

Tessa Norton

It was 11:57pm. I was walking down the stairs in the middle of the night. The hall was empty and quiet. But soon it would be filled with my aunts, uncles, cousins and birthday presents. I was going to be 16 tomorrow. It seemed as though all my childhood years had swept me up and knocked me off my feet.

My name is Hope. My father is a policeman. He's great at his job. Arresting criminals and going on high speed chases seemed like fun. The wind whipping through your hair as you roared your motorbike louder, going faster and faster... I was going to be that one day. Dad taught me all I needed to know about fighting, and how to electrocute someone with a taser. He taught me shooting as well. We owned a shooting range, and we set up targets out there, and shot them with his rifle.

I walked into the kitchen. I looked at the photo of my mother and I on the large blue fridge door. I looked around 3 years old in the photo. We had the same strawberry blonde hair, and green eyes. I never knew my mother, Lyra. She went missing on my 4th birthday. I had a plan, that after I turned 16, I would go and find my mother. I took the photo and tucked it into my pyjama pocket. I have hope that my mother is still alive. Somewhere across the earth, wishing she hadn't left us.

Passing my father's bedroom, I noticed his door was wide open, and he was not inside. I wandered in, and looked around. My father's draws were open, and inside, neatly tucked away, were envelopes. Curiously, I picked one up. The date read 14/05/2020, three days ago. I took the letter out. It was from my mother.

*Dearest Husband.*

*I am okay.*

*I miss you both so much. Our darling Hope must have grown up so much. I wish to see your faces, and I wish to wrap my arms around you both, once again.*

*But I cannot.*

*I have been taken to the meadow, where I am hiding safely, from the shadowlands.*

*They are looking for me, and they want Hope.*

*Understand this. Do not go down the dumbwaiter. Hope cannot come down until She's 18. Do not come and rescue me. Hope needs a father. She can't afford to lose you too.*

*And whatever you do. Do not tell her about her brother and sister. It's better this way. I wish you the best of luck.*

*I love you. And I will return when it is safe.*

*In the name of the loving Queen Broola, may her soul rest in peace.*

*Lyra*



Broola was my grandmother's last name. Was my grandmother a queen? Was I next?

Ding dong ding dong the large clock outside chimed. It was midnight. It was late. I needed to find the dumbwaiter. But what were the meadows? I stared at my father's map. And then it hit me. This map was not from our town. It was a map of an unexplored world. I tore it down. Approaching the stairs, I stopped. That door on the left side wasn't there before. And it certainly wasn't there last night. Grabbing the flashlight I turned the handle cautiously. It was *the* dumbwaiter. From the letter. I thought that maybe I should turn around, maybe ask dad and tell him about the letter. But I wanted to find my mother. So I crawled inside.

But then I realised. My watch has slowed down, and when I climbed back out, it returned to normal. My head was telling me it was impossible that time slowed while you were down there, but my heart was telling me it *was* possible, And so I climbed back in and pulled the rope until I reached the bottom.

As I opened the door and climbed out, I realised I was on a beach. It was sunny, not a cloud in the sky. I had only been to the beach once. The week before my mother disappeared. A warm breeze whistled along, and I stood there, soaking up the sun. A flood of memories came rushing through my head, and I knew that I had been here before. I edged towards the ocean more, feeling the wet sand ooze through my toes as the tide came in once more. I stood there, paralysed, un-willing to move for thirty seconds, until a large wave rolled in and swept me off my feet.

I struggled to keep upright, but the waves kept pulling me down, it was only then when I realised that I had no idea how to swim. As I waved my arms frantically out of the water, I felt my hand being tugged, suddenly I was pulled out, and my eyes fell on a girl. She looked around 14, maybe 15.

"Thank you!" I gasped.

"You're not from here, are you?" she said. "My name is Aiva. And you?"

I hesitated. "Hope." I said.

She stared in shock.

A teenage boy came running across the dusty sand. He waved his arms and pointed behind us. I turned around, wondering what an earth the thundering sound was in the distance. A stampede of wild horses were charging my way. It wasn't until they were closer when I realised that it wasn't a stampede of wild horses. No no. It was an army of centaurs. I stared at amazement, but the girl was tugging my arm now, yelling at me. "What are you doing?" she yelled. "Run!"