

CHAPTER I VISIONS OF A JOURNEY

Savannah knew she wasn't alone, even though she couldn't hear anything and couldn't make out a single face in the darkness. Suddenly she felt something crawling on her shoulder; and a second later a soft and furry object was brushing against her face. She jumped up and spun around as she felt the furry thing moving across her hands, which she had kept in her lap. Although there was nothing there, a cold chill trailed down her spine as she leaned against the wall.

She heard feet shuffling. Her sixth sense told her that something was going on in the darkness around her; and immediately thereafter a streak of light filled the place. Someone must have opened a door or perhaps a window, but had closed it an instant later and it was pitch-dark again.

The stark light had blinded her, preventing her from recognizing anything. She stood in stunned silence, not moving a muscle. As much as she was tempted to look for a way out, she didn't dare it again. Whenever she had done so in the past, people with ice-cold, clammy hands took her by the arm and brought her back to the same place.

A woman's voice whispered softly, "Don't move around, dear. They might hear you!" She was so close that Savannah could smell her sour breath. Another woman stated bitterly, "You're safe for now kid, but stay put if you want to live."

Savannah's throat closed up, restricting her from uttering a single word. Nodding her head she sat down on the cold stone floor again. Although there seemed to be no immediate sign of danger from anyone here,

she was terrified. What were these women afraid of, and what right did they have to hold her captive? Surely she hadn't done anything to upset them. But her mind was fuzzy; she'd been kept too long in the dark. She couldn't think straight anymore and her thoughts were troubled. Had she unknowingly offended anyone here? She felt trapped... and doomed!

The memory lapse bothered her. It would've been helpful if she knew where she was and how she got here. Was she in someone's attic, she wondered...but attics had wooden floors... possibly someone's cellar? She thought about it for a while, but nothing came to mind. For a long time Savannah sat still, endlessly staring into space.

"Hear that?" a woman asked in a trembling voice. "They're drawn by the scent of humans."

"Quiet!" a second female hushed her up as every occupant in the room listened to the barking and growling outside...vibrating through the walls.

"Wild beasts!" Savannah blurted out, unexpectedly remembering powerful ferocious-looking wolves chasing her with growling battle-scarred faces, their horrifying fangs showing. She recalled feeling their hot breath on her neck as she had desperately tried to get away.

Savannah remembered everything now! - Yes, that's how it was! She had gone for a walk ...a long walk...following a dirt road twisting and turning through fields of pink flowers...with the sun shining brilliantly above her. Rarely would she venture out that far alone, but she couldn't help herself...she couldn't resist an inner need...an inner calling. Unaware that a sweet melody had drawn her there...a melody no mortal ear had ever heard before, and she wanted to hear more of it.

She hurried along the road, as it turned into a narrow path... soft with overgrown moss. She felt as light as the wind ...and was virtually floating in the sweet scented air...as if some strange power had taken her over. An urgent, tiny voice within her wanted to make itself heard, but Savannah brushed it aside. Full of curiosity and excitement she arrived in the midst of an unusual exotic pink garden...a lovelier place she could only imagine in fairytales. She had entered the magical garden, in pursuit of the enchanting mesmerizing melody flooding her senses. "Don't let it stop. Don't let it stop!" she repeated.

Pink bamboo grew straight and thin into the sky with pink branches way at the top; its long thin pink leaves swaying in the mild breeze. The bamboo trees were filled with hooting and hollering playful little monkeys, the likes Savannah had never seen before. There was a pink bridge, made almost entirely of bamboo, reaching across a lake.

Savannah stared in fascination at thousands of bright-colored butterflies...not ordinary butterflies...but the size of small birds. They were buzzing around with a joy and excitement, such as Savannah had never witnessed

before. She gasped in delight and exuberance, yearning to touch them. But after numerous attempts she gave it up...they wouldn't hold still long enough.

Savannah didn't think it odd that she felt herself drawn into the midst of the most beautiful, most graceful pink flamingos. They had gathered pompously and paraded proudly along the lake, showing off their fanciful hot-pink feathers. The moment the flamingos noticed Savannah they rushed cheerfully towards her, their wings wide open to welcome her.

But something must've gone wrong there in the garden because the melody suddenly came to an end. Savannah felt a cold shiver when it stopped and she thought she heard an owl hooting, as if someone had pushed an alarm button. The wind picked up and whistled past Savannah's ears, and the bridge over the lake began to sway vigorously back and forth.

As the sky turned dark, the monkeys disappeared, screeching and howling. And with a cry of anguish the flamingos spun around and ran off.

Savannah discovered a pair of shiny eyes watching her in the gloominess behind her. She was frightened...uncertain whether to flee or stay.

She must've been getting too close to discovering something that wasn't meant for her to witness. In any case, she soon knew she was intruding. She found herself being chased out of the mysterious garden by herds of wolf-like creatures, appearing from every direction.

Knowing that it would only be a question of minutes until the whole pack would catch up with her, she began searching for a place to hide. She observed an ancient-looking castle or fortress way on top of a hill. But climbing the hill was exhausting and the wild animals were so close behind her that she could see the glint of their fangs and feel their hot breath upon her skin. She had to outsmart them quickly. In her terror, and not a minute too soon, she crawled into an old hollow tree to hide.

While she tried to make herself comfortable...long, thin fingers with a piece of skin stretched between...like a membrane...grabbed her, swept her up and flew off with her.

The enormous creature had no beak, and though it had incredible orange wings, they were featherless. Savannah noticed its body was covered with soft fur, resembling a mouse. "A bat...a giant bat!" Savannah marveled, as she became aware of small, sharp teeth in its open mouth. She had heard of vampire bats, living in jungles and surviving on fresh blood.

Looking back over her shoulder, she could see the dark shapes of the wild wolves following on the ground below, their growls growing more ferocious as they proceeded.

Just as Savannah began to pry herself loose from the grip of those strong fingers, the bat had arrived above the fortress on the hill. There, the sun trying to peek through the dark clouds unexpectedly blinded the crea-

ture. It slammed into a high brick wall, dropping the struggling Savannah who landed in a blooming bush. Fortunately, she was unhurt and climbed out of the bush. Guided by her instinct she ran straight toward the fortress.

Attempting to find refuge in it, she found every external door locked... all but one. The moment the wild beasts closed in on her, ready to attack, she discovered the door in the back of the fortress. Opening it she almost fell into it. Cold hands pulled her into a dark room and immediately locked the door behind her.

So that's how she got here! Things made more sense to her now. But she still couldn't remember how long she'd been here. She must've dozed off for a while.

A deep feeling of loneliness and a terrible longing for her family came over her. With a heavy heart, she realized that no one at home knew where she was. Tears clouded her eyes, and her heart began to beat wildly. She was certain everyone in the room could hear it. But it wasn't the beating of her heart...it was her sobbing that gave her away.

"Look what you're doing to the child!" some woman hissed to another. Then she turned to Savannah, "Calm down!" she said, trying to quiet her inner turmoil.

At last, fists began to pound on the door, and a voice demanded to be let in. It was the voice of a man. He was asking to speak with Savannah. The women kept quiet and had no intention of opening up. Savannah didn't know what to think. Who was that person asking for her? She didn't recognize his voice. Could it be a trick?

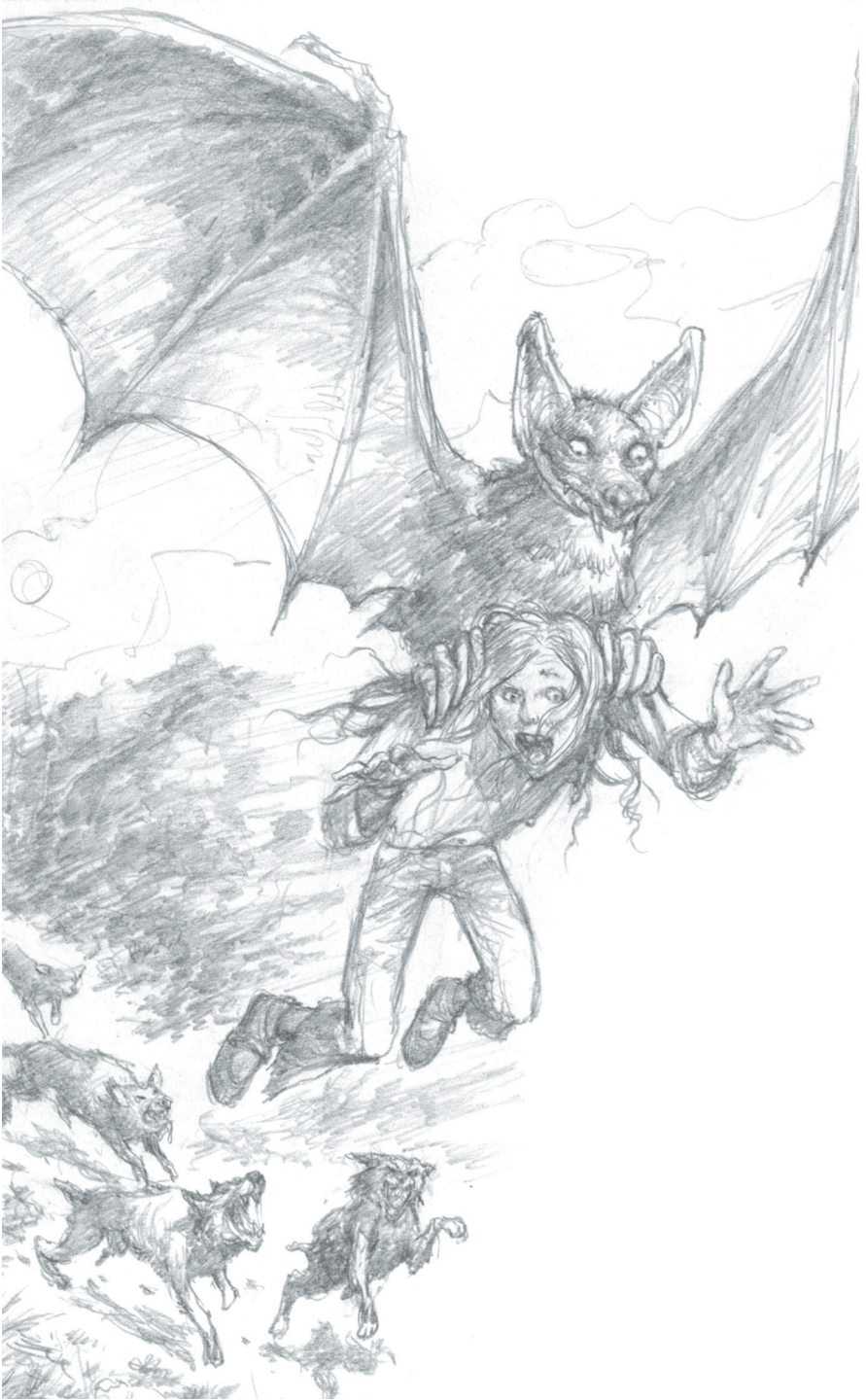
She heard a scratchy noise in the keyhole, followed by silence. Suddenly a loud explosion erupted, causing the door to fly open and pour smoke and dim light into the place.

At that moment Savannah noticed a number of rats disappearing into small cracks in the wall she had been leaning on. It gave her the willies. Women's faces were emerging from the cloud of smoke... faces twisted in fear...eyes wide with terror. It reminded her of a silent movie, people hastily moving about, but no sound escaping their open mouths.

As unbelievable as it may sound, Savannah felt a distinct vibration and immediately after that the room began to sink, as if it were being lowered down in an elevator. As the room sank, the ceiling remained in place. She could now look up and see not only the ceiling fading away in the distance, but she detected a hallway high above her on one side. As the room kept sinking to the next floor, a second hallway appeared above.

Then she saw him. Clearly identifiable were the outlines of a man standing in the hallway with a massive case tucked under one arm. In the unoccupied hand he held a pink flag, waving it back and forth. During a

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moment's hesitation Savannah identified her own name printed on the flag in large letters. Instinctively she waved back at the man. He turned, stuck the flag into the wall, and threw her a rope. Savannah felt a shiver run through her, but grabbed the rope and held on tight. The journey upward made her a bit lightheaded, but she held on until she arrived at the top, amazed how he had managed to rescue her with only one hand.

As Savannah got to her feet, she observed that the man had placed an enormous pink violin case on the floor. The flag was still stuck in the wall and the rope to which she was clutching so tightly was attached to the flagpole.

The man straightened up and spun around facing her, "Savannah," he said in a concerned voice, "come with me. Someone needs your help." He picked her up gently. His strong hands were warm and his eyes compassionate.

Clearing his throat, the man looked down into the sunken room addressing the remaining women below, "Don't panic. No one can get to you!" His voice boomed as he continued, "I'll be back for the rest of you! But mind you, I can only hide one at a time!"

Then he bent down and gave the room a hardy spin. It moved inward into the wall somehow, making a complete circle. Emerging again, complete with a temporary ceiling, it concealed the petrified women from the view of intruders. The entire procedure was accomplished in seconds.

Next the stranger produced a smooth flat stone in the palm of his hand. Revealing it to Savannah, he flashed a mesmerizing smile, almost blinding her with his sparkling white teeth, "Rubbing a magic stone makes all the difference," he admitted in humble delight.

Savannah looked at the gentleman in numb disbelief, and after studying him for a brief moment she came to the conclusion that he had quite an ordinary, yet unforgettable, face. Full pink hair and eyebrows, as well as pink eyelashes made him pleasant enough to look at. He was wearing a fancy glistening hot pink and purple suit with a wide belt that seemed to be made out of diamonds, and shiny pink patent leather shoes. A crystal ball might've helped to determine who he really was, but since none was on hand, Savannah relied on her own basic instincts, believing him to be an entertainer of sorts. In fact, she observed a slight resemblance to Elvis Presley.

Reaching the decision that his task was done, Savannah asked the man, "Where will I find this person who needs my help?"

For the second time the man smiled at her, "Oh, he will find you, my dear."

There was something so remarkable about this stranger that she neglected to ask for details.

Still carrying Savannah on one arm, he opened his violin case. Without a word he grabbed the stunned girl and stuffed her into his case. Savannah

kicked and screamed struggling to free herself. Fearfully, she looked up at him, but one gaze into his kind brown eyes calmed her down immediately.

The man's eyes pleaded. "Don't fight back," he urged quietly. "It's the only way I can smuggle you out of here."

To her own surprise, she relaxed completely and didn't mind being in the dark again as the man closed the lid on top of her. It was remarkable how much room she had to stretch out her legs. Now that the greatest threat had passed, the first thought that crossed her mind was food. She couldn't remember when she had eaten last.

Savannah must've nodded off in the violin case, because she couldn't recall what happened next. By the time the man opened the lid she came to and smiled.

"Look at you! You're still alive," he said, amused.

Rubbing her eyes, Savannah climbed out of the case. She straightened her hair and smoothed down her clothes.

"This is where we part company," the man said. "But don't hang around here too long. You could die from lack of water."

This remark seemed rather strange, but before Savannah could question him about it, the man had disappeared. From the distance she heard him calling, "Goodbye Savannah."

"Wait! Don't go yet! How am I supposed to get home from here?" she shouted in horror at being left behind, but it was too late. Apparently the man couldn't hear her anymore. Desert and mountains surrounded her, as far as the eye could see. She didn't recognize a thing. "Where am I?" she whimpered.

Instead of an answer, an echo coming from the far mountains was calling, "Goodbye Savannah...Savannah...Savannah!" traveling further and further away.

Something cold clutched Savannah's heart, and she felt painfully alone in the world. "Come back! Please! Come back! Don't leave me here in the middle of nowhere!" she cried, tears streaming down her cheeks. She ran deep into the desert, but no matter how far she ran, she was still lost.

With the wind tugging at her long blond hair, she eventually collapsed on the white smooth sand. Somehow the silence in the desert and the warmth of the sand gave her comfort, and peace came upon her, and she had the feeling that she was on the beach in Malibu near her Aunt Helen and Uncle Benny's house.

Blinking back tears, she sat up. She was astonished to find herself in her own room, on her own bed. She had been dreaming once again.

She'd been having similar dreams almost nightly and wondered if they could possibly mean anything. Most parts of the dreams she would forget

quickly, but there was always a man in each of them, always coming to her rescue in one way or another. His appearance was different in each of the dreams, but he was consistently gentle and caring. Each time the man rescued her in order for her to help someone else, or so he said. But the dreams always ended before the person in need of the help was revealed.

Stretching out on her bed once again, her alarm clock rang. She automatically turned it off. There was too much on her mind however to face the day that early.

Her sister's voice, disrupting her thoughts, jolted her back to the present, "Savannah, you better come down here quickly; Petra is trying to tip over Krissi's gold fish bowl!"

Savannah was fully awake now and instantly forgot about her dream. She tossed the covers aside and jumped out of bed and into her slippers. "Coming Shea!"