swinging wildly on a post outside.

Sera stumbled inside, her feet numb. Dak and Riq followed her. As Sera's eyes adjusted, she saw Dak was already squinting at the SQuare.

"Well?" she prompted. "What's the Break?"

"Not sure yet. We have to solve another puzzle," Dak said. "Pictures this time." He handed the SQuare to Riq.

As Riq studied the images, Sera peered around his shoulder to get a look.

$$A + \text{bowl} + (\text{fish} - F) + \text{sun} + (\text{document} - L)$$

$$\text{triangle} - F \quad D + \text{frowny face}$$

Sera looked at the first image and began talking it through to herself. "A bowl . . . fish . . . something about sunshine food?" Her teeth chattered.

Riq flashed her a look of mild annoyance. "Do you have to do that right next to my ear? My auto-translator is going crazy trying to decipher your tooth language."

Sera clamped her teeth together and stepped back. "Sorry."

The older boy's features softened. "It's all right." He held the SQuare so that both Sera and Dak could see. "Come on. We're all on the same team. Time travelers together."

"Some of us are better team players than others," Dak grumbled.

Sera sighed and looked away, tapping her foot. She didn't want to hear any more snide comments from either of the boys. She glanced around the shed, her eyes straining in the dim light. She wondered if there was anyplace to sit down without getting completely filthy.

It was a small shed. Even in the dark, she could make out the whole space. Which is why she was surprised to suddenly see movement.

Sera froze for a second, and then took a step back so she could ease the door open, letting in a bit more light. "Quiet!" she whispered. "Did you guys see that?" She pointed to the back corner of the little shed, where the floor was moving. It was a trap door, and it was opening. "We're not alone."